

# Kali, Untamed Goddess Power and Unleashed Sexuality: A

## Study of the 'Kalika Purana' of Bengal

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### **Abstract**

*This paper attempts to analyse the paradox inherent in the myth of Kali, both in her iconic delineation and the rituals associated with her worship as depicted in the twelfth century Kalika Purana. The black goddess Kali breaks conventional stereotypes of feminine beauty and sexuality in Hindu goddess mythology. She is the dominant sexual partner straddling the prone Siva and the wild warrior goddess drinking demon blood. She is originally depicted as a symbol of uncontrolled fury emerging from the fair, beautiful goddess Ambika in the battle with the demons in older goddess texts. Thereafter she gains independent existence both as the dark, mysterious and sexually demanding version of the more benign and auspicious Parvati and the Primordial Goddess Power pre-dating the Hindu trinity of male gods, the Universal Mother Force which embraces both good and evil, gods and demons in the Kalika Purana. Unlike other goddess texts which emphasize Kali's role in the battle against the demons, the Kalika Purana's focus is on her sexuality and her darkly sensual beauty. Equally it is on the heterodoxical rituals associated with her worship involving blood and flesh offerings, wine and the use of sexual intercourse as opposed to Vedic rituals.*

### **Keywords**

*kali, female, sexuality, primordial, goddess, paradox*

### **1. Introduction**

Kali, feared in Hindu mythology as the negative stereotype in goddess cults, is at the same time revered as the Universal Mother. Her iconic delineation, girded and garlanded with skulls and limbs while her hand is raised in the *abhayamudra* (gesture of re-assurance from fear) indicates both chastisement and benediction. As a dark, complex, mysterious and alluring figure, she breaks conventional stereotypes of feminine beauty and sexuality, combining the beautiful with the fearful. In a traditionally patriarchal society and an androcentric religious order, she emerges as a rebel; dominant in marital and sexual relationships and ferocious and bloodthirsty on the battlefield. Existing on the fringes of the *dharmic* value system and Vedic ritualism, the Kali-centric myths teeter dangerously on the extreme peripheries of social and moral acceptability in the iconic projection of her black nudity, her voluptuous breasts, her bloodstained tongue, her foot on the prostrated corpse-like body of her consort Siva, the sacrificial blood and flesh rituals associated with her worship.

Yet the *Kalika Purana* (Note 1), a text composed around the twelfth century in Bengal, establishes her supremacy by embodying her as the Universal Mother, the Creatrix who exists through every *kalpa* (the cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution) through which the Hindu trinity of Brahma-Visnu-Siva must pass. She is projected also as the embodiment of Goddess Power, both martial and sexual. This paper attempts to analyse the paradox of the myth of Kali as depicted in the text. The text in a sense is thus different from the later traditions of goddess myths projected in most of the *Mangal Kavya* (Note 2) literature of Bengal spanning almost five centuries where she finds little mention. It is also an early anticipation of the *Sakta padavalis* (Note 3) and Kali hymns of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries where she is eulogized as the Great Mother.

## 2. Method: History of the Kali Myth

In the first section the paper will attempt to briefly trace the history of the development of the myth of Kali. The advent of Kali was believed to be a comparatively late entry into Hindu religious mythology. Though possibly having an earlier tribal or pre-Aryan variant, her first official mention is found in the sixth century *Devi Mahatmya* (Note 4). Scholars like David Kinsley trace her similarity to Vedic figures like the demoness Nirrti and the goddess Ratri-devi owing to their dark colour. (Kinsley, 1998) In the *Mundaka Upanisad*, Kali finds mention as one of the seven tongues of Agni. In the Sauptika Parva of the *Mahabharatha*, Kali appears in the Pandava camp after the slaughter of the sleeping princes to lead the dead away. Thereafter in certain texts she is shown as the black and more violent and bloodthirsty alter ego of a stereotypically beautiful and controlled goddess figure combating demons. In the *Devi Mahatmya*, Kali emerges from the Devi Ambika's brow darkened with anger to an inky black colour, '*masivarnam*', to contain the self-multiplying demon Raktabeeja:

Tataha kopam cakarocairambika tanarinprati  
Kopena casya vadanam masivarnambhuttada  
Bhrukutikutilatasya lalataphalakadryutam  
Kali karalavadana vinastantisipasini

(VII: 5-6, DM: 98)

Similarly in the *Linga Purana*, on Siva's urging Parvati to kill the demon Daruka and his legions, she enters Siva's body and emerges blue from the poison in his throat as Kali of terrible appearance accompanied by her flesh-eating minions. In the *Devi Bhagavatam*, in the battle with Sumbha and Nisumbha, after the fair, beautiful Ambika emerges from Parvati's body, she turns black as the 'cosmic void where no lamp burns and she is Kalika or Kalaratri, the night of destruction' (Menon, 2006, p. 140) who could destroy demons merely with her rapacious laughter. And subsequently battling Canda and Munda, a black goddess emerges from the fair Ambika's brow. She is Bhadrakali, with red eyes, skin black as moonless nights, fangs sharp as ivory pillars, tongue lolling over crimson mouth, huge breasts

and loose belly, armed with axe, noose and trident, wildly drinking raw wine. With reference to these texts, David Kinsley says: 'In her association with other goddesses, she appears to represent their embodied wrath or fury—a frightening, dangerous dimension of the Divine Feminine that is released when these goddesses are enraged or are called to take part in war and killing'. (Kinsley, 1998, p. 80)

However, in texts like the *Vamana Purana* and the *Kalika Purana*, we note that Kali and Parvati are the dark and fair variants of the same goddess, the blackness a sheath which is stripped off by the goddess herself to make her more sexually acceptable to the crystal-hued Siva. As Sasibhusan Dasgupta notes that even in some of the Sakta Padavalis of Bengal, Kali is seen as the darker version of Parvati, Himalaya's daughter. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century hymns and poetry of Bengal of poets like Ramprasad Sen, the cult of Kali begins to crystallize in literature. These poets synthesize the fearful with the beautiful in Kali as Ramprasad sings of the bloodstained dark body as a beautiful scarlet *kingsuk* flower floating on the dark waters of the Kalindi/Yamuna river, or of her dark face as a blue lotus:

Ke re Kaliyo sarire, rudhir sobhiche

Kalindir jale kingsuk bhase

Ke re neel-kamal, sri-mukha-mandal

Ardhya-candra bhale prakase. (Dasgupta, 2002, p. 291)

Here she finds independent mention as the Universal Mother, as also in the Hindu Revivalist Movement of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna explained her black colour by saying that just as the waters of the ocean appear dark from afar, but without colour when seen at close quarters, so also Kali appears dark when her mystery is viewed with awe from a distance without understanding. He himself approached her in 'santaan-bhava' as a child to its Mother. (Dasgupta, 2002, p. 278) Kali is indeed also the compelling focus of an entire cult of religious heterodoxy of Tantrism (Note 5) which, particularly in its Vamacara sect, is considered by many to be violently antithetical to traditional Vedic norms of worship and ritualism. The *Kalika Purana*, despite being a relatively early text, shares many of these characteristics in its depiction of Kali both as Siva's consort and as warrior goddess as also in the rites prescribed for her worship.

### 3. Kali in the Kalika Purana

As opposed to the fair, relatively benign and more domesticated versions of the Devi and her avataric aspects of the beautiful Sati and Parvati portrayed in the *Mangal Kavyas* (Note 6), the *Kalika Purana* shows the interchangeability of the fair and the dark goddesses. In the first instance, Daksha's daughter Sati, born fair, assumes the fearful visage of Kali and the other Mahavidyas to terrify Siva into submission. At Daksha's *yagna*, her father attributes her dark colour to constant proximity to the wild mendicant Siva, causing her to give up her life in sorrow and humiliation. In the second, she is the dark

and beautiful Parvati, like a blue lotus, ‘neelotpalodaloshyama’ (KP: 92) daughter of Himalaya. She is born to serve the gods’ purpose of luring into domesticity the stern, austere hermit-like Siva to preserve the cosmic cycles of Creation, Preservation and Destruction. It is only later, piqued and jealous of Siva’s propensity towards fair skins that she emerges from her *kosa* (sheath) of darkness to become the golden-hued Gauri:

‘Swarna varna habo aami tyajiya Kalika’ (KP: 102)

Yet her darkly alluring and compelling sexuality is highlighted in the text as opposed to the prototype of a domesticated wife and mother like Candi in the *Candi Mangal Kavya*, as earlier mentioned in this essay. John Stratton Hawley in his Prologue to *Devi: Goddesses of India*, notes that Kali in a strange way mediates between the transcendent goddess, the generic Devi who has supremacy over all forms of life and the consort goddesses like Lakshmi and Radha. ‘On the one hand, Kali unquestionably manifests herself as supreme—whether as a mother demanding submission or as an uncanny, uncontrollable force—but on the other hand, her supremacy is paradigmatically measured by the power she exerts over her consort the great god Siva.’ (Hawley, 1998, p. 9) And he quotes as example of her sexual dominance, the iconic representation of Kali dancing wildly on the prone, ithyphallic corpse of her husband Siva.

The *Kalika Purana* initially projects her as the manifestation of the universality of the Divine Feminine, Mahamaya, who is Visnumaya and Rudrani consort of both Visnu and Rudra (Siva). She is Savitri, Saraswati, through the power of her *maya* (illusion), incomprehensible to all who are ensnared in her power of illusion:

‘Ke Jaane mayar marmo hoye mayasroy’ (KP: 27)

She is Visnu’s Yoganidra, his state of cosmic sleep or stasis. She is Yogamaya/Mahamaya, who ensnares the cosmos in her web of illusion, she is Mahamoha, the fatal enchantress and the Supreme Trinity itself is not immune to her mysterious lure. Another goddess text, the *Sri Lalita Sahasranama* calls her Mahabhoga (LS: 86) and Bhogini (LS: 97) implying her *rajasik-rupa* (dynamism, also material grandeur) of being steeped in worldly luxuries. Yet she is the path to *mukti* (salvation) for beings trapped in the worldly and materialistic which is all part of her cosmic illusion:

Jini moha-mamata te koriya jorito

Mukti-pathe aborjona kore nikhepito...

Seyi se Vaisnavi sakti muktir karon. (KP: 10-11)

And the same *Sri Lalita Sahasranama* also states that she is Mohanasini, (LS: 80) destroying the *moha* (bondage) of her devotees and Pasu-pasa-vimocini, (LS: 104) releasing them from the inferior, coarser earthly bonds. She is *Vidya* (knowledge) for the householder who desires *mukti* (salvation), and *Avidya*

(ignorance) who binds the universe in bonds of material desire. She is the primeval Demi-Urge, the Adyasakti that activates the inert maleness of Siva into the dynamism of the Siva-Sakti or Purusa-Prakrti union for without Sakti, Siva is but a *sava* (corpse). In fact among the Sakta devotees it is Kali among the many manifestations of the Divine Feminine who is recognized as the Adya-murti, the original goddess manifestation. In the text, Kali alone can excite Siva, for on the one hand, she is a *yogin* to participate in his yoga and on the other, it is her eroticism, wild and uncontrolled, which is the perfect counterpart to his dominant sexual urge. And she alone is capable of releasing his fiery sperm:

Kali bina keba beerja karibek chyuto (KP: 95)

And she alone can contain this sperm which incinerates objects it falls upon. At the same time she is the Universal Womb, 'Brahmanda-udari' (KP: 150) the Creatrix who precipitates Creation itself, 'Viswa-prasabini'. KP: 150) She is both the abstract and formless, the Nirguna and the manifested and iconic, the Saguna. She is the embodiment of paradox, and who can comprehend her contradictions, says the poet. She is also the endless night of dissolution. While all the male gods are subject to Time and Destiny and the cycles of creation and dissolution in each *kalpa* as is also said in the *Nirvana-Tantra*:

Brahmavisnuh sivo devi prakrtya jayate dhruvam  
Tatha pralaykale tu prakrtya lupyate punah  
(Nirvana-Tantra, III: 1-2, quoted in Dasgupta 2002:15)

