

SHIVA

The Ultimate Time Traveller



Rishabh Jais

shailendra gulhati



COLLECTION OF VARIOUS
-> HINDUISM SCRIPTURES
-> HINDU COMICS
-> AYURVEDA
-> MAGZINES

FIND ALL AT [HTTPS://DSC.GG/DHARMA](https://dsc.gg/dharma)

Made with



By

Avinash/Shashi

**Icreator of
hinduism
server!**



KAPWING



SHIVA, THE ULTIMATE TIME TRAVELLER

SHAIENDRA GULHATI

Credits:

Cover art: Rishabh Dev Sharma.

Cover art design: Kanval Tikku.

Motif art: Aswin Nalanda (Shiva on Nandi)

Motif art: Rishabh Dev Sharma (Shiva and Sati)

Editing: Special thanks to my friends Masoom Hamza, Hema Mt, and Hemang Bhojani, who worked tirelessly for months, helping with this manuscript.

A thanks also goes out to Triveni Chauhan and Uma Anil.

First published on Amazon Kindle, October 2015.

All rights reserved by Shailendra Gulhati.

Contents

[Author's Preface](#)

[Shiva](#)

[A Time Traveller's flight \(Prelude\)](#)

[Forever](#)

[The Storytelling Sage](#)

[Guise or Disguise](#)

[The Art of becoming a dot](#)

[Shiva](#)

[The Storytelling Sage](#)

[A Simple mendicant from the mountains](#)

[The Storytelling Sage](#)

[The Oldest Story](#)

[Boddha](#)

[A Timeless love](#)

[Tell me your story](#)

[Aum](#)

[Shiva](#)

[Rudra Kand](#)

[Nandi Gan](#)

[The Ocean and the Sky](#)

[A cosmic delivery](#)

[The Storytelling Sage](#)

[Rudra](#)

[The Dance of scents and senses](#)

[The Unnamed Shaman](#)

[Rudra Pasupati](#)

[The Unknown years](#)

[The Matrika men](#)

[A Shaman magic](#)

[Kailash](#)

[Toughians](#)

[The mysterious beauty](#)

[Shiva : The Time Traveller](#)

[Brahma's wonder: A world full of water](#)

[The Storytelling Sage](#)

[Begin with a Head](#)
[Usas, at the dawn of Life](#)
[The Storytelling Sage](#)
[Society](#)
[Sati, She who Always Is](#)
[A Vendor for all creation](#)
[Guha Vashishta](#)
[Sristi Iswara Maharaj](#)
[Humesha](#)
[The arrival of Time](#)
[God proposes, man disposes](#)
[My gifts are not silver or gold](#)
[A marriage made in Heaven](#)
[Shiva's Baraat-A merry kaleidoscope of ganas](#)
[Sati Shiva Jaimala: The Garland of Eternity](#)
[Fun, Feast and Festivity](#)
[Love and learning](#)
[A Bonding far more than skin deep](#)
[Market place, or a Place of wisdom](#)
[Shiva: doting husband, mystic poet](#)
[Shivlinga, the Celestial Godfire](#)
[Do you believe?](#)
[Mother Annapurna](#)
[Loading the dice](#)
[In Lakshmi's pool of luxury](#)
[Lanka Kand](#)
[DakshaThe ignorant Yagya maker](#)
[Gana Satsang-The real Yagya](#)
[Daksha Yagya-The burning pot of Divinity](#)
[Catalysis and Cataclysm](#)
[When God turned His back](#)
[The darkest cloud](#)
[Time Stood Still](#)
[Epilogue](#)
[Cast of characters](#)
[Bhasya \(Glossary\)](#)
[Conversation Credits](#)

SHIVA, THE ULTIMATE TIME TRAVELLER

Author's Preface

He is the One who existed even before the world began.
He is the One who has been prayed to, even when He was unseen.
And ever since the very first time He chose to make His presence known, Shiva has been loved by millions.
Records about Him from ancient folklore are very interesting;
He is the perfection of opposites:
Supreme spiritual Guru, but warrior Chieftain,
Ascetic, but perfect husband,
Mendicant, but householder,
Meditative, but intoxicated,
Master of yogic stillness, but King of dance;
Shiva is the fountainhead where paradox reconciles.
In the Hindu pantheon of Gods, He is called the destroyer,
And yet, known by the beautiful symbol of creation, the Shivlinga.

Shiva is a storyteller's delight.
But because Shiva is hugely paradoxical, it comes as no surprise that, much as He is loved by the masses, there *have* been times when He has actually been maligned in some circles. This may have been by the design of a select few, as had happened at the instance of His own father-in-law, Daksha. Or then, it may simply be because of ignorance—a lack of knowing Shiva's esoterics. Ignorance is not always bliss; ignorance mostly leads to a fear, which then makes up its own stories.

I believed it was important that Shiva's endearing mythology, as well as His scintillating spirituality, *both* needed to be known.
The twin wings that make the truly ethereal flight He eternally embarks upon. It became my call to write a book that gives equal emphasis to Shiva's story and reveals the fabulous mystic that He is, *and* indeed, has always been.

At first, I was overwhelmed by His infinite aspects: What could one write about Him, who is Timeless, Limitless and Boundless? And then, the question itself revealed the answer. One sure mark of Shiva, is that He is bound to Parvati. It is said of Shiva that He does not incarnate. Of Parvati's bhakti (devotion), it is said She is one who can make *even* Shiva incarnate.

He is Timeless, and yet when Parvati manifests, it is time for Shiva to arrive. He is formless, but when *She* arrives, He manifests form. She is His eternal soulmate, and they always find each other, through the mists of cosmic time, even through lifetimes; such is the magic of their love! For it is said, Parvati is His wife even from Her previous birth, when She was called Sati.

And I realised that behind the innumerable tales about Him, at the core of the myriad roles that He plays out, Shiva's story, is essentially a love story, over and over again.

There is the Pauranic Shiva: The Timeless One vouchsafed to us by the ancient tellings of the Rishis, down to our grandmother's tales. The Shiva from Kailash. Shiva, the mountain Chieftain who lives happily with His beautiful Queen, Parvati, and the merry mountain men called ganas. Because His traditional story must always be respected and passed on, it *is* important to read about Shiva from the Puranas and assimilate this learning into the contemporary idiom of His legend.

But there is also the Adhunik Shiva; the Omnipresent, who is always here, lurking in our own hearts, in the present, and therefore the most modern at any time.

For Shiva is Mahakaal, the Ultimate Time Traveller...The Shiva who sometimes comes into the fantasies of writers to make up new stories—as indeed in my own heart He has been, and remains a constant inspiration, stroking my own imagination...

In the deepest reflection, we realise that all things are possible to God; *As long as we do remember the Traditional*, the modern *can* be imagined.

In my book, therefore, while there will be conformity to tradition in recalling the magnificent trysts of the players from ancient times, there will also be exciting new characters to introduce a dramatic interplay. These are names which may not have been heard before, but who nevertheless encapsulate the spirit of Shiva's fantastic bhakts. They reiterate that the enigmatic story of Shiva, enfolds All! Past, present, future, history, mythology *and* fantasy.

A magical story about the possibility of Shiva in dance with all the mystics of all the worlds, through all the ages and to our own present time.

Aum ShivaShakti Namah!
Shailendra Gulhati



SHIVA

A Time Traveller's flight. (Prelude)

"Sati..." His voice worked like an awakening call.

"Sati..." He repeated. And He did not say anything else; there was nothing else to say.

Shiva repeating Her name like a mantra on His lips, sounded like a thousand poems sung, by a divine singer, who voiced eternity in each moment.

"Shiva..." She managed to utter the mantra She had indeed been repeating a million times over.

"Yes, my dearest?" He answered.

"Shiva, will we be together?"

"We *are* together," He smiled.

"No. I mean, will we be together *always*, like this?"

"Yes, we will always be together."

"Is it possible for one to be conjoined by her Isha? Please don't wake me up from this dream..."

"Humesha..." He whispered softly, and lifted Her, bringing Her face near His own.

"Humesha?" She asked.

"Hum, Isha. When the divine finds its plurality as One, it is forever.

A love so perfect, it becomes clear there never were two!

This is no dream, Sati... it is the coming true of the dream,"

He said, with a soft but sure voice, gently putting Sati's feet back on the ground.
They stood face to face, His arm still around Her,
stilled in the moment where He had planted Her,
as if She had always been there, and whispered in sweet resonance,
“Humesha...”



FOREVER

The first time Shiva went into a cosmic trance, He was thrilled to bits. And He realised that's where His story began:
in a cosmic trance.

He loved mountains. He loved to dance. He loved to wear His hair long. He was a simple hillbilly: good at heart, and He loved his fellow mountain men. But He was not considered in turn, a fellow man.

It was said of Him that He was God Himself—The Primal One.

He was said to be the Timeless Lord of the mountains and also the men He so loved.

He was Shiva, the Auspicious. Shiva, whose very presence was able to transform humans into demigods.

So many times on His mountain sojourns, He had chanced upon a singing shepherd, or a wandering minstrel, singing of Shiva!

