



Stories about Devi

Stories from the Puranas Retold

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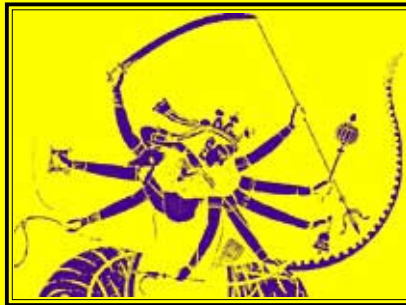
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Introduction

Our gods and goddesses have strong and vibrant personalities as described in the hymns of the Vedas and the stories in the Puranas. Most Hindus have heard these stories in childhood and have an easy familiarity with the ways of life and living that the gods display in their various Avatars. There is always a take-away message in the stories - sometimes it is ambiguous and leads to more questions; sometimes the message simply defines good and evil, right and wrong - but always, there is the possibility of relating to ones own personality and ones own situation. No doubt, this is why the stories have endured. I for one carry a sense of comfort that there is a special god/goddess to recall in a certain situation. The stories actually hold our faith, allowing us to accept all the gods as one and the one god as many.



There is also the matter of images. In a way the images of India - the great idols in worship, the wayside shrines, the calendar art images, the great and the small sculpture - are abstraction of the stories and the personal message of the stories.

In this book, written entirely for the web, the stories have been cast in a simplified mould. The intent is to familiarize the new visitor and to aid recall for the old friend.

All the images were commissioned by me with Tribal and Folk Artists. We had only to tell them the story and they drew the pictures. They knew the stories! Language was no barrier. Some readers may be familiar with the styles of Indian Folk and Tribal Art and will instantly recognize the Madhubani, the Warli, the Oriya and Bengal folk art . For others, given below is a chart :

An attempt is made in the stories to show the harmony between the gods and goddess; time coalesces and the gods are present at each others life events, a general value system emerges; the invocation is of god love rather than god fear.

We hope the reader enjoys this presentation of ancient text and is encouraged to delve deeper into our well of faith.



Andhra leather puppet and folk art



Madhubani style



Bengal folk art



Warli style



Madhya Pradesh
tribal art



Creation of Devi



The king of the demons, Mahishasur was making life miserable for Indra and the other Gods. They approached Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva to get rid of Mahishasur. Hearing of their plight, the three of them and other gods combined their Powers into one. This resulted in the birth of an immense energy. The energy condensed into the Great Goddess, Devi. The Gods gave her their own weapons and pleaded with her to vanquish Mahishasura. The goddess agreed and proceeded to encounter Mahishasura and his multitude of demon armies.



...Creation of Devi



Mahishasura had been given the boon to change himself to any form he desired. As he changed his forms, Devi simultaneously changed into fierce forms. She slayed Mahishasura and his armies. Finally she produced her most fierce form — Kali — to kill and drink the blood of the demons. She ravaged through the battle field killing and devouring the demons.



...Creation of Devi



In the end she killed Mahishasura just as he was escaping from his buffalo form. But even after that Kali was still in a destructive frenzy. In order to pacify Kali, Shiva started dancing with her. He quietly lay down on the ground and in a mad frenzy Kali stepped on his body. Suddenly she was aware of herself and became pacified. The Gods then came to her with gratitude, and asked for her blessings.



Kali



Sita taunted Rama who was boasting about his victory over Ravana. She said that it was easy to kill a monster with ten heads but would Rama be able to kill a demon who had a thousand heads. Rama proudly retorted that he would take on any monster. Sita chided him and said that it was better if he stayed home. But now Rama's blood was pounding in his head and he decided to set off in pursuit of this creature. He dragged along his wife, brothers, soldiers and the monkey army.



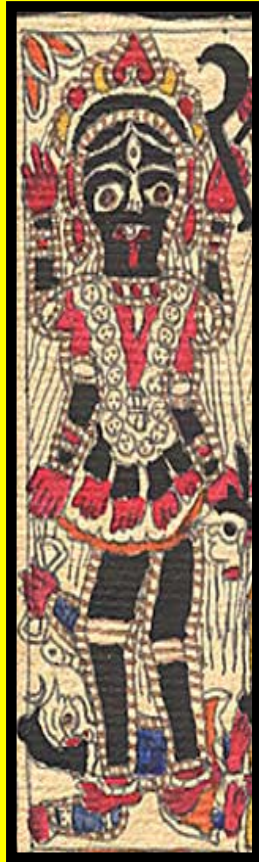
...Kali



They set off for Satadwipa. Hanuman as usual went ahead to locate the monster's place and collect vital information. But when the army arrived with Rama at the head, the monster laughed scornfully. He shot three arrows. The first arrow scattered the monkey army. The second arrow drove the brothers to Ayodhya and the third arrow sent all the soldiers scurrying for cover. Rama was left alone open mouthed. Sita laughed at her husband's consternation and assumed the form of Kali. She took on the thousand headed demon. The battle was long and bloody, and lasted ten summers. Finally Kali killed him and drank his blood. She could not contain her joy at the victory and she began to dance and scatter his limbs.



