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Dus Mahavidyas the Ten Forms of the Devi

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Hinduism is probably the only religion in the world which talks about Shakti (the Sacred Feminine) concept as being equal in power to the Parabrahma or the Supreme Divine. According to Hinduism, the elements of Shakti (the female or the Prakruti) and Shiva (the male or the Purusha) are two parts of a whole. While they are incomplete by themselves, they form a balanced, harmonious whole together.

Shakti, as the name itself suggests, means "Strength". Lord Shiva has stated time and again that He is nothing without His companion, Goddess Shakti. This clearly depicts the important role play by the Mother Goddess in the Hindu pantheon. In this article, we bring you the story about the Ten Mahavidyas of Hindu mythology.

The Dus Mahavidyas

The name, "Mahavidyas", comes from the Sanskrit roots of Maha, which means great and Vidya, meaning, Wisdom, Knowledge, Manifestation or Revelation.

The Dus Mahavidyas or the Ten Goddesses are actually ten aspects of the Devi or the Divine Mother in Hinduism. These are Goddesses of Wisdom and represent an entire spectrum of divinity, right from horrific goddesses, to the most beautiful and peaceful deities.

The Mahavidyas, as a group, represents a vital turning point in the history of Shaktism, as it marks the rise of Bhakti in Shaktism. This movement reached its peak in 1700 C.E. Commencing during the post-Puranic era, in about the 6th century C.E., this new theistic movement envisioned the supreme being as a female.

Important Hindu texts such as the Devi-Bhagavata Purana, especially in the seventh skandha, which are known as the Devi Gita, talk about the Devi's powers. This soon became the central texts of Shaktism.

The Ten Goddesses

In Shaktism, the Divine Mother is jointly worshipped as a combination of ten different cosmic personalities. She is seen as the One Truth in ten different facets - the Dus Mahavidyas.

What sets the Mahavidyas from other Devi forms is that are considered Tantric nature. They take the following names and manifestations:

1. Kali: This "Devourer of Time" is worshipped as the very essence of the Brahman or the Supreme Self. Kali is regarded as the Supreme Deity of Kalikula systems
2. Tara: The Goddess who Saves, Guides and Protects. She offers the ultimate knowledge necessary for salvation. This Mahavidya is also known as Neel Saraswati
3. Lalita Tripura-Sundari: The Goddess, also known as Shodashi, is the One Who is the Most Beautiful in the Three Worlds. She is the Supreme Deity of the Srikula systems. She is also the "Tantric Parvati" or the "Moksha Mukuta".
4. Bhuvaneshwari: This Goddess is the Mother or Janani of the whole world - Her

- entire Body is the Cosmos
5. Bhairavi: The Fierce Warrior Goddess
 6. Chhinnamasta: The Self-Decapitated Goddess, who holds her own neck in her hands
 7. Dhumavati: The Widow Goddess or the Goddess of death.
 8. Bagalamukhi: The Goddess Who Paralyzes Enemies
 9. Matangi: The "Tantric Saraswati", also the Prime Minister of Lalita
 10. Kamala: The "Tantric Lakshmi", also the Goddess on the Lotus
 11. Interestingly, according to the Mahabhadgavata Purana and Brhaddharma Purana, Shodashi and Tripura Sundari are regarded as one deity with two different names.
 12. The Guhyatiguyha-tantra relates the Mahavidyas with Vishnu's ten avatars or manifestations. It also states that the Mahavidyas are the source from which the avatars of Vishnu manifested.

All of the above ten forms of the Goddess are worshiped as aspects of the universal Mother.



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DUS MAHAVIDYAS

Legend of the Dus Mahavidyas

According to the Mahabhadgavata Purana, the Mahavidyas manifested as a result of an argument between Shiva and Sati, the earlier incarnation of Devi Parvati.

Sati's father, King Daksha, disapproved of his daughter's love for Shiva. He was further incensed when Sati went on to marry Him. Daksha organized a great yagna (sacrificial ritual) to which he invited everyone except his daughter and son-in-law.

Furious, Sati insisted on attending the sacrifice, in spite of Shiva forbidding her from doing so. Her anger transformed Sati into a terrible presence, which multiplied into the ten Mahavidyas. These Goddesses jointly subdued Shiva's resistance and thereby, Sati proceeded ahead to attend the sacrificial ritual.