Sometimes, as a bonus, even lovelorn women sang His praises, when they actually pined for another suitor; and He was amused by the stories He heard about Himself.

There were all sorts of things talked about Him, and He generally liked most of it, just because of the possibility it offered. It gave Him a strange excitement; this fact that *others* were suggesting what He was; and that as a corollary, there was actually a chance to choose one's own act from so many suggested plots.

He, Shiva, was supposed to be the ultimate spiritual alchemist.

But whatever He could see of Himself, was plainly human.

He *felt* like a human; fond of the forest life, and like all the other creatures that roamed in the forest, always looking forward to more of it. Gods were said to be

without desire, but He loved life!

Gods were timeless, but He was always contemporary, always in the present.

Gods were supposed to have some subtle form of body, or then none at all, but He was the most earthily magnetic mountain man.

Yet, legend insisted that He was no ordinary forest dweller.

“He is the Supreme, in the midst of all beings,” ancient Seers noted in their historic notes.

“He is *The* God,” they emphasised, and in their tedious manuscripts, added, “Ultimately, of *All* things.”

“Time and again He has appeared on the scene and time and again, He has vanished. No one knows where He comes from.

The one thing that’s almost certain is, that even when He appears to us for the first time, the records of our forefathers remind us that He has been here before. He *has* been here before us all and so, no one knows where He comes from, or when He was born,” they repeated.

Shiva was thrilled, because in His trance, there was a vague realisation that, since there was no real ‘beginning’ to Him, so too, there was no end.

And yet the enigma of His self remained, because again, dreamily, even He could not tell where and when it all began.

He *had* heard some origin stories of Himself recorded from previous timelines, and the one He liked most, suggested that in a previous Yuga, He was born to Brahma, the ancient God, as His son, Rudra. Could previous lives exist? Was there such a thing as Reincarnation? He became meditative again.

Women sang of Him while they wished to get married to someone else, because He was supposed to be, among many things, a God who lavishly bestowed boons on them to find a suitable groom.

He was much married Himself and the name of His eternal beloved, Parvati, was always fused into His own name.

So often was He referred to as ‘Shivparvati’, that this plural had become synonymous with togetherness.

But it was His presence as singular that got Him accredited with some contrary attributes.

The most popular belief had Him listed as The Destroyer.

The ancient Indians, who propitiated many Gods, had three principal deities at the helm of affairs. Brahma, the creator of the universe; Vishnu, who handled its running; and then, there was another amazing aspect that no one really

running, and then, there was another amazing aspect that no one really understood:

The ancients had emphasised that there existed a God who destroys the universe at the end, and that God was Shiva.

So it was, that He shared Godhead with the other two.

No one really understood why God would need to destroy the universe, yet horror stories abounded about how Shiva would always signal the end of time for each creation.

Though this was a little strange, because surely no one would have seen the end of a universe and lived to tell about it!

Yet, graphic details about the divine holocaust were chanted in fervent whispers, as though etched in a collective memory.

Details of how Shiva literally snuffed out all life. It was whispered that He stomped His feet upon the earth in so furious a manner that it sent massive tremors through the cosmos, and that all this was a dance! The last dance called Tandav, that beginning always from Prithviloka, ended all things that had ever come into existence. Ending, as it were, existence itself; Tandav was dubbed as the dance of death.

This was the great mystery—when did the endearing mountain dweller become a cosmic hard stepper, the Avatar of destruction? And, why?

Ancient Seers sensed an enthralling story here.

THE STORYTELLING SAGE

It was the young seeker, Shaunaka's curiosity which finally got bits and pieces of Shiva's known episodes out from the wise sage Suta.

"Tell us about Shiva, the mountain God, respected Sutji," Shaunaka would implore the master.

Suta himself had been vouchsafed these precious bits by his predecessor in the Shiva quest, the even older sage Sanatkumara.

What charmed Shaunaka the most was how animated his master Suta would become when he got into the details of Shiva's stories. It was as if he saw the episodes himself; as if he was not just told about the scenes, but had been a real witness.

"Ah, but I *have* been a witness, my dear Shaunaka, but in a realm that is way too subtle for the ordinary eye to see, for the ordinary ear to hear. *I have been witness*," Suta would sigh and continue. "There was a time when Shiva Himself told His story to the forest dwellers, and Vyasa, the bard, used his prolific skill to record the self-revelations of the Divine One."

"And Sanatkumara? He learned it from Vyasa?" asked Shaunaka.

"No. Sanatkumara knew the story for himself."

"Even before Vyasa?"

"Yes, even before Vyasa. In fact, he did visit Vyasa only to make him revise what Shiva had taught. Sanatkumara is enigmatic; he looks young but is older than most. Some say he is the son of Shiva Himself!"

"Alright, so Shiva told His own story to His son Kumara, and also to some others..."

"Yes, that is right. Shiva told His own story from time to time, like He did with Vyasa."

"And then?"

"And then, true to His trademark humility, Shiva receded into the background. But perhaps, wishing secretly that we would all remember Him, we would all know His legend, always."

"Why, if Shiva wishes to be known, does He Himself recede into the backstage?" asked a surprised Shaunaka.

“Because, simply...” replied Suta with utmost wisdom. “He respects all His creation. He wants them to have their own say in the play. Remember one thing about Shiva: Being the center of all things, He seldom is center stage.” Taking a puff of his forest pipe, Suta added, “And this is the rahasya; the secret of how His wheel of time turns.”

“And we learn to forget and then remember Him again?” asked Shaunaka.

“Precisely,” said Suta.

“So Shiva is married to Parvati, right?” asked Shaunaka.

“Yes,” replied Suta.

“But then, who is Sati, if Shivparvati is true?” asked Shaunaka, pleased with his own knowing.

“Shivparvati is true,” replied Suta. “It is synonymous with togetherness.”

“But it was said that Shiva was married to Sati, too?” Shaunaka persisted.

“Shiva *was* married to Sati,” replied Suta gravely. “What was said *was* true, and Sati loved Him to death. Literally. Not that there were two women in Shiva’s life; it was said that Parvati *was Sati*, reincarnated.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Shaunaka, his mouth agape in wonderment.

“Sati was Parvati too, and Parvati was Sati, two,” continued Suta. “Do you understand the magic of love?”

“Love transcends death?” asked Shaunaka.

“Love transcends even time itself!” replied Suta. “And *that*, is the central message of Shiva’s story.”

Suta went into a deep silence, his eyes closed meditatively. It was the end of the day's deep lesson.

Humesha was indeed the magic of a love so perfect, thought Shaunaka to himself, ‘ It has become clear that Shiva and Parvati co-exist beyond a lifetime, or, to use Shiva’s own words, they never were two.’

The next morning , Shaunaka was up early. He had had a deep, dreamy sleep, but he awoke at sunrise, fresh as the new day.

He came out of his own hut and started walking hurriedly to the hut of Guru Suta.

Suta himself was awake, already bathed and seated on his kusa grass mat. Before Shaunaka could even ask his question, Suta answered, “Yes, go and get bathed and ready. We will continue the story of Shiva today. Tell mother to serve you breakfast first, and then come to the old banyan tree,” Suta said, taking pride in calling his own wife 'mother'. He was the Guru, and the Guru's wife, was mother to all his disciples.

Shaunaka readied himself in just half the normal time of his ablutions, cleansing

and prayer. Rushing through his morning meal, he ran to the banyan tree, which always looked like a storehouse of wisdom itself, deeply rooted to the earth and all its mysteries.

Suta smiled at Shaunaka, in indication that he could begin his queries.

“So, what is Shiva like?” asked Shaunaka. “Does He have arms that are more muscular than anyone? Is it true that He is built like a tree? And that He can lift a mountain ox without any effort?”

Suta laughed at the innocence of a child’s curiosity. “Shiva is stronger than any man. He is spectacularly built. Not as enormous as some of His own mountain men, but spectacular in symmetry, and yes, He can lift an ox without any effort,” Suta replied.

“Oh!” said Shaunaka in wonder.

“Sometimes it is like a game of love,” Suta continued. “The Oxen wouldn’t let anyone else even touch them, but with Shiva, it is different; they too love Him, like all else in the forest, and allow themselves to be lifted in sport! In fact, the denizens of the forests wait to be met by Shiva; they wait to be in His company.”

GUISE OR DISGUISE

“Oh, then is it possible to meet Shiva?” asked the excited young one.

“Of course it is! But you never know when. Shiva chooses His own time to surprise. But if you want to meet Him, you must always be ready, *anyone* who wants to see Him must always be alert.”

“Why is that, Gurudeva?”

“Hahaha! Because Shiva, amongst other things, likes disguises. And His best guise is humility. With all that He is, His utter humility can make you not recognise Him, even if He came face to face.”

“So is it true that He wears a snake around His neck? He is called Bhujendrahaaram, isn’t He?”

“Yes,” said the old Sage. “He is known to wear a snake around His neck, but like I told you, He is the master of guises. And to discard one of your own attributes, is an excellent way to go unnoticed. Think about it.” Suta took another puff of his pipe and looked at a passerby in the distance.