...Kali



The universe shook at its centre because of her dancing and a great chasm opened. The gods were terrified. They begged Shiva to do something . Shiva lay down on the cracked land and begged her to stop, but Kali was so carried away that she stood with one foot on his thigh and the other on his breast. She was unaware on account of her jubilation. Then she looked down and was horrified at what she was doing. She stuck her tongue out and stood stock still. This is the abiding image of Kali. Sita then assumed her gentle form and left with her husband Rama . Shiva was thanked for saving the universe.



Slayer of the she-demon Daruka



Once there was a wicked female monster who was terrorizing the gods. Her name was Daruka and through prayer and penance she had obtained terrific powers. She was intent on demolishing the gods and the brahmanical world. She had as her companions other demonneses, and this prevented the gods from openly attacking her. Killing her and other women would heap sin upon them. They approached Shiva who requested Parvati to find a solution. Parvati was a fair woman and she realised that evil cannot be allowed to flourish, specially when it is shielded by civil conduct.



...Slayer of the she-demon Daruka



She created from her own blood a terrifying form- a black maiden with uncombed hair, an eye in her forehead, bearing a trident and a skull, astride a tiger. She was fearful to behold, but only to the demons; for the gods she appeared the saviour, for she soon set about killing the she demon Daruka. Parvati thus created Kali, she who killed the she-demon Daruka.



Durga, the saviour of Krishna



Durga was awarded a permanent place in the heavens as a goddess by Krishna. It is believed that Durga was Krishna's younger sister. She loved him very much and was ready to do anything for him. Kansa the wicked king of Mathura had made up his mind to kill all the male children as he was afraid of the prophecy which said that the eighth child of Devaki and Vasudeva would destroy him. Krishna asked Durga to take his place in Devaki's womb. Meanwhile he was born and was taken across the river to Vrindavan by his father. Kansa on hearing about the birth came to dash the baby against the rocks. But it was only Durga he found. The infant Krishna was saved. Durga became a goddess with her permanent abode on the Vindhya mountains and came to be worshipped with animal sacrifice.



Why did Durga assume so many forms?



Shumba and Nishumba were Giants who had performed countless austerities to become more powerful than the gods. Finally Shiva had to grant what they asked for and this was to be more powerful and richer than all the gods. Once they had been given this boon, they started on a life of plunder and conquest. The gods were reduced to penury and hard times. They had no authority and no dignity left. They went in a consortium to Brahma and Vishnu. Both Brahma and Vishnu replied that only Shiva could help them in their

misfortune. On approaching Shiva, he suggested that Durga alone would be able to assist them. They would have to offer prayers to her. Durga appeared to them and agreed to take on their battle. She first disguised herself as a maid carrying a vessel of water and walked through the praying gods.



...Why did Durga assume so many forms?



This was to test their sincerity and she saw that they were genuinely concentrating on her. She assumed her form (Durga) and decided on a plan. She wandered on Mount Himalaya as a beautiful goddess. On this mountain lived the envoys of Shumba Nishumba named Chanda Manda. When Chanda Manda saw her they were overwhelmed by her innocence and charm. Immediately they went to their masters and described the beauty of this lady. They also felt that such a person was an equal consort for Shumba Nishumba. The giant Shumba decided to send his special messenger Sugriva to negotiate with the goddess. He sang praises of Shumba and told her that the giant was in control of the universe and the gods were reduced to the status of slaves.



...Why did Durga assume so many forms?



The goddess replied that she would only marry someone who could defeat her in a battle. Sugriva got angry at the reply and said that she was a mere female and how could she dare to say this. She retaliated that this was her resolve. Sugriva went back and narrated to Shumba what had transpired. Shumba was consumed with rage and sent his army chief Dharma Lochan to tackle the goddess. When he encountered the goddess she let out an ear-splitting, terrible roar, and took on a ten armed form (Dasabhiya) which reduced him to jelly.



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