Yet another legend of the Mahavidyas

There is yet another legend about the birth of the Mahavidyas. Shiva and Parvati are believed to have played numerous love games with each other. On one such occasion, things went a bit too far with a mock fight, with Shiva threatening to walk out on Parvati. The Devi tried to cajole her Lord into not leaving her. But Shiva refused to listen to her and tried to move away from her.

Parvati then decided to take ten different forms of herself, each facing one of the ten directions. Thus Shiva was unable to escape from her, as he would find one aspect of her standing in each of the directions he turned, guarding it, preventing him from escaping.

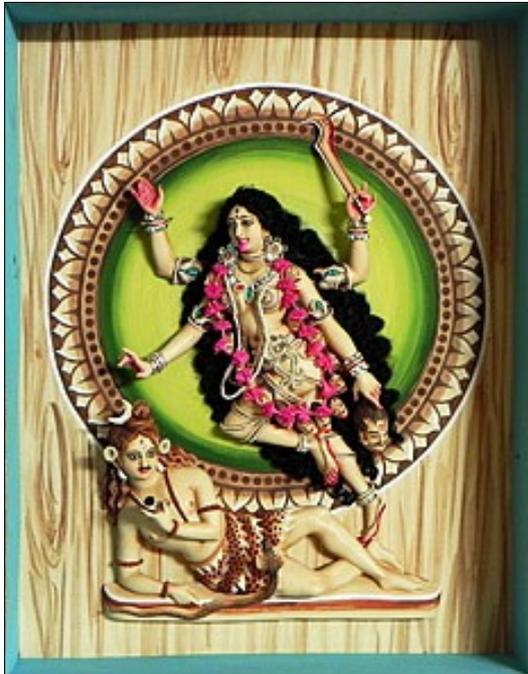
This made Shiva realize the true degree of their eternal love and also, that Shakti's power was much superior to his own. The Devi demonstrated her own endless powers to Shiva, also making him realize many essential truths in the process.

This is why these ten aspects of the Devi are called Mahavidyas - the great Goddesses of Wisdom. These truths apply to mortals as well. The Mahavidyas are the Goddesses who collectively guide us, inspiring us to search for and find the spiritual beings lying dormant within us.

Let us now go ahead and learn more about each of these powerful Dus Mahavidyas.

Kali - the Eternal Night

"Kali Kali Mahakali Kalike Papanasini
Khadgahaste Mundahaste Kali Kali Namostu Te"



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KALI

Kali is regarded as one of the fiercest deities in Hinduism. The word Kali arises from the Sanskrit word "Kaal", which means time. This is also why Goddess Kali is sometimes referred as the Goddess of Death. In actuality, though, Kali is the slayer of the ego in a person.

A study of the Goddess reveals that she only killed evil demons, who caused much turbulence in the world. Kali is not in any way associated with Yama, the Hindu God of Death. Interestingly, Goddess Kali is also considered mother by her devotees - and is one of the few Goddesses who are celibate, who renounced the whole world.

Physical attributes

Kali is shown with four arms. In two hands, she hold a sword and a freshly severed head, representing the fierce battle in which she destroyed the demon Raktabija. The other two hands bless her devotees, granting them liberation in this life and in the next.

Kali wears a garland of 52 skulls and a skirt of dismembered arms because the ego comes out of identification with the body. Her black or dark blue skin represents the womb from which all creation springs forth and into which all of creation will ultimately return. She is the pure, un-manifested energy, the Adishakti.

Goddess Kali is depicted placing one foot on Lord Shiva, who is pure formless awareness Sat-Chit-Ananda. Here, Kali represents "form" eternally supported by pure awareness.

Kali and Shiva

Kali and Shiva are considered to inhabit cremation grounds. The cremation grounds imply the temporary nature of the body, as against the permanence of the soul. Devotees actually visit these areas in order to pray to the deity to destroy the ego.

Maa Kali, the Merciful One

Kali is also the most merciful one, as she provides moksha or salvation to her children. Both Kali and Shiva are the destroyers of evil and unreal. It is believed that Kali will appear as wrathful to the egoistical ones. But for people who are truly spiritually inclined, Maa Kali will appear as a protective, benevolent and affectionate figure.

Tara - the Compassionate Goddess

"Pratyaldhapade Ghore Mundalamala Pasovite
Kharve Lambodari Bhime Ughratarā Namostu
Te"

Tara is often depicted in a form similar to that of Kali. However, there are differences in the depiction - Tara's complexion is blue whereas Kali's can be black or blue. Tara holds a bowl made from a scull in one hand, a pair of scissors in another, a blue lotus in the third hand and an axe in the fourth. She is draped in tiger skin and has a necklace of skulls. Though depicted to be a very fierce deity, she is considered to be benevolent towards her devotees and showers them with blessings.