A mountain man with wavy, long hair, who had been looking at them, started to walk away.

“With Shiva, who knows?” Suta sighed again.

On Day Three, Suta began contemplatively, “Shiva was accredited with a peculiar penchant for earth, roaming its length and breadth in general, but preferring in particular its mountains, the Himalayas, as His abode.

The Himalayas actually meant ‘The abode of snow’. They were noted for their majestic stature, always touching the sky; noted for their stunning beauty and their crisp air, as though preserving the pristinity of life itself.”

Shaunaka looked to the North, where he could actually see the snow-clad mountains, and smiled.

“Ironically, the other place where Shiva was said to visit frequently was where life ended: it was said He was always present at the cremation grounds. A presence as certain as the

lit-up pyres that devoured life. Some of them were actually named ‘Shiv Dhaam’—The sacred place of Shiva,” Suta said, changing the mood. Shaunaka shifted uneasily.

“In all His mentions, different aspects abounded, both magnificent and terrible

In all his mentions, different aspects abounded, both magnificent and terrible, which were spoken of, in whispers. Over a period of time, the repetitive whispers became a routine and a fervent chant. And in times of need and fear, these came to be passed off as a prayer to Shiva Himself.”

“I see, Gurudeva,” said Shaunaka.

“Bhujgendrahaaram,” said Suta loudly. “The one who wears snakes as garlands. Damrudhaaram—The One who rattles an hourglass drum to time all of life.”

Then changing his tone to a musical note, he continued, “Nataraja Dum Dum—The one who dances in rhythm with the drum-beat created by Himself, as though to set a pace for us. Trinetra Devam—The Three-Eyed One, who is the most powerful. Yogi Dhyaanam—yet, unassuming like a recluse ascetic in the forest. Jai Shiva Trinetra Trisuldhaaram!” resounded Suta.

“Hail Shiva, the Three-Eyed One who wields in turn, the three-pronged spear” repeated Shaunaka.

“So you see, my child, a prayer to Shiva, was the description of Shiva, repeated to Him.”

Shaunaka found to his surprise that his own hands had folded into a position of worship, into salute of Namaste.

“With the passage of time, these prayers of attribute became longer and more speculative; and somehow, fear showed a greater propensity to grow, than love,” Suta continued. “So, while He was accredited with dance, it was a dance of death; while He lived on the mountains, it was a hidden abode of a Warlord; if He was strong, it was a strength you must be defeated by, always.

Not to forget, that He was The Lord of the cremation grounds where, at the end of one’s life, His portals only just began.”

“I am beginning to understand, Gurudeva.”

“Ultimately, that Shiva was the God of destruction, became a label that found itself stuck in the majority of minds. Vinasham Aghoram Samharam—the Terrible dissolver, who ends it all.

This description also crept into the string of epithets that made for prayer,” said Suta.

“But it doesn’t seem to me that Shiva is terrible!” cried Shaunaka.

“Hmm...” Suta said. “It may interest you to know that Aghora is actually the benign; it is *Ghora* that is used for darkness, but such was the mindset of the fearful, that even Aghora is identified with terrible!”

“So then, Shiva began to be known as the Destroyer; I understand,” said

Shaunaka with remorse.

“Hmm... Yes, but there *were* other, less opinionated and therefore more open-minded seers, who, after a great deal of research and meditation, comparison of notes and deliberation, declared simply, ‘only Shiva knows what He is, really’, thus affording Him the opportunity to express His own truth and pass it on, from time to time,” said Suta with a redeeming smile.

“Ah!” the cheerfulness came back on Shaunaka’s face.

“Those, to whom these revelations came, were completely transformed,” Suta continued. “They became confident and trusting of life, shifting to a mode bubbling with high self-esteem. They were always at ease and seemed to know their place in the plan of things. Not that these seers lived in a different time or place, or were exposed to a different reality: The same things that some thought were ominous, these few saw clearly, as the play of life.

They had begun to penetrate beyond duality. They did see how all things arrived in pairs, like light and dark, day and night, heat and cold, but also saw beyond it all, a single source; A Oneness from where all phenomena emanated.”

“Ah!” said Shaunaka again, mesmerised by his master’s articulate skill in storytelling.

“It was actually as if Shiva was the supreme alchemist, transmuting the spirit of the seers with His touch. The very ‘seeing’ of Shiva itself, even when it happened in meditation, drew out a dormant divinity within the seer. A divinity, which they now came to realise, was timeless and present from the very inception of the world. It had to be: Not only was everything made by God, everything was made *of God*. ‘God stuff’ had been wired into *all* from the beginning!” Suta declared.

“And the magic of Shiva’s touch...” Suta continued, gently putting his hand over Shaunaka’s, “Was understood to be the bringing back of the spirit to its original form.”

“So... meeting the source automatically enabled a factory resetting! Like when we take a broken toy to its maker, and he assembles it back! I see...” said Shaunaka.

“Yes,” confirmed Suta, with a benign smile, pleased with Shaunaka’s grasp, indicated by his innocent, but accurate analogy. “It is all in the touch of the maker’s hand. Speechless as they were, these meditators then termed the ‘Seeing’ as a revelation of the Self; a Darsana. Those to whom the Darsana

‘happened’, came to be called rishis. These seers prayed differently.”

“Differently?” asked Shaunaka.

“His mentions had been varied. Shiva the auspicious, Shiva the Warlord, Shiva the mountain God, Shiva the dweller of the cremation grounds, Shiva the creator of the universe, Shiva the destroyer, Shiva the ascetic, Shiva the loyal husband, Shiva the intoxicated, Shiva the meditator, Shiva the recluse, Shiva the Supreme spiritual master! Which One was He?”

“Yes, which one was He indeed, Gurudeva?” asked Shaunaka.

“The transformed seers spoke of Shiva in endearing terms, adding yet another epithet to His mentions. ‘Verily, *He is all*. He is Shiva Natraja, Lord of the cosmic dance! ’ ” replied Suta.

“One thing that stood out clearly in the descriptions, was that there was much paradox about Him. The moment anyone thought they understood one aspect of Him, immediately another would come and juxtapose itself in contrast. And that was the way He was known by most people: As the greatest enigma in the pantheon of the hindu Gods,” continued Suta.

“Truly Gurudeva, Shiva is a great enigma,” said Shaunaka.

“Yes,” Suta continued, “No one was ever sure of His antiquity, or His antecedents; none knew who His parents were, or if He was actually a sibling to the Vedic Gods. Some said He was Brahma’s son, others asserted He was Swayambhu, the Self-created, who, after manifesting Himself, in fact, created Brahma also.”

“So what is the truth, Gurudeva? Who created who?”

“No one could know for sure,” said Suta. “Every search for Him spiraled into a concentricity of a higher realm. Even after hearing about Him endlessly, one would come back to the same mystery.” Shaunaka noticed that Suta was gently spinning his own head in a circle as if to signal the concentric nature of Shiva.

“What was His story, really? Where were His origins? Why was He called Rudra the terrible, in one breath and also Pasupati, Lord of all creatures, in another?”

Suta looked at Shaunaka piercingly.

“His one thousand and eight other epithets that had astounding ramifications in their tributes, left so many tracks to follow.

He seemed to be all-pervasive.

This Omnipresence had a magical effect; it veiled Him.”

THE ART OF BECOMING A DOT

“That is so amazing!” exclaimed Shaunaka. “Omnipresence is the very magic that veils God. If we are in the midst of a thing too much, we don’t register it. Like air!”

“Verily, there is a great lesson you must know, my dear Shaunaka,” said Suta. “There is Shiva tattva and there is Shiva, the Yogi.”

“You mean there are two?” asked Shaunaka. “Now I am really confused, Gurudeva. Please clarify.”

“There is just The One, there has always been One, and there shall always be The One only. Two is only a derivative of One.

A derivative does not change the origin! The One is Shiva tattva, the universal stuff from where all things are made. From where all beings originate, including us.”

“So who is Shiva the yogi?”

“Ah!” said Suta with visible happiness as he took a deep puff of his forest pipe.

“Shiva the yogi, is the highest embodiment of Shiva tattva.”

“So, you mean...”

“Yes. After the whole universe is directed by Shiva tattva, there is the entry of the director into His own play, as one of many actors in the act.”

“Oh my God, Gurudeva!” said Shaunaka. “That’s amazing! The director taking on a role as actor; that’s quite a plot on its own!”

“Isn’t it simple?” said Suta. “Why else would the director create a play like that of all life, if there wasn’t a role for Him?” As his smile widened, he added, “And *that*, my child, is Shiva the yogi. Not two. Still the One.”

“Amazing!” repeated Shaunaka.

“So, too, the whole world was ready to be created; a stage, waiting for Shiva’s own arrival. But there was still one problem.”

“A problem? What problem could God have?” asked Shaunaka.

“Hmm...the problem is, if you already know you are God, you already know that you can do anything, then in a subtle way, it actually lessens the potential to learn about yourself.

To be predictable, lessens the play,” answered Suta.

“Ah! I wouldn’t have thought of that, Gurudeva” said Shaunaka in bewilderment. “To be predictable lessens the play, therefore it must follow, that

to be less predictable enhances the learning.”