She is beyond Time and Destiny, because she is Kali who has swallowed Kala (Time) itself. Patricia Dold, in her essay, *Kali the Terrific and her Tests: the Sakta Devotionalism of the Mahabhagavata Purana* notes that in spite of her wild attire, lolling tongue and bizarre, grotesque ornaments, her embodiment 'as Sati, Ganga, Parvati in the *Mahabhagavata Purana* renders her character more complex and inclusive of the auspiciousness associated with such goddesses and so she becomes less extreme. Such embodiments also exalt Kali, for she is no longer merely the dark side of auspicious goddesses; she is their very essence.' (Dold, 2005, p. 41) While this is certainly true of the later hymns and poems of Sakta literature of Bengal in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries where despite her dark, frightening appearance, she is extolled as the benign, universal Mother, I wish to highlight in this paper her wild, dark, erotic aspect in the *Kalika Purana* which is apparently inimical and dangerous to the stability of the established religious and social order as part of her inherent complexity.

Thus whereas other texts such as the *Devi Mahatmya* and the *Linga Purana* project Kali's martial prowess, her fierce, bloodthirsty nude manifestation on the battlefield feasting on the demon's blood and flesh, cannibalism and devastation incarnate, this aspect is only briefly shown in the second half of the *Kalika Purana*. This text focuses on her darkly sensual beauty, often referring to her nudity in such

words as *digambara*, *biboshona*, to her voluptuous and extended breasts, *peenonoto stanojug*. Eroticism and sexuality play a predominant part in the projection of Parvati/Kali here. While the erotic does play a significant role in other traditions of mythological literature in Bengal as in the extra-marital relationship (*parakiya prem*) of Radha and Krsna in Vaisnava poetry, (Sasibhusan Dasgupta notes the influence of the Vaisnava *padavalis* on the Sakta literature of Bengal in its use of the *madhura rasa*, Dasgupta, 2002, p. 207) the overt display of sexuality in the *Kalika Purana* probably owes much to the importance attributed to *Maithuna* (sexual intercourse) as the fifth requirement among the five M's of Vamacara Tantra Sadhana as its mode of worship of Kali, the other four being offerings of *Madya* (wine), *Matsya* (fish), *Mamsa* (meat) and *Mudra* (parched grains) (Note 7). The text opens with the account of the birth of Kama (Eros) as the mind-borne son of Brahma to incite sexuality and sexual hunger into the world and culminates in the establishment of the worship at the *yonipeetha* of Kamakhya where the vagina of Sati's dismembered body is said to have fallen, as the most potent and sacrosanct place of pilgrimage. The text describes in detail the sexual exercises of Siva-Sati and Siva-Parvati/Kali. Despite their prolonged and tempestuous coitus causing the earth to heave and the primeval Serpent and the Tortoise to tremble under the storm of this union, neither is sexually satisfied and Siva is unable to ejaculate his fiery seed necessary for the birth of the warrior-god Kartik for demon-destruction. When the gods arouse them from their union for fear of disruption of the universal cycles, Siva is disturbed, for who other than Kali/Uma can contain his sperm, fiery as a burning mountain:

Jwalanta parvat-tulya ati bhayankar  
Uma bina dhore tej kahar sakati. (KP: 104)

And the sexually unsatisfied Parvati/Kali like an avenging fury, curses the gods with sexual sterility. Resuming their sexual play, Siva is unable to satisfy Kali sexually and she arises naked and dishevelled and is accidentally seen by Bhringi and Mahakal born of drops of Siva's sperm falling on a rock, turning her from a shy and abashed sexual partner into a fiery goddess unleashing a volley of curses on them. The union of Siva and the golden-hued Gauri (the transformed Kali) culminates in Siva's projection of the androgynous figure of the *ardhanariswara* (half male, half female) image, each offering one half of the body to the other, and the poet describes the salvific potential of this image to the faithful:

Nijo dakkho sororardhya sankare sopila  
Baam-ange sankarer korila haran  
Gauri-kaye sorirardhya den trilochan. (KP: 103)