Tara is the deity of accomplishments and is frequently propitiated by business owners for success. She is also a provider of salvation, and speaking prowess.



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TARA PEETH KALI

Lalita Tripura Sundari - the Red Goddess

"Om Aim Hreem Shreem Sri Lalita Tripurasundari Padukam Poojayami Namah"

The above is the simple mantra used in Chakra Pooja or Yantra Pooja, that is, worshipping the Goddess in the form of the Shreechakra Yantra. This is also regarded as the highest form of worship of Lalita Tripura Sundari.

Tripura Sundari literally means the "Beauty of the Three Worlds". Goddess Lalita (the one who indulges in play), also referred to as Shodashi (the Vermillion-hued One) and Rajarajeshwari (Queen of Queens), is regarded as the most beautiful one ever.

Physical attributes



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**IMAGE OF TRIPURA SUNDARI
from DUS MAHAVIDYA
(in Hindi)**

Lalita Tripura Sundari is depicted as a sixteen year old (another meaning for Shodashi), thus embodying the sixteen types of desire. She is described as having a dusky complexion and is often depicted in an intimate position with one aspect of Shiva. She is also shown sitting on the Shree Peetham, a throne or pedestal which usually seats most of the major Hindu Gods such as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

An esoteric interpretation is that her body is said to be made up of the collective Shaktis or energies of Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudra, that is, she is Brahmani, Vaishnavi and Rudrani respectively.

Lalita holds five flower arrows, noose, goad and bow. While the noose represents attachment; the goad symbolizes repulsion; the sugarcane bow, the mind; and the flowery arrows, the five sense objects.

Devi Tripurasundari combines Kali's determination and Durga's charm, grace, verve and complexion. She has a third eye on her forehead. Clad in red, the richly

ornamented Tripurasundari sits on a lotus seat laid on a golden throne. She carries in her hands various attributes associated with Shiva. An aura of royalty characterizes her overall bearing and ambiance.

The Panchadashakshari Mantra

The Panchadashakshari (fifteen-lettered) mantra is the most guarded secrets of Sri Vidya, which a Guru only gives to the most highly deserving disciple. This mantra, it is said, should only be taught to a deserving person as this is the King of all Vidyas.

The Lalita Sahasranama describes the deity as extremely merciful, leading the devotee to liberation. Adi Shankara's Tripura Sundari Ashtakam portrays the Goddess as a Mother wearing a blue and red-spotted dress, holding a pot of honey.

Bhuvaneshwari - the Creator of the World

*"Bhuanesheem Mahamayaam Sooryamandalaroopineem
Namami Varadaam Suddhaam Kamakhyaroopineem
Shivam"*

Bhuvaneshwari, in Sanskrit, means the Creator of the World. Goddess Bhuvaneshwari is the fourth of the Dus Mahavidyas. She embodies the physical cosmos and is considered to give shape to the creation of the World.

Bhuvaneshwari is regarded as the supreme goddess who creates everything and destroys all the unnecessary evils of world. She is also the Mother goddess of Kali, Lakshmi, and Saraswati also Gayatri. The Bija(root) Mantra of Goddess Bhuvaneshwari is "Hreem" and she is also known as Om Shakti or Adi Shakti.

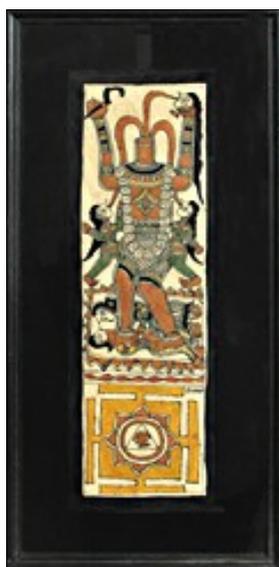
It is believed that she is so powerful that even the navagrahas (nine planets) cannot stop her from doing anything she wishes to do.



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**IMAGE OF BHUVANESHWARI
from DUS MAHAVIDYA
(in Hindi)**

Chhinnamasta - the One Who Severs Her Own Head



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CHHINNAMASTA

*"Guptadurge Mahabhage Guptapaapapranashini
Saptajanmaarjitat Paapaat Traahi Maam Saranagatam"*

Chhinnamasta, "She who severs her own head", is also called Chhinnamastika or Prachanda Chandika. This tantric goddess is a ferocious aspect of the Devi and can be identified by her fearsome iconography.