“Yes” Suta smiled, “You are beginning to understand the play of the Divine”.

“So how does Shiva manage this problem?”

“That, my son is the secret of what God does right after creation!” smiled Suta mysteriously.

“Oh Gurudeva, please... please tell me,” implored Shaunaka.

Suta smiled and spoke softly, in almost a whisper, “In all His magic, Shiva, had the most fascinating magic—that of forgetfulness.”

“I don’t understand, Gurudeva, forgetfulness?”

“Hmm. It was quite simple really, that the master of all memory, would induce to Himself a mystic forgetfulness; a spiritual concussion of sorts, that would temporarily make Him forget the time before He embodied Himself in a role.

“Ah”

“It was called Baindavi Kala. The art of the smallest point. A whole Infinity reduced to a dot,” said Suta enigmatically.



SHIVA

He often drifted into a whirlpool of questions. What was His role in this world? How far had He played out that role? Where had He come from? Where was He going?

He had serial memories of the past, lucid visualizations of a future, strangely woven together into a spiritual *Déjà vu*.

A tizzy mix of past life regression and peeps into future progressions, would become His surreal but thrilling ‘mind ride’.

The whirlpool of imagination was actually like a trance that revealed to Him the matrix of the entire universe.

It was as if time and space danced around Him in astral dimensions, to rouse His own ancient rhythm. A dance that led Him to an understanding of how the entire universe, all things, *anything at all that existed*, came into being.

Or then, it was like a flight, which, after cruising across the most surreal skies, always arrived consistently and without any landing error, to the place where it had begun; indeed, the place, where it had always been.

That it was the first time He went into trance, was a self -contradicting phenomenon. The trance itself showed Him that there had been more.

It was true that He remembered it as His first time, but equally true that it had the characteristic of sequence; each episode was enveloped in the comforting certainty that it was just one of many that had happened before.

No matter what new adventure a trance would embark on, each time it always seemed to reach the same end:

He was the beginning of all things; He, was Causation itself.

As He understood it was He Himself, who had all along envisioned the whole play, a wide smile crossed His face.
It was apt to call it a trip.

THE STORYTELLING SAGE

“After the first trance, there were many more. Each one, affirming layer after layer, the message of the first. Life was one endless sequence. It was a sort of cosmic masquerade, where Shiva had learnt to easily identify and love the players even through their new roles,” said Suta.

“Players? New roles?” asked Shaunaka.

“For example, He had known Vishnu, the other God, through at least two of His incarnations. He had known Him as Rama, from His forest meanderings and resonated so completely with Him in the love for one’s spouse.

Shiva empathised greatly with Rama in the pain of separation. But that was about it. Rama, who, under auspicious constellations was proclaimed as ‘nobly born’, was indeed designated crown prince of a Royal House; and yet got banished from His own kingdom, in the most bizarre turn of events.

Shiva had never been banished from His kingdom; but then, He never ruled it as one: those who surrounded Him were more like merry men rather than subjects. They were more like ‘brothers in arms,’ a happy bunch of gypsy people who were rumored to be fierce like brigands and impetuous as hobgoblins.” Suta’s eyes gleamed as if he saw the whole scene of Shiva’s forests being played out right in front of him.

“Merry men! Ah, what an interesting scene!” said Shaunaka. “So Shiva had such terrible people for company; it is true then?”

“That is what people thought of Shiva’s friends. It was not true. In reality, the merry mountain men were quite like the mountain goats in their midst: hard like their own horns on the outside, but wooly soft inside. The hardness was only about posturing; in reality, they lived quite totally from the heart.”

“I see...” Shaunaka nodded.

“Yes, you do now,” Suta smiled and continued. “Perhaps it was strangely symbolic of the fact that Shiva too, ruled from the heart and not the head, that as their chief, He never wore a crown.”

“Shiva never wore a crown, that’s true. But why so, Gurudeva?”

“Shiva was never interested in being a king, inasmuch as it meant flaunting expensive adornments, and holding Darbar meetings to feed one’s own ego. Though in a distant past, He had been born as a royal son Himself. He was

ego. Though in a distant past, he had been born as a royal scion himself, he was said to have spurned a kingdom in favour of quiet asceticism.”

“Really?” asked Shaunaka. “What kingdom was that?”

“Ah, you take me through the annals of divine time itself.

A time, when Shiva was born as Rudra, a son to God Brahma.

And Brahma had a kingdom far more beautiful than any mortal king could dream of. Verily, Brahma was the original dreamer, and the land of His dreams was very beautiful indeed. Shiva was scion to all that.”

“But I always thought of Shiva as an ascetic!” Shaunaka exclaimed.

“Yes. He was quite the mendicant even in the palace, whilst Rama was full of kingship even in exile,” replied Suta.

“And then there was the question of intoxication. Rama refused even Soma, the nectar of the Gods, whilst Shiva devoured it with a great passion, like a man in a desert, quenching his thirst after months of being divested. And with Shiva, the thirst was enormous, and so too, the quenching was regular,” Suta added with a twinkle in his eye. “But this was not all; He didn’t seem to mind when His hobgoblins smoked hemp, in wild festivity.

He even partook in Bhang, calling it the sacred herb! And that is where His resonance with Rama ended.”

“I see,” said Shaunaka.

“A life cycle later, when Vishnu incarnated again as Krishna,

Shiva went all the way from Kailash to the Plains to see Krishna as a baby.

But lo... the play of the Gods! Yashoda would not allow Him to ‘see’ her baby!”

Suta chuckled.



A SIMPLE MENDICANT FROM THE MOUNTAINS

“I am but a simple mendicant, come from far, very far indeed, to have a darsana of your child...” implored Shiva.

But Yashoda backed off even more, further alarmed at the yogi’s words.

“Take what you want!” she exhorted. “Here... pearls, gold, jewelry... but see my baby, you cannot!”

“Of what use are these to a mendicant?” replied Shiva wistfully. “These are of no use at all in the forests. Please let me have one glimpse of Krishna.”

“Not at all! Go away, please, I say!” Yashoda’s voice had assumed a slightly aggressive tone.

Such were Shiva travails; such His guises that they worked against Him at many times. He was about to turn to go back, when an old lady emerged virtually out of nowhere and cried, “Oho Yashoda, you silly girl! Do you know this is a great benefaction for your baby? To be blessed by this great Baba from the mountains is a huge boon!”

Yashoda bowed to the old lady. Apparently she had a great respect for her. “You know him?” asked Yashoda. The woman nodded in affirmation.

“You know me?” asked Shiva too, totally surprised.

“Yes, my Lord, who doesn’t know you?” said the woman as she looked at Yashoda with a subtle smugness. “But i, i do know you better than you know yourself, at times,”

Then, taking the baby Krishna from Yashoda’s protective arms, she raised Him high onto Shiva’s chest.

Shiva looked ever so longingly at Krishna and then said with a loud and very

Shiva looked ever so longingly at Krishna, and then said with a loud and very authoritative voice, “Yashasvi bhava, premasya bhava, tvam Ishwar asi. Be famous, be loved, for you, are God.”

And then, turning to the old woman to ask who she was, Shiva began, “So who...” but he did not complete his sentence,

He was surprised to see she was not there anymore; she had gone already, after deftly handing Krishna back to Yashoda.

Taken aback, Shiva asked Yashoda, “Where has she gone, that woman? And how do you know her?”

“Oh, she came here soon after Nand and I shifted to this vicinity; in fact the very next day. And she is like a mother to me, a grandmother to Krishna. And you, how do *you* know her?”

“I do not,” said Shiva.

“So who are you?” asked Yashoda surprised.

“I am Shiva, from Kailash,” He replied.

Yashoda was electrified on hearing the name ‘Shiva’ from Shiva’s own lips. She fell to the ground in prostration at His feet, and then lying on the ground itself, she gently folded Krishna’s tiny hands into a salutation to Shiva, along with her own.

“Oh Divine Master, we are blessed. Krishna is blessed. Sorry for not having recognized you. Forgive my ignorance. Not knowing the one who I worship, The One whom I have dreamed to sight just once. Truly I am a foolish woman clouded by motherhood.”

“No, mother,” said Shiva gently, raising Yashoda up again. “It is not like that. Motherhood is the greatest divinity of all. It is not clouded; it is the highest form of creation and thus protection. You did right.”

“Thank you my Lord, we are truly blessed. And... you do not know the elderly woman?” she asked again.

“No,” said Shiva completely mystified. “Not really.”

Then, as a hazy scene came to His mind, He added “Was her name Gita, by any chance?”

“Gita? No. She didn’t tell us her name and we were content to just address her as big aunt. But she did prophesise something about Krishna singing the Bhagwad as a gita when He grows up.”

“A prophecy! Alright then, it was definitely Gita Mahakaleshwar!”

“Who is that, my Lord?” asked Yashoda.

“Someone I know from Kailash,” said Shiva with a soft smile.

“A very old and devoted soul. A Tantrika of high attainment.”

At the mention of the word Tantrika, Yashoda shuddered just a bit, but then collected herself to give out a weak smile to Shiva, who was, after all, the Lord of Tantra itself.