The emphasis on female sexuality continues in the second half of the text when Siva describes the

primacy of the Kamakhya *yoni-peetha* (yoni, vagina) as a place of pilgrimage. The worship of the vagina forms an important aspect of Tantric texts. The *Yoni-Tantra* talks of worshipping the yoni with sandal-paste and flowers for attaining salvation as is done at the temple of Kamakhya where a cleft in the rock signifies Sati's dismembered vagina (Note 8) It talks of vigorous sexual intercourse and chanting the Devi's *mula-mantra* (her myriad names) a hundred and eight times prior to intercourse and of drinking sexual emissions as the best form of *sadhana* (worship). The yoni or vagina is emblematic of Mahamaya, the primordial goddess and the linga or phallus, of Sadasiva or the eternal Siva. The *Karpuradi Stotra's* Hymn to Kali, says:

Tripancare pithe savasivahrdismeravadanam  
Mahakalenocairmadanarasalavanyaniratam  
Samasakto naktam svayamapi ratanandanirato  
Jano yo dhyayettvamayi Janani sa syat smararah (vs 18)

(He who at night, when in union with his Sakti, meditates with centred mind on Thee, O Mother with gently smiling face, as on the breast of the corpse-like Siva lying on a fifteen-angled yantra, deeply engulfed in amorous sexual play with Mahakala, himself becomes the destroyer of the God of Love.)

In the Kaula and Other Upanisads, she is referred to as:

Kamom kalam kamorupam vidtva naro jayate kamarupadya kamyaha (vs 11)

The *Kalika Purana* also narrates the myth of the male gods ignoring this sacred site of Kamakhya and thereafter being rendered immobile and impotent by the curse of the goddess. It is only after they bathe in and drink the vaginal fluid symbolized by this site that they are liberated and find themselves surrounded by thousands and thousands of yonis, a symbol of the male being ensnared and overcome by female sexuality, of the Creatrix engulfing her Creation. The Goddess is here referred to as Maha-yoni and Viswa-yoni. C. Mackenzie Brown in *The Triumph of the Goddess* notes that archaeological evidence from the ancient pre-Aryan period in India largely in the form of figurines and ring stones in the form of the yoni was found, suggestive of an early fascination with female powers of fertility of the Feminine Divine. (Brown, 1990) The yoni is also symbolical of the triangle of the *sahasrara* ('thousand-petalled', the seventh primary chakra in the tantric yogic tradition), the ultimate stage of the uncoiled *kundalini* within the sadhaka's own body at the top of the head, which represents the union of Siva and Sakti.

Even apart from the Siva-Kali union, sexuality plays a pre-dominant role in the *Kalika Purana*. The influence of Kama (Eros) and his five potent arrows which indicate the five effects that sexual desire has on those afflicted by it (Note 9), overwhelms gods, householders, sages and demons alike and arouses lustfulness beyond the peripheries prescribed by the Hindu dharmic code for relationships

between men and women. The many myths associated with Kama in this text include instances of incest as that of the usually sage Brahma's for his mind-borne daughter Sandhya, of extra-marital lust of Brahma for Sati at the nuptials of Siva and Sati, of unlicensed sexual union of Visnu's in his avataric form of the Boar with the menstruating Prithvi (Earth), a social anomaly that causes her to be in labour for aeons of time and to give birth to a monster. It also cites other myths of extra-marital lust of the Rishi Kapot's for the nude bathing form of Queen Taravati (an earthly form of Parvati), of the god Indra's sexual union with Ahalya, wife of the sage Gautama leading to her being turned into stone and of the sage Jamadagni's wife Renuka's desire for the princes for which she is decapitated by her son Parasuram by his father's commandment. It narrates the myths of the unleashed sexuality of the heavenly *apsaras* Urvasi and Rambha, here termed *banita* or prostitute for they bear children only to abandon them. Here, the fatal enticement of men and sexual orgasm, rather than procreation, are the only urges behind their bewitching ways.