This self-decapitated goddess holds her own severed head in one hand and a scimitar in the other. Three jets of blood spurt out of her bleeding neck, which is drunk by her own severed head and two attendants standing by each side of her. Chhinnamasta is also usually portrayed as standing on a copulating couple.

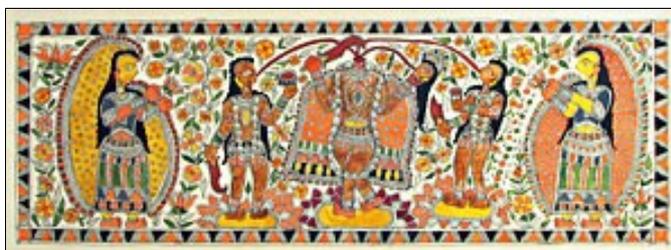
As the figure of Chhinnamasta suggests, this particular Mahavidya is associated with the concept of self-sacrifice as well as the awakening of the kundalini - the spiritual energy lying dormant within the Sookshma Sharira (subtle body). Chhinnamasta is a mixture of contradictions. She is regarded both as a symbol of self-control on sexual desire as well as an embodiment of sexual energy, depending upon the interpretation of the devotee.

As Chhinnamasta is considered a dark and dangerous deity, she has few temples, mostly found in North India and Nepal. Her individual worship is restricted to Tantric worship by Tantrikas and yogis.

Interestingly, Chhinnamasta is recognized by Hindus as well as Buddhists. She is closely related to Chinnamunda - the severed-headed form of the Tibetan Buddhist goddess Vajrayogini.

Physical attributes

Chhinnamasta is shown as being red like the hibiscus flower and as bright as a million suns. Portrayed mostly nude, with dishevelled hair, she is considered to be a sixteen-year-old girl with full breasts, having a blue lotus near her heart. Chhinnamasta is also depicted donning a serpent as a sacred thread and a garland of skulls/severed heads, bones and other ornaments around her neck.



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CHHINNAMASTA

She carries her own severed head in her left hand and holds a khatri or scimitar-like object in her right hand, by which she decapitated herself. Three streams of blood string from her neck, one of which enters her own mouth. The others are drunk by her female companions.

Both the attendants are depicted nude as well, with three-eyes, wearing the serpentine sacred thread and carrying the skull-bowl in the left hand and the knife in the right. While Dakini is light-skinned and represents the tamas guna, Varnini is red-complexioned and embodies the rajas guna.

Chhinnamasta is often shown standing on Kamadeva (the god of Love) and his wife Rati, who are engrossed in copulation with the latter, usually on top. Below the couple lies a lotus and in the background is a cremation ground. The copulating couple is sometimes different and sometimes, completely absent.

Legend of Chhinnamasta's birth

According to one legend from the Pranotāsani Tantra, Parvati, while once having a bath in the Mandakini river, becomes sexually excited, making her skin turn black. At this time, her two female attendants Dakini and Varnini also become extremely hungry and beg for food. Though Parvati initially promises to give them food once they get back home, she decides to behead herself by means of using her nails and gives them her blood to satiate their hunger.

The other story is narrated by Shiva. His consort Chandika (also an aspect of Parvati) was engrossed in coitus with him in reverse posture, but became angry at his seminal emission. Her attendants Dakini and Varnini rose from her body. The rest of the story is similar to the earlier version.

There is yet another legend that relates how the goddess Prachanda-Chandika helped the gods slay all the evil demons. The enraged goddess then cut off her own head too and drinks her own blood.

Her name also appears in the Samudra Manthan episode (Churning of Ocean), where Chhinnamasta drinks up the demons' share of the Devamruta (divine elixir of youth) and then beheads herself to prevent the demons from acquiring the same.

Relevance and symbolism of Chhinnamasta

Chhinnamasta signifies that life, death and sex are interdependent. Her image embodies the eternal truth that life feeds on death and that the ultimate destiny of sex is to perpetuate more life, which in turn will decay and die in order to feed more life. The lotus and the copulating couple symbolize life and the urge to procreate. The blood flowing from goddess' neck conveys death, which flows into the mouths of her devotees, nourishing them. This symbolizes the aspect of the Goddess as a giver.