THE STORYTELLING SAGE

“Lo, the play of the Gods!” chuckled Suta, once again.

“Krishna loved to play, and Shiva loved to watch Him play. He loved the infant Krishna’s delightful ability to steal butter cookies from His mother’s larder, much before He was a full-blown God. He smiled at Krishna’s charming adolescence as He dallied with the infatuated cowgirls of Vrindavan.

Then again, years later, when the time came for Krishna to sermonise Arjuna about divinity on the battlegrounds of Kurukshetra, Shiva had watched from an eternally witnessing sky above, listening intently along with others to Krishna’s song of God, the Bhagwad Gita.

When Krishna sang eloquently to Arjuna about Mahakaal, The Great Timelessness, Shiva smiled again. He had known this song even before Krishna was born. He, verily, had known it even before Rama’s time,” said Suta.

“This is fascinating, Gurudeva... tell me more!” implored Shaunaka.

“Time can only tell stories in bits about the Timeless, Shaunaka,” said the wise Sage quietly. “The story will go on and on, forever. There will be many more tellings, many more listenings....” his voice trailed away.

THE OLDEST STORY

In time, when Shaunaka grew old and himself sported a free flowing white beard, he often told the story to his own disciples.

“With Shiva, who knows?” he would remember Suta’s words.

“What we do know, is that Shiva has been here from the very first sightings, and the very first stories about Him were told by Him Himself,” Shaunaka would begin, saluting his own Guru from his heart, bowing his head in the direction of the giant banyan tree under which he had sat with Suta for tutelage.

Through generations of the forest dwellers, the constant retelling of these narratives of the great forester came to be called the **Shiva Mahapurana**. The delight of the neophyte in the hearing of the stories remained ever the same, ever fresh and ever in wonderment, and who was to say, perhaps, as Suta had suggested, somewhere in His snowy abode, The great mountain God too, smiled in approval.



BODDHA

In an even later life cycle, Shiva had sighed when Siddhartha, prince of the Sakyas, left his palace and blissfully asleep wife Yashodhara, in search for a higher and unchanging reality. Such was the penchant for the truth, such the yearning of the soul to know its origins, that when someone left his *all*, Shiva, the Supreme of all souls, had to sigh: For Siddhartha to abandon Yashodhara, the sweet princess who slept in an already pristine state of innocence, *just so he may find his own pristine self*, was a great poignance.

The poignance that somehow always trumpeted alongside truth;

Shiva wondered why sadness was the announcer of truth, always.

Why couldn't self-realisation be one joyous affair?

When Siddhartha *did* find his truth after years of forest dwelling, he blossomed into a divine awakening. And sure enough, there remained that gentle poignance around his persona. "Why was this to be the price for enlightenment?" Shiva wondered again. This was Shiva: He cared intensely for the suffering that beings like Siddhartha went through. He cared about the process, unlike others who only valued results. He wondered about the ilk of people, who, when a great seeker finally unveiled his divinity, only wanted benefactions for themselves from the enlightened one, with no care for enlightenment itself.

It so happened then, that when some such enamoured people asked Siddhartha if he was The tenth incarnation of Vishnu, he simply replied that he was Boddha—Awake.

Awake. Not God, nor devata; simply awake. Thereafter, all the awakened ones were called Buddha, and Shiva smiled at all of them gently, knowing He had been awake much, much before all this.

But this was not all. He had also known beings like Antarikraksasa; intergalactic monstrosities of creation, who were now extinct, long gone and forgotten, except in the *Akashik* records, which were safely tucked in His own mind. It was better this way; to let some memories fade away from the cosmic carnival. But that did not stop Him from waking up at nights in a cold sweat, only to realise that all the monstrosity was just a bad dream, and that the sweat His hand wiped from His own forehead, was a greater reality of the now.

The universe had had some really bad creations and episodes, and Shiva had witnessed it all somewhere in time, sequence after sequence, rolled out like a cosmic film. But there were a lot of good memories, too, and so, there were others He waited impatiently to see, in every life cycle that His own magic would project forth.

He, for example, loved a western shepherd boy called Jesus.

Jesus, with whom He had had long conversations, both in the heavenly peaks of the Himalayas and in the magical surroundings of the Alps. Jesus was all about love.

Jesus was love.

And Shiva loved Jesus! But it had been a long time since they had sat together, and He longed to resume their talks once again.

True to His superb sixth sense, Shiva did sense that this was a future projection, though it seemed to be a past memory.



A TIMELESS LOVE

But the one person that Shiva loved meeting in this cosmic mind field, the one person whose memory He would not allow to fade even when they were not together, was, unchallengeably, His Woman. In a whole universe that had been projected by Him, She was the one being He loved immensely.

Parvati, His inseparable better-half.

Parvati, without whom, Shiva felt like ‘not Shiva’.

Parvati, without whom, *Shiva didn't feel anything at all.*

Parvati, without whom, the Seers summarized, “He was Shava, a corpse.”

And without whom, as He Himself told Her once, ‘Nothing’, was actually possible.

And just as great an enigma as He was, so too was Parvati. It was She who was Sati, in a previous life. She it was, who was Shakti, the Goddess of power, in eternal wedlock with Shiva, making Him Shaktiman, the wielder of all the power there was in the Universe. She was always present in His presence. Even if that meant being reincarnated from one lifetime to another.

“But you are the Eternal One,” She looked up sweetly, continuing, “And me, I am just a mortal.”

“You are the Goddess of my life,” He answered. “And eternity is the promise we have made to live together in.”

“Ah, but I die as soon as I see you,” Sati teased.

For a flick of a moment, Shiva was quiet.

“What is it?” She asked. “Another vision in your third eye? What does our future hold? Is the Great Shiva scared of losing me? That too, even before He actually got me? Hahaha!”

“The future is here already, Sati,” said Shiva, as He hugged Her more tightly.

Sati sensed again, just the suggestion of insecurity in Him, but didn't say anything, not wanting to lose the moment.

"And my third eye tells me we are going to be married very soon," Shiva continued. "I shall come and meet your father, Daksha, tomorrow itself, to ask for your hand to be given in mine, for a lifetime of wedded bliss."

Where had this cosmic love story actually begun? Was there a starting point at all? Or had it been a timeless trance with no beginning and perhaps with no end?

She was always present in His presence; and yet there had been times when Shiva and Parvati *were* separated. Times, that constituted the nadir of Shiva's life; the absolute pit of the universe itself. Shiva had looked to the skies from this pit and noted how an infinite canvas painted blue by His own hand, could turn melancholically into an equally infinite grey.

Thus it was, that whenever a lover looked to the skies in the anguish of a torn love, his cry would pierce straight into Shiva's heart as a resonant and lethal arrow. And He had seen this story repeat itself not only with lovers whose names had become immortalised, but also those, whose tears had been shed unsung.

When Laila, a woman who had become the object of love for a young man, called out his name in utter despair, Shiva heard whispers of "Majnu, beloved Majnu" in His own ear.

It was no different when a young lad called Romeo sang as he ran down the cobbled streets of Verona; Shiva found Himself whistling happily into the air! *It could not have been different*; the same story happened across the sands of times, not only in deserts, but also in the mountains, the forests, across oceans and, as Shiva knew, sometimes, even beyond the planet.

With each story, He felt an immense upheaval, an immense empathy.

He had been the greatest Lover in the world.

Love was the essence of what they were; love *was* existence.

Love, it was, that was in the beginning, love, that sustained the present, and love it would be, in the end.

That love had its periods of pain, was accepted by Him as a free will of the play, but it was a half-baked acceptance.

He never allowed the idea of permanent pain or permanent separation to crystallize itself into completion. He always believed in a permanent

togetherness, a permanent happiness. He believed in 'Forever'.

"But this is absurd. How can there be a permanent happiness?" While some academic godmen criticised this as spiritual immaturity, a few others saw it as the greatest hope of the world.

If even Shiva aspired for a happiness that would last forever, then there was a hope that it could happen.

And so, between togetherness and separation, loneliness and jubilation, He danced in turn with pleasure and bittersweet pain.

Dance was a key. It was His most innate nature, to respond to an inner song with every sinewed muscle in His body. Night or day, dark or bright, the end, or just signaling a beginning, dance was the form behind all His form.

He was the epitome of motion; flowing on forever, was His constant.

Then again, He knew a perfect stillness.

When He sat alone, He was in deepest oneness, always. When He closed His eyes in self-repose, a most enigmatic dance presented itself to Him; a dance of Time; where the past and the future got animated as players and themselves entertained Him, like performers in a carnival. It had dawned on Him that He was an eternal witness, and thus too, the realisation that the story of all life, was *His* story.

Life was like a repeated throw of dice, and He knew, somehow the dice rolled from His hand. But He was not always in control of how the dice would roll. This was the interesting thing:

It was a story whose end was fixed, but the journey itself was always unknown; a completely uncharted flight to a known destination. The play seemed to be in the remembrance of the simple knowledge that all would be well by the end. But no one knew when, not even He.