Turning to the next section of the essay, regarding Kali as a negative stereotype of female beauty, her first visionary appearance to sage Daksa later to be her earthly father, is as a blue (dark) goddess, supremely beautiful, four-armed and mounted on a lion. She is nude, her hair streams down her back, she has reddened eyes and a blood-stained outstretched tongue. She holds a scythe in one hand as a weapon of destruction and is girded and garlanded with demons' heads and limbs. Later in the text, Siva in his instructions for her worship to his sons Betal and Bhairav, similarly envision her as:

Sriksna pinakpani kalaratrirupini,  
Raktasya nayan ugra rakta malya rupini  
Raktambar-dhari tumi pasahasta-dhari  
Rudhir karaho paan mamsason kari. (KP: 119)

She is *kalaratri*, the eternal night of dissolution, her eyes are bloodshot, she is attired in red and garlanded with red flowers, she drinks blood and consumes flesh. In her Bhadrakali image however, she is described in the text as being golden-hued as the *atasi* flower, her dreadlocks piled on her head, sixteen-armed and garlanded with snakes. As the fearful Sivaduti, she is red-hued like vermillion, seated on ghouls, preying on flesh, her blood-reddened mouth agape in terrifying, demon-destroying *attahasya* (laughter). As Ugracandi, she is eighteen-armed and apart from the many weapons she wields, one hand carries a flagon of wine from which she drinks copiously, her eyes wild and whirling with intoxication. The *Sri Lalita Sahasranama* also describes her intoxication as 'Varuni-mada-vivhala' (LS: 102) and 'Madhvi-paralasa'. (LS: 136) Despite the ferocity of these many images cited in the text, the poet of the *Kalika Purana* is careful to describe her as being supremely beautiful and sexually bewitching. The power she wields over the demons is thus both martial and sexual, a fact also emphasized by the *Devi Bhagavatam*. As earlier noted in this essay, she is both Mahamaya (the Great Illusion) and Mahasuri (the Great Demoness), having the magical capacity to change her shape with

equal felicity as the demon demonstrates in engaging with her and the same untamed sexuality and the libertine ways that the demon displays. She is accompanied by her sixty four dakinis (witches) and yoginis (ghouls). Some of her ten Mahavidyas are equally terrifying in their manifestation as is Chinnamasta with decapitated head, one hand holding the severed head which drinks the blood flowing from the neck in two streams, the other flowing into the mouth of a votary, an image both of destruction and preservation.

#### 4. Vamacara Tantrik Rituals of Kali Worship

Regarding the rituals associated with her worship, Goddess worship is probably the only arena of Hinduism where animal sacrifice has been and is practiced even today. The mode of Kali worship enumerated in the text closely reflects the Vamacara form of Tantrik worship, involving flesh and blood, both animal and human, often performed at remote locations like the cremation grounds with human skulls, while seated on a tiger skin. The *Kalika Purana* informs us that of all forms of flesh and blood offered to the goddess, human flesh and blood may be considered the most potent, including drops of the sacrificer's own.

Chagol, mahis, nar teen mahaboli  
Sandhi-kale dibe boli niyo gatro-rakto (KP: 119)

And blood-stained human skulls must be offered:

Rakto-makha nara-seersa Kalika uddese (KP: 124)

The use of the five substances, namely wine, fish, meat, parched grains and sexual intercourse, represents an apparently heterodoxical religious order antithetical to Vedic ritualism and to Vedic notions of ritual purity which demand great austerity and celibacy among its strictest practitioners, though Tantric scholars claim evidence of certain Tantric rites in the Sam Veda and even in the Rg Veda's Devi-sukta and Ratri-sukta. The question that arises in the minds of non-practitioners of this Left-handed cult of Tantrism is whether this is just a wanton indulgence for personal power—power over one's enemies, power to display one's spiritual prowess. According to Tantric texts like the *MahanirvanaTantra*, the five substances used for worship of Sakti in this religious order, are offered to the Feminine Divine because she is the Mother of the Universe and in this offering, substances symbolical of life-forms represent the Universe itself. At the same time the body is of great importance in the Tantric form of worship, for within the body lies the Devi Kundalini representing the *prana-sakti* (life-force) and *mano-sakti* (power of the mind) of the *sadhaka* (practitioner), she is the instrument both of bondage to it and of salvation from it. By stepping outside the established religious order and practising rituals antithetical to it, Tantrism makes its *sadhakas* confront rather than decry, the extremes