In a spiritual context, the image of Chhinnamasta is a representation of the awakening of the kundalini. The lovemaking couple actually represents the awakening in the Muladhara chakra. The kundalini flows through the central passage in the body. The blood spilling from the throat depicts the upward-flowing kundalini, breaking all obstacles and finally resulting in enlightenment.

The severed head shows the transcendent consciousness. Dakini, Varnini and Chhinnamasta can be related to the three main subtle nadis or channels, namely, Ida, Pingala and Sushumna. The self-decapitation also represents removal of ignorance and ego.

Bhairavi - the Goddess of Decay

*"Mahapadmavanantasthe Paramanandavigrahe
Shabdabrahmamaye Svacche Vande Tripurabhairaveem"*

Bhairavi, the Terrible One, is also the consort of Lord Bhairava, a fearsome, destructive aspect of Shiva. Bhairavi is the very embodiment of destruction and decay. Hence, she is also termed as the Goddess of Decay. Bhairavi's destruction, though, need not always indicate negativity. The principle behind her destruction is that everything that gets created needs to be destroyed, in order for the cycle of life to keep moving.

Physical attributes



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BHAIRAVI AS KAAL RATRI

Goddess Bhairavi is almost indistinguishable from the terrible Kali. They are much the same in looks, except for the fact that Bhairavi is depicted as the consort of Bhairava.

Bhairavi is also referred to as Shubmkari, who is good to good people and terrible to bad ones. Legend has it that, when Bhairavi entered the battle field, her horrible appearance made the demons weak-kneed and cowered under her gaze. Most of the demons would start panicking the moment they saw her.

In Durga Saptashathi, while slaying the demons Shumbha and Nishumbha, Bhairavi is seen as the Mahakali. However, she also slays Chanda and Munda (the Chieftains of asuras) and drinks their blood. Hence, Parvathi gives her the name, Chamundeshwari.

Bhairavi in her other forms, is also identified with Durga. In her violent form, she is sometimes shown sitting on a donkey, her body covered with a tiger skin and skeleton, her mouth dripping with the blood of the asuras. She presents the abhaya mudra (gesture which grants the devotee succour) and vara mudhra (bestowing boons on the

devotee). Contrarily, she is also shown holding heavy weapons such as a trident, axe, and thunderbolt.

Bhairavi is associated with the Mahapralaya (the Great Deluge at the end of each yuga or epoch), during which all creation is dissolved in the formless waters of destruction. Since everything that is ever created is destroyed, destruction exists everywhere. In that sense, Goddess Bhairavi exists everywhere.

Bhairavi in Kundalini Tantra

Bhairavi is the name given to a female yogini adept in Kundalini Tantra. A Bhairavi is one who has succeeded in mastering the Kundalini shakti (power) inside her.

The name, "Bhairavi", itself implies terror. It also means "awe-inspiring". Hence, the one who attains the status of Bhairavi, is beyond the fear of death, which is supposedly the greatest fear faced by living beings.

Dhumavati - the Goddess Who Widows Herself

*"Devim Koteshwarim Suddhampapaghnim Kamaroopinim
Namami Muktikamaya Dehi Muktim Harapriye"*

Dhumavati, literally "the Smoky One", represents the fearsome aspect of an old, ugly widow. Like her depiction, she is associated with the inauspicious and the unattractive, such as the crow and the Chaturmas period, which does not augur well at all according to the Hindu calendar. It is believed that Dhumavati manifests herself at the time of the Mahapralaya and is "the Great Void" that exists before creation and after dissolution.

Though Dhumavati is largely associated with ill-omens, her Sahasranama or thousand-name hymn talks about both her positive and negative aspects. She is also referred to as being soft-hearted and a bestower of boons, a great teacher and one who reveals ultimate knowledge of the universe. Her ugly form teaches the devotee to look beyond the superficial, to look inwards and ultimately, seek inner truths, which matter the most.

Dhumavati is also known to bestow siddhis or extraordinary powers on devotees and rescues them from all troubles and ultimately grants them moksha or salvation. Those who wish to destroy evil foes would do very well worshipping Goddess Dhumavati. Interestingly, Dhumavati is also worshipped by single persons, desirous of seeking life partners, by Tantrikas desiring to attain supernatural powers and also by those who want to renounce the material world.

In her temple at Varanasi, Dhumavati goes beyond her inauspicious form and manifests as a local protective deity. Though there are very few temples dedicated to her worship, Tantrikas continue to adore her and worship her in secluded places like cremation grounds and forests.