The challenge was to hang onto the exciting act, with just a vague but comforting belief that though He appeared to be one of many actors, He was also the scriptwriter; That life would always have a secret to be known, but He was the encryptor.

This smug feeling was only strengthened each time He met the familiar beloveds. With each bunch of new acts that would be played out, in all the new stories that came into being, there was a flood of intimations from the past, accompanied by a great remembrance of the power that He Himself was.

TELL ME YOUR STORY

That 'Shiva was an aloof mendicant', was the greatest misnomer.

He defied the very concept that the more mystic one is, the more detached he becomes. Contrary to what people had come to believe of Him, as the most mystic of all, He was desperately attached and fallibly infatuated, which made Him endearingly human.

He loved relationships, in fact, craved for them, surfing with equal intensity the crests of one and all in a tumultuous ocean of relationships and feelings; sometimes knowing, at other times eager to know, how his favourite people had surfaced to their present form in this ocean of manifestation: He always wanted a recap from the other's story.

In each lifetime, in each story, He enjoyed sitting with His friends, sharing quality time in long conversations. They would exchange anecdotes and talk of the experiences gathered in each other's *absence*. It was like filling in the blanks, putting in the pieces that fitted into a mystic Jigsaw. Unfailingly, each time, there would ultimately be that one glorious moment when, while sitting and exchanging their own private worlds and sojourns, the final piece would fit, completing the big picture.

And a silent but supremely powerful Oneness would dawn.

It was called Samadhi.

AUM

A mixing of the time worlds, in the stillness of *now*.

This would enable them not only to rejoice in the essential Oneness, but also enable the group to bring forth and introduce characters into the play that were hitherto unknown to the other.

Everything would just *become* a divine moment, a climax of the life lived. Samadhi.

The magical moment of transcendence was loved by the wise seers. They understood a divine sound, a divine vibration for it, and whispered it almost inaudibly...“AUM”.

The art of the littlest point.

A whole infinity reduced to a dot. And the dot crowned the Aum, represented by crowning the syllable ॐ.

Aum, was always in the *now*. Samadhi was a moment of the future mingled with the past. The seers understood that Samadhi was the grace of Shiva, it was the ultimate revelation about the Self.

The play of life, belonged in the truest sense, to its players; and paradoxically, not to time, but to their present.

“Ah Amar, the immortal Nath,

Your dance, O Shiva,

confluences the future and the past!

And we glimpse your eternal present,

in a moment we call ours.” happily sang their holy mountain bards .

Shiva knew many such moments and cherished them like jewels in a collection, all of which He loved with a great passion.

As for the ‘jewels’ themselves, a meeting with Shiva meant the culmination of their existence; an entry into the cosmic treasure box!

Shiva smiled when he heard the men of a land called Italia use a wise proverb about a game of chess, “After the game, the king and the pawn go into the same box.”

“Indeed,” He whispered to Himself.

But this was about the game of life, and He *was the box*.

He loved it when the game was played out upon His chest.

Only one matter remained: If He wasn't always in control of how the dice would roll, how was the end fixed?

That was simple too. He was endearingly Human, but He **was** God. And not knowing how the game would roll, did not lessen His omniscience at all. It in fact, enhanced the omniplay of the divine with itself.



SHIVA

All through this, His greatest throb remained the same as ever: Parvati.

Of all thrills, seeing Her again, was the greatest.

He was a Time traveller; He had been to many lands in many times and had known many different people. But, no matter where it was that He sat, at the thought of Heaven, images of snow-clad mountains and a certain indescribable joy of togetherness would inevitably come rushing to His mind. Another image almost always linked itself to the landscape: A gypsy tribe of fierce men and gorgeous women dancing around a bonfire of pure warmth, in a bonhomie that was incomparable in the entire Universe.

A bonhomie that He had now understood, led intergalactic travellers to search for this tribe like the Holy Grail.

If discoverers of the cosmos and Time travellers could find the tribe, surely the mountain Chieftain and His Queen would be spotted in the midst of it all.

Parvati. The very thought of Her made Shiva smile. She was the Queen Jewel seated in His heart as centerpiece, around whom, all the rest rallied in adornment.

At times like these, He would feel the same arousal, which, when it went to high pitch, usually made Him lose discernment of where intoxication ended and meditation began.

Yet, that would put Him back in the center of all things.

And this was Shiva. Always self-absorbed. Right in the middle of where one high ended and another began: In the middle of high always, a divine paradox.

Sensual as the trances were, He recognized the tendency of drifting and sometimes, even getting completely swept away with their tidal sequences.

There He was! With all sails up in an enchanting and very fluid cosmic ocean, in

a ship on the seas, sometimes coming ashore at a forest, a high mountain top, or then drop deep into a valley, a desert or then on a ground with burning pyres. But in a moment, He would realise that He was, in fact, tucked in the safety of His own bed, in the very snow-clad mountain others dreamt of finding. In the safety of His own Self, He was awake, once again. Boddha.

The joy of awakening would be short-lived:

Parvati, who just the night before had Herself prepared His hemp, was now clearly irritated. *She was always present in His absence also.*

“Do you remember, when was the last time you did this?” She would admonish.

“Did what?”

“You were completely intoxicated. And took off, on some kind of trip to a completely different realm. You just disappeared into your own world!”

“But you yourself so lovingly made the drink for me...” He would plead.

“Yes, I did!” She would reprimand. “But that doesn’t mean you lose control and get completely swayed. You are the master of control, Shiva, remember?” She was always ashore on a different and more grounded reality.

Of course they loved each other insanely. But they had the same argument so many times that He reckoned it was time to at least try and fix it somewhat.

Trances were so good when they happened, but almost every time, when He came out of them, the landing onto reality was bumpy and quite uncharted.

He wanted to be on the same ground as Parvati.

One day, He hoped, they would be able to ‘see’ His dream together. But for now, He was eager to address Her misgivings. And that’s when He came up with the code of ‘trance exit’: It would be simple; He would ask Himself, “Where was He now? What time was it?”

What time was it? In His case the answer to that could be anything possible from any history book ever written.

Who knew of His travels and travails through the portals of that enigmatic thing called Time?

Caves, fire, herds, kings, wars, success, empires, tyranny, spirituality, generosity, poverty, sickness, famine... He had seen it all. Now, He just had to ask who the King was, or then, who was the godman, and by these two parameters He could place Himself in an ‘Era’.

Also, He had developed a rather fine sense of being able to tell what part of the day it was, by ‘listening’ intently to sun rays; He could tell what season it was by ‘smelling’ the sky! He could use one sense and enhance it to tune into other dimensions.

And so, in no time at all, He would become quite well anchored in what time it

really was.



Rudra Kand

Of all the origin stories, He did feel more comforted in the ones that listed Brahma as His father.

In one, Brahma gave Shiva His first name.

That was His prerogative as Father: to name the son.

And, truly speaking , Brahma had quite literally done that earlier, the moment He asked Shiva for a boon that He should be born as Brahma's son; He had *named the Son!*

Once Shiva had been the formless, nameless, unseen one, but Brahma saw to it that all that changed.

And when it happened, this birth was indeed the miracle of a cosmic timeline.

Now, holding a rueful baby in His paternal clasp, listening to His cries and wails, trying His best to calm Him down, Brahma let out a proud laughter, saying aloud "Rudra."

"You are Rudra, the wailer, my tiny son. Welcome to the world of manifest beings."

In this world of manifest beings, much before He was deemed as Shiva the Auspicious, He had been called Rudra, the terrible.

NANDI GAN

It was dusk, darkening into a starry night, when Shiva awoke. He looked out of His window to see Nandi, His bull seated on the porch.

Again the thought, “*What time was it?*” He was sure He had seen a morning when He was awake last. And also, the year seemed to have been way in the future then, gauging by the vahans.

The vahans were an interesting thing. They were the transporters of Gods. Something more personalized than just a chariot, they were a sort of companion to the God they served. Asides from their ability to transport, they were a good parameter to gauge the time of the day—starting from animals, they morphed themselves into other beasts, humans, denizens and sometimes even metal or other elements. The more sophisticated ones could evaporate into ether form and travel into the future. So, one could gauge the era by observing the kind of technology that the vahan had.

Though it was Parvati who was His inseparable self, another being also loved to be by His side, at all times. Nandi.

Nandi was Shiva’s vahan. He was His most faithful attendant.

Nandi had the body of a human but the head of a bull. To make matters more intricate, the human part was built like a bull; the finest and most steely physique, and the bull head could think in the wisest manner possible. It was like magic. But then, that’s what the denizens of the jungle were. Magical creatures. And Nandi had been declared by Shiva as the chief denizen, the Top Gana. Nandi was His best friend, His loyal devotee, and His vehicle for transport, all rolled into one.

He was Shiva’s ride, so to speak, but even when they were not journeying, Nandi would seat himself at the outer gates of Shiva’s chamber; He thought of himself as a guard, and was indeed, the most formidable obstacle to anyone who wanted to reach Shiva.

He was never off duty.

Once when Shiva joked with him about his snores that were louder than the roar of many creatures, Nandi had replied, “Even when I walk the streets of dreamworld, I proclaim Shiva as the Supreme Master of the universe, and whose chosen gana I am.”

