

Of Feminine Supremacy

Mother Goddess and the Pahadi Myths of Creation

○ Shivanath

Of the many myths of creation that circulate in traditional folklore, one which is prevalent in the Garhwal Himalayas tells of when there existed no earth, no life in the beginning; there was only a vast expanse of water. From this swirling, foaming, vortex of water emerged Shakti, the incarnation of power. Looking around, she saw no living beings, no trees, no mountains, no life anywhere. Feeling the need for a companion, she churned a part of the water, and from it came forth Shiva. Shakti looked at Shiva with wonder and longing as he shook his hair, still wet. A drop of water from his locks fell into the mouth of Shakti, and she conceived.

In due course, Shakti gave birth to the twins, Nala and Nalini. As the boy and the girl grew, they started cohabiting. Nalini conceived, and when the time came for her to deliver, she took shelter under Nala's legs. She gave birth to Pankh and Pankhini (a male bird and a female bird). They produced Garuda and Garudi (a male eagle and a female eagle). Garuda then laid three large-sized eggs which Shakti, the great grandmother of Garuda and Garudi, lifted with her powers and dropped down, one by one. The two halves of the first egg formed the earth and the sky, the two halves of the second, the East and West directions, and the two halves of the third egg became the North and the South.

Thus, the universe was created. Shakti looked at her creation with

joy. She then continued the process of creation and filled the universe with all kinds of live and inanimate things—clouds, animals, insects, crops and grasses; also day and night, sleep and wakefulness, feasts and festivals, and so on.

The other myth from the hills of Shivalik is contained in a Dogri folk tale and goes something like this:

Shiva and his consort, Parvati first created *devas* and *asuras*, but they were not happy with their creation because these gods and demons kept quarreling with and complaining about each other. Therefore, they decided to create afresh a male and a female being with some dough; and thus man and woman came into existence. Then Shiva created Bidh Mata, the goddess of destiny, and entrusted to her the task of breathing life into these figures.



That done, Partvati set to work on the female figure and embellished her with attractive qualities, showering on her the benediction of beauty. She said to her, "You have to shoulder the burden of procreation to carry forward the human lineage." Shiva, on the other hand, attended to the male figure, endowing him with strong muscles, strength of legs and arms and hair on the face, and said, "You have to work hard and toil to provide for yourself, your woman and your family."

Thereafter, Shiva asked the Sun to give his heat and light to infuse life into the man and the woman. Shiva also bestowed upon the human couple fruits of action. As soon as the man and the woman received the blessing of action and its fruits, they were infused with movement and activity.

Shiva called the *devas* and *asuras* and asked them to behold the new creations. The *asuras* started touching and twiddling with them, at which the woman got startled, but the man caught hold of a piece of wood lying nearby and gave the *asuras* a couple of blows on their backs, driving them away. The *asuras* approached Shiva and complained, "Maharaj! You have created a new rival for us, a troublemaker!" However, when the gods saw the human couple, they bowed to them. In return, the man and the woman touched their feet and obtained their blessings. The *devas* said to Shiva

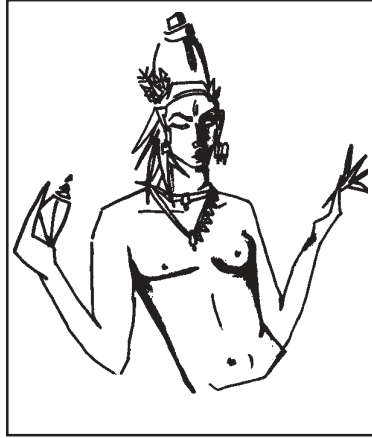
and Parvati, "Your *leela* is unmatched. By creating a human couple, you have given a new meaning and direction to creation." Parvati asked them, "Did you notice anything wanting in our creation?" "Mata," the *devas* replied, "How can your creation be wanting in anything? But we are afraid that since in facing the hardships and troubles of life, man will be stronger than woman, he will dominate her and make her suffer. Do something so that the woman may live on earth with honour and self respect."

Taking a serious note of this suggestion, Parvati bestowed on the woman a special aspect of her *shakti*, and turning to Shiva, said, "Maharaj, with this she will remain the centre of life. Man will be incomplete without woman. With this special element, she will become a storehouse of mental power. When energy in man will show itself in the shape of physical strength, my *shakti* in the mind of woman will remain hidden. When she will use this energy, consciously or unconsciously, she will be capable of altering destiny."

Shiva smiled and said, "Parvati, you have done a great job. By blessing the woman with mental power, you have given the human beings divine faculties. Woman will be able to enjoy the fruits of action and *dharma* through her sheer *satitva*, her virtue, and will be able to provide for her family a heaven at home."

These myths show that Shakti,

¹ However, it is not just the Hindus who recite this prayer — it has become an almost pan-Indian hymn, popular among people of diverse religious backgrounds. This phenomenon is reflected especially, and most prominently, in schools, for example, where it is sung and recited by a heterogeneous mix of children, whether it is a convent, a Sarasvati Shishu Vidya Mandir, or a public school.



the female deity, is supreme as the fountainhead of all creation in the universe, but she is also an equal partner in creation with her consort, Shiva. Over the years, however, during the long years of dominance of Brahmin priesthood, this concept of feminine supremacy has been undermined, as the following prayer in Sanskrit, commonly recited by many Hindus, bears out¹:

*Tvameva mata ch pita tvameva
tvameva bandhu cha
sakhatvameva tvameva vidya
dravinam tvameva tvameva sarvam
mam deva deva*

(You alone are the mother, you alone are the father, you alone the relative and the friend, you alone knowledge, you alone wealth, you alone are all time, o god, o god.)

I am inclined to suggest that the last line must have originally been *tvameva sarvam mam devi deva*. Thus, as the prayer begins with an address to the mother and not the father, the end should also be addressed to the female and the male principles in Divinity, in that order. This will accord well with the well-known concept of *Ishwar*, divinity being *Ardha narishwar*. □

Shivanathji is a Dogri writer, scholar and translator. Several of his works have been published by the Sahitya Akademi, including *Dogri Folk Tales* and *the History of Dogri Literature*.

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