As a goddess of hardships, hunger, thirst, destruction, death, poverty and despair, Devi Dhumavati is often compared to Nairrti, the God of Sickness and Misery. Dhumavati is believed to have a bad temper and encourage an unhappy atmosphere, creating much rife and quarrels.

Physical attributes

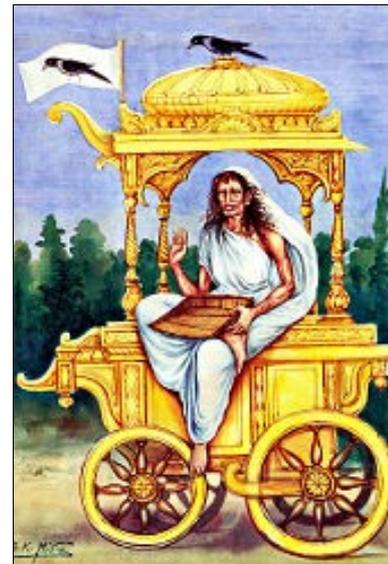
The Dhumavati Tantra describes the goddess as an old, thin and ugly widow, with a pale complexion. She is portrayed as restless and wicked. She wears old, dirty clothes, wears no jewels and has dishevelled hair. Her eyes inspire fear, her nose is long and crooked, and some of her long fang-like teeth are missing, leaving her smile with gaps. Her ears are ugly and rough and her breasts hang down.

One of her trembling hands is held a winnowing basket, while the other has a varadamudra or chinmudra (granting knowledge). Her vahana (vehicle) is a horseless chariot bearing an emblem of a crow and a banner.

The Prapancasarasara-samgraha describes Dhumavati as having a very dark complexion and wearing ornaments made of snakes. She holds a spear or sword and a kapala or skull-cup in her hands. She also has an aged, wrinkled face. Her nose, eyes, and throat resemble those of a crow. She holds a broom, a winnowing fan, a torch, and a club.

She is also sometimes shown as holding a trident. This terrible goddess also sometimes chews the corpses of the demons Chanda and Munda, and drinks a mixture of blood and wine.

Some rare paintings portray her as a full-breasted, beautiful young woman, adorned with the finest gold jewellery. She looks sexually tempting, but is still an inauspicious widow.



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**IMAGE OF DHUMAVATI
from DUS MAHAVIDYA
(in Hindi)**

Some regions of Nepal depict her as a nude woman, wearing a pearl necklace and headband, standing on a peacock, looking into her own reflection in a mirror. A ring of fire, which probably conveys cremation flames, surrounds her.

Legend of Dhumavati

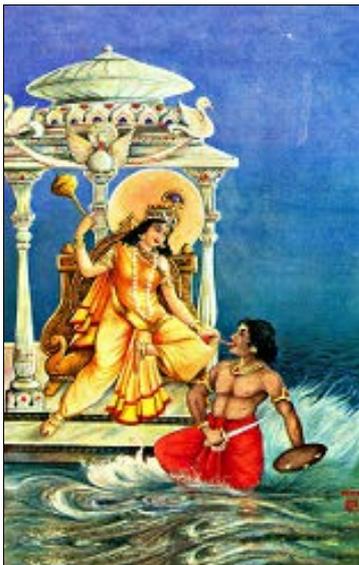
Dhumavati guards the Southeast direction. According to the Shaktisamagama-Tantra, Dhumavati arose from the flames which Sati had jumped into. The Pranatosini-Tantra gives yet another story.

Once, Sati was very hungry and requested Shiva to bring them some food. When Shiva refuses to do so, she eats him up to satisfy her hunger pangs. Shiva asks her to disgorge him, but she declines to do so. Shiva is incensed and curses Sati that she would assume the form of a widow!

Incidentally, Sati is the only Mahavidya who has no consort. Having consumed Shiva, she destroys the male element (Purusha) in the universe. She is hence left with nothing but a horseless chariot and nowhere left to go in life.

Interestingly, Dhumavati is also associated with sex and is said to be present where sexual activity is, and to be occupied with sex. She is believed to like liquor, to be intoxicated and to be worshiped by intoxicated people.