of sensual temptations, and through limited indulgence under the tutelage of a guru, overcome them to proceed on his chosen path of *sadhana* to attain *moksha* or salvation. According to Jnanendranath Bhattacharya, only those having *veerabhava* (those who have overcome sensual temptations) and those having *divyabhava* (those who have attained complete control of themselves) are allowed to indulge in prescribed measure in the *Pancha-makaras* (five substances) and that, only during worship and never for personal pleasure. Those having *pasubhava* (those steeped in passions/the unliberated) are expressly prohibited from this indulgence. (Bhattacharya, 2004, p. 24) Each of these substances represents a particular therapeutic quality associated with it that redeems the worshipper: so that wine gives joy and dispels sorrow, flesh nourishes and increases power of regeneration, cereals or parched grain represents the yield of the earth and the basis of life. Sexual union (either with one's wife or with a low-caste woman) represents the origin of all creation and the union of the World Force Siva, (in this case the worshipper's own body) and the Sakti Kundalini, the Inner Woman, (in this case, the female partner). Elements of Tantrism can be found in the Vajrayana sect of Buddhism as well, where the *mahasiddhas* (great adepts) used methods radically different from those used in the Buddhist monasteries. They included the use of sacred sex and of ingestion of alcohol, meat. As Thomas Cleary and Sartaz Aziz tell us: 'The manifestation and mission of the mystic courtesan Vasumitra illustrate the Buddhist use of sensory experience for a transcendental liberating purpose.' (Cleary & Aziz, 2000, p. 163) Like the practitioners of Left Handed Tantrism in Hindu philosophy, this propounds a view of transcending the world by experiencing it consciously through sensory experiences.

The *Kalika Purana* thereafter stresses the importance of the Yoni-mandala, also known as the Sri-Cakra or Sri-Yantra and the Yoni-mudra:

Netro-beeje prathomoto likhibe mandal  
Trikone porete habe padmo astadal. (KP: 147)

The Sri-Cakra is a two-dimensional diagram, a visual, non-iconic form of the Feminine Divine. Lynn Foulstan and Stuart Abbott in *Hindu Goddesses: Beliefs and Practices* state that this diagram is a representation of the innate potency contained in the union of Siva and Sakti. (Foulstan & Abbott, 2009) At the heart of the diagram is the Bindu or the concentrated essence of the invisible, elusive centre from which the diagram, and symbolically the cosmos, expand. Surrounding this are the five triangles pointing downwards representing Sakti and four pointing upwards, representing Siva. The nine triangles also known as *nava-yonis*, intersect, creating forty-three triangles symbolical of the womb of creation. The five Sakti triangles represent the five elements and the four Siva triangles, his four metaphysical attributes. Surrounding the triangles are concentric circles outlined with eight and then sixteen lotus petals representing the lotus of creation and the reproductive vital forces. Inscribed on the eight petals should be eight of the nine syllables of the Devi's *beej-mantra* (incantation specifically for a deity), the ninth being at the heart. Encompassing the circles is a square with central openings in each

of the four sides. The Sri-yantra is understood as a symbolic map of both the macrocosmic and microcosmic and the *sthula* (gross) and *sukhma* (subtle) human body. It is only when the sadhaka has attained the higher stages of his sadhana that he can move beyond the iconic image of the goddess to her visualization in the Sri-Yantra.

## 5. Conclusion

The *Kalika Purana* repeatedly highlights the paradox of the goddess both in her manifested and her symbolical forms as well as the inscrutability of the mantras and the *kavacas* (devices of protection for the devotee) associated with her worship:

Guhya hote Guhya-tamo kavaca prodhan (KP: 147)

David Kinsley in *The Sword and the Flute: Kali and Krsna Dark Visions of the Terrible and Transcendent*, states: 'Kali quite clearly conveys maya as seen from the 'other shore'. She illustrates strikingly what the world of appearance looks like to the one who has seen beyond...her over-all presence which is frightening, and her dwelling place in the cremation ground clearly mock the ultimate significance of a world grounded in the ego....In her mad dancing, dishevelled hair and eerie howl, there is made present the hint of a world reeling, careening, out of control.' (Kinsley, 2000, pp. 134-135) In conclusion, Kali, in integrating absolute binaries of the terrifying and the beautiful, the compassionate Mother and the blood-thirsty demon destroyer, the consort of Siva and the sexually dominant partner points to a more comprehensive image of non-duality (Note 10) that is beyond the reductivist social and religious definitions of what is acceptable or what is heterodox. She embodies life as it is in all its wild and abundant complexity, not as it is selectively made out to be within social and religious peripheries. She embodies the Divine Feminine in all its complexity; she is the synthesis of both the auspicious and benign goddesses and the wild and uncontrolled for as the Adyasakti, the primeval cosmic force, she represents both the good and the evil, the godly and the demonic of which the cosmos is composed, all of which arises from her. For, as the *Brhdaranyaka Upanisad* says, he is a beast (*pasu*), who makes a division between himself and the object of his worship:

Anyosa-vanyoha-masmiti Na Sa Veda Yatha Pasuriti (1-4)

It is however important to note that the dominant female sexuality, the prolonging of intercourse in the Shiva-Shakti union described in the preceding sections of this essay, is not an exercise of power associated with the sexually dominant partner. Its ultimate purpose is the awakening of the dormant *kundalini shakti* (vital energy), which rises up the spine through the various chakras within us to culminate in the *sahasrara* (the thousand-petalled lotus) on the top of the head, which may be called the psycho-spiritual centre. It envisages the path from *pravritti* (intense activity) to *nivritti* (cessation of

desire) in this act of sacred sex. It defines a path of realization through indulgence without bondage to the senses, rather than through deprivation and denial of the sensory experiences. The myths and the cults of worship associated with Kali therefore strip life of its absolutes to envisage a more comprehensive and all-inclusive vision.

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## Notes

Note 1. The Puranas are not considered to be scripture in Hinduism but part of the oral tradition and 'smriti' literature, hagiographically attributed to the sage Vedavyasa. The *Kalika Purana* is part of the Upa-puranas, not the Maha-puranas which are mainly dedicated to Brahma, Visnu and Siva. Other Devi Puranas include the Devi Bhagavatam. The version of the Kalika Purana used in this essay is translated into Bengali in the payar metre by SriKaliprasanna Vidyaratna.

Note 2. The Mangal Kavyas were part of a literary genre composed in Bengal between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. They were folk epics mainly dedicated to female deities worshipped among the rural folk and were chanted or sung during festivals pertaining to that particular goddess.

Note 3. The Sakta padavalis are part of a literary genre composed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Bengal, originally popularized by the saint-poet Ramprasad Sen. They are mainly religious hymns dedicated to Kali.

Note 4. The *Devi Mahatmya*, narrating the three stories of the Devi's destruction of the demons, is part of the *Markandeya Purana*.

Note 5. Tantrism is a Hindu goddess cult worshipping Kali as the supreme deity. Among them the more extreme Vamacara followers practise the Pancha-Makaras or worship through the offering of the 5 objects, namely, meat (mamsa), fish (matsya), wine (madya), parched grains (mudra) and sexual intercourse (maithuna).

Note 6. Here, the epic verses are generally addressed to the deity in her incarnation of Sarvamangala or Mangalmayee (*mangala* indicating her benevolent form).

Note 7. The Vamacara Tantric Tradition, where the Upacara of the Rajasik puja are the five tattvas and the acts of eating, drinking and sexual union offered to the goddess by the initiated under the supervision of the guru.

Note 8. The myth of Kamakhya believes that when Sati committed self-immolation at her father Daksa's yagna, her consort Siva, indulged in prolonged grief, imperilling the cosmic cycles. So Visnu dismembered her body into 51 parts, scattering them across the land. The site of each part later became a Sakti-peetha, Kamakhya believed to be the site where her vagina fell, observes three days of closure of the temple annually when the goddess is believed to be menstruating.

Note 9. The 5 arrows of Kama are Harshan (joyfulness), Rochan (pleasure), Shoshan (draining dry), Mohan (bewitchment) and Maron (death).

Note 10. I use the word 'non-duality' not in the sense of the Advaita-vada of Hindu philosophy, I mean here that the goddess represents a comprehensive vision of the universal Divine Feminine in all its aspects, both the auspicious and benign and the fearful and terrible. It also means that as the original Creatrix, she is the mother of both the good and evil aspects of the universe and as such her manifestation includes both the godly and the demonic.