Looking at the familiar silhouette of a bull outside His window, He grinned at

the thought of Nandi in a metallic suit just a few minutes back. It was obviously a time slip, and He reminded Himself to behave absolutely normal, so Parvati would not suspect He had gone into a trance yet again.

“I had an amazing dream,” He announced. “How long have I been asleep?”

“Long enough,” She said. “You hit the bunk soon after you came from your jungle meet with the ganas. What was it about?” She queried.

“Oh, nothing. The usual... a brawl between two elementals, with either side getting their tribal egos up...and then the council brought them to Kailash for a quick arbitration...” said Shiva.

Parvati nodded in acknowledgement of His Chieftainship, prompting Him to continue.

“You know Parvati, all these beings seem so terrible; and the rest of the forest, especially the humans, like to call them pishachas and bhutas. I call them ‘Elementals’, which is, no doubt, a polite word for monsters, but there’s something so charming about them,” He said as He adjusted His rudraksha necklace.

“True, they aren’t disciplined, in the strict sense, but amazingly, they’re so obedient when it comes to my verdicts in a council hearing... these so-called beasts from the valley jungles; there’s a certain innocence to them...”

“Yes, Shiva,” Parvati drawled. “I know...”

And then, imitating His manner of speech, She added, “There is a certain beauty in all that Nature has manifested. Hahaha! You do remember we have to go out to dinner?”

“Yes, of course,” He replied. “You think Vishnu and Lakshmi will be calling any of the ganas, or will it be all the boring folks obsessed with their ideas of shaping Heaven?”

“Hahaha! You are incorrigible!” She said. “But always, so much fun. Now just remember they are our elders and they mean well.”

“Of course,” He replied, again.

He liked Vishnu. Despite the completely diverse style, despite the different setup, the well thought out plans, the over-groomed, extra mushy attendants, the penchant for titles and kingship, and all things orderly and articulated. And while He Himself, was quite the opposite. He loved His obscurity, if anything at all. His dwelling was chosen deliberately on a fringe location to afford Him the freedom of His own gypsy way of life.

Was He a nonconformist? Not really. He had a genuine respect for tradition, but

He also trusted instinct, and this birthed a great creativity. His was a freedom of openly giving expression to His own existence in this Great Universe, of which He was now a manifest part.

‘A gypsy way of life’ was an apt description, for He knew, ultimately, all things move on. This knowing helped Him not to cling on to things. The exception proving His rule, of course, was Parvati. Even after being married to Him for years, She always found Him staring at Her in awe, especially when She would get ready to go out to a dinner invite. He seemed in perennial enchantment of the Shringar ritual and would happily wait for Her to dress Herself up, never complaining about how long She took.

But tonight, His mind raced back to the time when Brahma first lovingly called Him, “Rudra, my son.”

He had a tremendous ability to remember most things from the past; an ability, which could not be termed simplistically as a gift. *Sometimes* it brought up wreckage from a timeless sea, which was unrelatable, if not downright unpleasant. True, He was now called Shiva the Auspicious, but He could remember things that were not Shubha, auspicious, as the name suggested. Long ago He was called Rudra the terrible. Rudra, who destroys the world. People were so scared of Him that the elders and Medicine men of all tribes learnt only a prayer of fear.

Rudra had a unique propitiation: One of absence. While all other Gods were invoked for a visit, He was actually prayed to stay away. It was only with the passage of time that He evolved into His present persona of a well-loved and hugely admired Shiva. But then, talking about the Timeless Sea, Shiva remembered Himself even before He was Rudra. It was aeons ago, but He remembered it vividly; it remained freshly etched in His memory, as if the birth of Rudra had happened only a little while back.

THE OCEAN AND THE SKY

At first, there had been a fluid cosmic ocean, for what seemed like eternity. It was calm and self-contained, and so self-satisfied that there just couldn't be a sense of time, or anything else for that matter.

Whichever way the ocean turned to look, it could only see itself, and which, was a truly expansive state of being. Somehow there was a word that hung above the ocean, like a sky. OM...OM...OM...

For many thousands of earth years, He remained in the bliss of the ocean, listening to the word. By and by, He became aware that He *was* the cosmic ocean itself. And also, that in its echo, the drone was sounding VYOM. Vyom? It wasn't a thing.

In fact, that's what it was: NO thing.

And yet He was there in Vyom, and it felt good.

This was an unending present, and the paradox was the understanding of Timelessness in every moment. He rested, floating in that peaceful placidity.

Even gravity hadn't taken birth. Om was the ocean and Vyom was the sky, and together, they were One.

Such was the profound state of Vyom, as Shiva could remember.

And then, it happened.

Suddenly, there was a gross change of state, and He felt He was going through a tunnel, with no light at the end, though He could see a golden dot hovering at the top of a seamless darkness.

In fact, when the movement finally stopped, He felt trapped in a dark cave.

There was an intuitive sense of reduction.

Something drastic had happened to the calm ocean, but He didn't know exactly what. All He could hear was a distant but comforting drum.

The dot had faded away.

He was in a womb. Garbha.

And so, Garbha, the womb, became His new world, Griha.

But this was no ordinary maternal womb. Life itself had not yet learnt to mate and procreate itself into multiple forms and images.

This was the genius of Brahma's mind; He had already issued forth a whole universe just by thought.

The distant drum was not a mother's heart beating for her child, but a paternal mind throbbing in dense thought for his progeny.

Wave after wave. That is how Brahma did it. He was the original Patriarch. He, fathered by manan and chintan. Mindfulness and reflection.

He ensured that Shiva's new state wasn't very different from the OM VYOM state of the cosmic ocean. Except this time, the ocean had been confined within four walls. How impossible was that?

But the impossible was happening, for sure.

Brahma had actually sucked in with His yogic prowess, the formless essence of Shiva, and was now preparing to birth Him in the land of form and time.

Shiva didn't quite understand that He had become a divine embryo.

There was a sense of security in this new surrounding; the distant drum was pulsating gently, comforting Him, in an 'always present' sort of way.

But there was a counter thought, "Where had insecurity come from in the first place?" Something to do with the drastic change, Shiva knew...

And who was this talking to Him, instructing Him, guiding Him?

Still a bit hazy, He realised it was Him talking to Himself, because *there was no one else*. But all of a sudden, He felt sleepy and couldn't really think more.

Sleep was to be His newfound pastime. So calming, so comforting, reminiscent completely of OM VYOM.

He was sleeping when the second drastic passage took place.

A COSMIC DELIVERY

All the four walls that had earlier comforted Him now started to close up, squeezing each other, squeezing Him, squeezing the very space; it was most uncomfortable. The drum too, had started beating to a fast and unnerving rhythm. It went on like a ritual, reaching a crescendo. Just when He thought He was going to burst, He was thrown out tumultuously into a third space. He had burst onto planet earth; He had burst into matter, from Brahma's mind. This time, there was lots of light. So much that He closed His eyes in response. "Suswagatam prithvilokam aham putrami! Welcome to earth, my son!"

He now suddenly remembered Brahma had spoken those words, even before naming Him.

He didn't feel welcome. OM VYOM were much better words.

He felt cold, and longed to go back to garbha. Already, the cosmic ocean had become distanced.

But it seemed that those who had become His receivers in the land of light were in no mood to let Him sleep. They actually said, "Wake up, wake up!" as they slapped His infant buttocks around in bonhomie. The slaps stung, and He became aware that He was enclosed in something that was quite like the four-walled garbha, with a difference that He could see it and yet, be it.

Garbha had been an enclosure, and it contained Him inasmuch as He lived in it. But it hadn't been anything like this new feeling:

This one felt like He was in a personal enclosure. This time it was clearer, that being contained, meant simply, that He was trapped.

THE STORYTELLING SAGE

“Om and Vyom, Gurudeva?” asked Shaunaka

“Yes Om is actually Aum, that we knew as the divine vibration,” replied Suta.

“I see... is it the way that it is pronounced?”

“Yes,” said Suta. “Precisely. The divine rishis taught that, saying it in this way represented the trio of waking, dreaming and sleeping.”

“I see, that’s so scientific then,” said Shaunaka. “So Aum represents all three?”

“Aum is all four,” said Suta.

“Four?” Shaunaka looked puzzled.

“Aum is always more than the sum of its own numbers, always more than all it represents,” Suta said mysteriously.

“Ah! I do understand, Gurudeva,” said Shaunaka. “And Vyom? What is Vyom?”

“Vyom is the great nothingness. Whilst Aum is the great everythingness.”

“I do understand now, Gurudeva,” said Shaunaka. “The difference between Aum and Vyom.”

“You do, do you?” smiled Suta. “But here’s the enigma: Aum *is* Vyom.”

“What!” Shaunaka exclaimed.

“Because, my son, I just told you that Aum, is everything,” smiled Suta again, exhaling a mystic circle of smoke from his pipe.