Bagalamukhi - the Goddess Who Seizes the Tongue



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**IMAGE OF BAGALAMUKHI
from DUS MAHAVIDYA
(in Hindi)**

*"Prapadye Saranam Devim Srikamakhyam Sureswarim
Shivasysa Dayitam Shuddham Kamakhyam Kamaroopini"*

Goddess Bagalamukhi or Bagala is the One who destroys her devotees' enemies. In parts of Northern India, she is also known as Pitambara and Brahmastra Roopini. She is the one whose face has the power to capture or control. She therefore represents the hypnotic power of the Goddess.

Physical attributes

Bagalamukhi has a golden, glowing complexion and is dressed in yellow. She sits on a golden throne right in the middle of an ocean of nectar, covered with yellow lotuses. A crescent moon adorns her head. She is depicted both as Dwibhuja (two-handed) and Chaturbhuja (four-handed).

The former form shows her as more benevolent. She is shown holding a club in her right hand with which she beats a demon and pulling his tongue out with her left hand. This image is interpreted as an exhibition of stambhana, the power to stun or paralyse an enemy into silence.

She is known for her powers to turn everything into its opposite, such as speech into silence, knowledge into ignorance, defeat into victory and so on. This Mahavidya represents the knowledge whereby each thing must in time become its opposite. Bagalamukhi hence embodies the secret presence of the opposite wherein each thing is dissolved back into the Unborn and the Uncreated.

Legend of Bagalamukhi

It is believed that at one point in time, a huge storm had come over the Earth. So fierce was its power that it threatened to destroy whole of the creation. Fearing the unthinkable, all the gods assembled in the Saurashtra region and prayed to the Mother Goddess for succor.

Goddess Bagalamukhi emerged from the 'Haridra Sarovara', and pleased by the requests

of the other demi gods, came down to Earth and calmed the storm down.

Worship of Bagalamukhi

There are many Bagalamukhi temples in Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Nepal also has a large temple dedicated to the worship of Bagalamukhi, in the region of Patan.

Bagalamukhi Puja is performed according to Vedic ritual, only by experienced Pujaris (priests). Properly performed, it is believed not only to decrease the power of one's enemy, but also to ultimately render them helpless.

Matangi - the Goddess who Loves Pollution

"Saraswatyaya Namō Nityam Bhadrakalyaya Namō Namah Vedavedantavedanga Vidyasthanebhya Eva Cha"

Matangi is the Tantric form of Saraswati (the She Who Flows Continuously). While Saraswati's energies are directed towards learning, academics, language, and the arts, Matangi's energies are focused inward, on acquiring deeper wisdom.

Matangi is hence the patron of inner thought and speech. She guides her devotee to Aum, the primordial sound. Considered the daughter of Rishi Matanga, she is worshipped as Goddess Meenakshi at the temple at Madurai, Tamil Nadu.

Matangi is actually an aspect of Sati. Appearing just after Bhagalamukhi, Matangi is closely associated with the Purnima, the full moon - the 'night of intoxication'. She is believed to grant control over all forms of speech, including poetry and music. She is associated with the throat chakra. She is also associated with vast and expansive knowledge and therefore, with Saraswati as well.



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**IMAGE OF MATANGI
from DUS MAHAVIDYA
(in Hindi)**

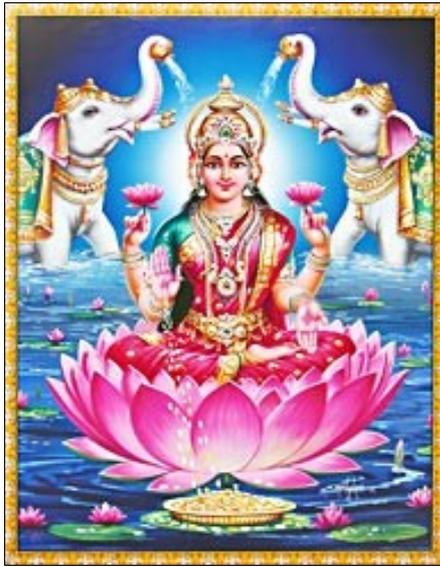
Physical attributes

Matangi is depicted as having three eyes, dark (blue-black or dark emerald) complexion, extremely beautiful and sensuous, with large breasts, slender waist and long, flowing locks. She holds a goad, a noose, a sword and a sarod, a musical instrument. Of course, these items differ from region to region.

Matangi is considered to be born as a chandala or outcaste. Her father was a chandala who was raised as a Brahmin. Maybe this is how she originated as a tribal or non-Vedic deity.

Devi Matangi is associated with strong sexual energy, the expression of which may take several forms. Though part of the Mahavidya group of Shaktis, Devi Matangi is complete in herself and is regarded as the most potent Sacred Feminine.

Kamala - the Lotus Goddess



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KAMALA

*"Sadachara Priye Devi Shuklapushpamvarapriye
Gomayadishuchiprite Mahalakshmi Namostu Te"*

Kamala is closely identified with the Tantric form of Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth. Kamala is the goddess of creation and consciousness. This strikingly beautiful goddess with golden skin and is shown either seated or standing on a fully bloomed lotus, flanked by elephants on each side.

Kamala's greatest power is the destruction of poverty, both material and spiritual, and the bestower of well-being, prosperity and fertility. In fact, both Lakshmi and Kamala are the same goddess, though the latter is more esoteric in nature.

The lotus in spirituality

Spiritually, the lotus denotes purity, auspiciousness and piety. It is also a symbol of the entire manifested universe, found in every yantra and is associated with many deities of the Hindu Pantheon.

The other esoteric significance of the lotus is that it grows from murky, muddy waters and yet, is in no way attached to the water. It bursts forth into large leaves and gorgeous, fragrant blossoms, symbolizing the emergence of the pure, limitless Atman (soul) from the impure, limited material body. This lovely flower is also very nourishing - almost all its parts are edible and healthy. Hence, it represents the vital nature of the spiritual path in nurturing our whole self.

The elephants that shower Kamala with water symbolize the fertile rains of monsoon that create and nurture the whole universe. They also give her an air of royalty - she is the consort of Vishnu, the Preserver. Hence, she too becomes the preserver of the Earth. While Lakshmi is usually depicted as serving Vishnu, Devi Kamala takes the position of the primary deity as the elephants bathe her instead.

Kamala as a creative force

Kamala is the power who creates happiness and abundance all around. Kamala also blesses families with children, hence those experiencing difficulty conceiving would do well to offer worship to this powerful Tantric Goddess. Those who already have children also pray to Kamala for the well-being of their offspring.

Devi Kamala is the spirit of nature and is manifest in the natural world. Hence, we can worship her by spending time in nature, appreciating its profound beauty and also trying our level best to protect the Earth's natural resources and the natural habitat. By doing thus, we can move on the path of spiritual progress, of becoming a sadhaka of the Divine Mother Goddess, Kamala.

One can also worship Kamala to help manifest their own creative vision, eliminate poverty, stabilize the home environment and open up one's heart to spiritual practice of the deity.

The worship of Kamala

The day of Lakshmi Pujan, during Diwali, is special to Devi Kamala. This is celebrated on the full moon day of the Ashvin month. There are prescribed techniques listed out for Lakshmi Puja. But even those not knowing about ritual techniques can pray to this benevolent deity with their whole heart. This wonderful deity immediately grants the seeker all his desires!

In conclusion

The worship of the Mahavidyas in any form ultimately leads the sadhaka to liberation. Even the deities who appear fierce are in actuality, always bestowing grace on their devotees, leading them on to conquer forever higher peaks in their spiritual lives.

The central aim while becoming a Devi Upasaka (follower) is to stretch one's consciousness beyond the conventional, to break away from binding social norms and expectations. This liberates the devotee and raises his consciousness from the inhibiting categories of proper and improper, good and bad, polluted and pure.

The upasana of the supposedly "bizarre" goddesses in the group of Mahavidyas probably facilitate the devotee's spiritual climb, by helping him shun the "approved" social norms and open out his heart to the more esoteric, which is indeed the main prerequisite while on the path of deep spirituality.

However, here is a word of caution for those intent on seeking the grace of a Mahavidya. Though each of these Mahavidyas is very powerful and grants all the boons as desired by their devotees, Sadhakas (seekers) should understand that they should never try and misuse the powers of the special mantras attributed to these Devis.

All aspects of the ritual worship should be carried out faithfully, without missing a single point. Also, they should never endeavour to do ritual worship on their own, without the initiation and guidance of a Guru. Omitting any ritual in a certain Devi's worship, it is considered, will result in severe ill-effects for the devotee.

This article was written by **Saipriya Viswanathan**. Saipriya is a teacher/performer of Bharata Natyam, Carnatic vocal music and Carnatic Veena. She is a recipient of several awards for both dance and music, including the Sur Mani and Singar Mani titles. She is a recipient Govt. of India Merit Scholarship for dance and is a diploma holder in Carnatic vocal music.

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