RUDRA

One of the first sounds He heard, was of admiration. “Oh! What a nice body He has!” Someone was saying to Brahma. From the corner of His eye, He saw Brahma beam with pride. “ Mam putra! Mam putra! He is my son! MY son!” And from the other corner, He felt a part of the cosmic ocean slip out. It was His first tear. Why was He crying? He didn’t know; this was Rta, the cosmic tradition. You weep when you arrive on Prithviloka. He didn’t know why He was crying but somehow, the tear felt appropriate. Here He was, dealing with the shock of displacement, and here they were, a strange horde of receivers who already called Him ‘the baby’ and welcomed Him to their Kutumba, the family. His head hurt, like a migraine from the remembrance of a big past, a cosmic hangover. Birth in the manifest world, had indeed been a trauma.

It also struck Him that His personal enclosure was the new thing called body that they were admiring.

The receivers could well have been revellers. They were shouting and kissing Him, cuddling Him, tossing Him amongst themselves, from one to another.

Some were even pinching Him on His posterior. The patting and shouting and buttock-slapping increased, only to be supplemented by some smothering kisses on His cheeks by ladies who in turn said, “I am His Aunty.”

This was His first ritual. And it was frenzied, this welcome ritual by earthly fathers and mothers and what they were collectively called - Kutumba. One of the mothers started draping Him in some very fine and warm robes. “Our little

“ . . . ”

raja," she said fondly.

"What an ugly, rueful baby!" He heard someone else say. "Dark, like the night, and with a full weave of hair covering His head. In our time babies were bald. I tell you, these newcomers are different."

Day one and two earth lessons. Shiva could hear an instructive voice:

"One, no one praises you for you. The pride is somehow connected to their own ego: Brahma eulogized the becoming of a father more than the birth of a son.

And two, dissent and criticism are the siblings of praise."

'You do have a beautiful body, but you could have been of fairer color. You have hair, which you ultimately should have grown, but why already?'

There is always something to criticize, on Prithivilok. Nothing is ever perfect.

It was then that Shiva spotted the scary man looking at Him with peering eyes.

"Hmmm. He has the markings, alright," said the man.

Brahma was pleased. But Shiva was scared and let out a terrified howl. The man echoed Shiva's howl with a laughter that was absolutely sinister.

"He will be our Chief!" the man continued, and coming uncomfortably close to Shiva, "Hello, Chief!" he said, revealing his crooked teeth, many of which were plated in gold.

Shiva shrieked with terror.

"Are you sure?" asked Brahma. "Why is He so scared of you?"

"Make no mistake about it," answered the man. "He has arrived. The most magnificent of the magnificent, the most terrible to those who think they are terrible. He howls because He is scared. How interesting! He does not yet even know that the terror He feels is also a great prop in His enjoying His own play. It is all as it should be." The final proclamation made Brahma's smile spread even wider.

The man was the Head Shaman of a thousand villages.

THE DANCE OF SCENTS AND SENSES

At night there were festivities. The mansions were done up in proper pomp, as should be, when a prince is born. Thousands of torches that were hoisted in the mansions were lit. Thousands more had been provisioned for the occasion.

A few hundred were normally enough to brighten things into festive mode. But this illumination actually created the effect of a million visiting stars.

Rosewater was carefully trickled into little containers enveloping the bases of the torch holders, which were slung against the mansion walls in a geometric dance. The gently increasing heat made the water evaporate in a sensuous response.

And then, as if invited to a magical masquerade, it started wafting outwards in its mysterious new vapor form to the royal lawns, to mix freely with the scents of the jasmine and sandal trees. Enticing aromas of the sumptuous dinner being prepared, also joined in the bonhomie of the scent mingling. Each with their unique individuality, the aromas were also actually like beings.

Courtesans and palace helpers were seen darting to and fro, and talking to each other in excited pitch. Everyone was feeling very important. In Brahma's domain, it was always clear that each person, each being made a difference; a virtue of Brahma's time.

One by one they arrived, all the demigods of the old times. Agni, Vayu, Indra, Asvins, the Maruts, accompanied by their pretty consorts, and in some cases, harems. Monogamy was not a rule.

One by one they entered the gates of Brahma's palace in a never-ending ethereal procession. It was as if entire galaxies were being charioted for a celestial Ball.

Each chariot seated a master chieftain Magi from a distant part of the universe. Once collected, everyone was busy in exchanging pleasantries and making new contacts. Society had always done that; make contacts. *To not socialize in Brahmas' own banquet would be a cosmic waste of time.*

The consorts too, were updating themselves of new trends.

Star glitter from farthest corners of the world was exchanged, if not as actual gifts at least as ideas and inspiration in boastful talks

girls, at least as ideas and inspiration in occasional talks.

The children were amazed to see the band wagons of other demigods, freely moving about in their ranks, petting the new and strange animals who stared back in equal wonderment.

Everyone was doing something! Busying themselves in some activity, making for a scene that was both festive and frenetic.

But the Shaman looked only to the Moon. It was full.

THE UNNAMED SHAMAN

Only the Shaman, along with a few others knew what this full moon actually heralded.

His mind raced back to the time when he had knelt before Shiva, who, seated upon His stone throne in the snowy Himalayas, had knighted him as a gana, friend of the order of Kailash.

Shiva was the Lord of Tantra, a unique system of weaving together God's science of manifestation. He often taught His ganas the tantra, saying, "All of science is merely a notation of God's art. From the beginning of time! Just like a musician plays his music from a notation, so too, whatever the scientific man discovers, has in fact, already been artistically painted by Mother Nature into the world." And then, with a nostalgic tone he would add, "You see, from the very beginning of the world, there was an interplay of Shiva and Shakti. I, a Poet, and She, an Artist. Whatever I sang in divine verse, She painted on the canvas of the world. And life began. Whatever you see around you, has been given by your mother. All things have come from the same origin, with the intention of love and togetherness and sharing; Thus too, my friends of Kailash, you will form the Ganatantra, the republic of all friends of God, in the spirit of sharing." He would declare with a leader's authority.

Shiva, who loved His fellow men and the elementals, would never ever allow them to cast servile titles on themselves. He insisted they were 'ganas', the friends. Despite their devout feelings for Him, He always regarded His followers as that—Friends. And loved them with the passion of a fellow in arms; and in so doing, ushering in a vibrant camaraderie.

So many times, when any of them went overboard with their emotion and actually asked for an eternal enslavement at His feet, as was in vogue with other Gods and their worship, He asked them to see Him as a friend instead. "You are my ganas," He would always insist. He repeated this to them till the time they began to love the word gana for themselves, till the time they completely imbibed it, and each one declared proudly, "I am a Shiv Gana." which was very much what Shiva wanted.

So too, it was that the council functioned as a Republic, a totally consensus

So too, it was that the Council functioned as a Republic, a totally consensus based machinery. “Conference and consensus with all parts are the essence of Ganatantra,” He told them.

“Ganatantra?” asked the Elementals with eyes wide in awe, much in the childlike spirit that Shiva loved.

“Yes, the circle of the friends and co-wayfarers,” He said. “People sometimes have such ambitious ideas about Republics...” He looked skywards. “That they forget the simplest laws of all. Our weave in this universe begins with our own childhood playmates, our neighbours, our village brothers, kinsmen, and tribe. It is only after we tend to those who are right here in our own reality that we may then talk of bigger things. Ultimately, we can only come to understand Niyati, the lofty cosmostatic balance, when we learn to love the minute details of our own near ones. For what is here, is everywhere, what is not here, is nowhere. It is how it should be,” He would say with the same divine authority. “One who has any knowing of the interplay of love will know that it does not allow for servility.” So it came to be, that the ganas loved their uncrowned King as their best friend.

But Shamshan Nath was no ordinary gana. He belonged to the Aghora sect—The most elite, but also the most terrifying Guard of Shiva. It comprised of some ganas from Himachala, Tibet and Mahacina, and others from the unknown reaches of the mountains called Shambala.

Aghoras were the earliest and foremost Shamans to whom absolutely nothing mattered, other than proximity to their Lord Shiva, at all times.

To be chosen into this Guard was indeed a rare honour for a boy from the Plains.

“Arise, Shamshan Nath,” Shiva had said ever so gently. “It is you who shall prepare for my arrival into the current life cycle.” When Shiva clasped his shoulders to shake his disbelief, Shamshan Nath felt as though a thousand bolts of lightning from a sky of knowledge and power had entered him. It indeed had. It was called *Pervesa*, the pervasion of gnosis.

Shiva had this generous habit: He gifted His attendants, the powers to be almost Shiva themselves. Gorakh Nath, Balak Nath and Shamshan Nath were just a few of the people, who, if they wanted, could conjure all three worlds from their magic bags.

But not once, in known history, had the ganas ever usurped power. This was most unlike the Asuras, another primal race, who were actually the earlier cousins of the Devas. The Asuras had a peculiar trait of misusing power. Everyone knew the pattern. They first performed penances for hundreds of years to Shiva, and when He would be happy and ready to grant a wish, they would ask for power. Once booned, they would start to plunder everyone else. This had happened several times. But Shiva never changed His giving Nature. Instead, He understood that to digest power was far more difficult than the act that helped acquire it. It was only being in touch with one's divinity that could enable this spiritual maturity. Shiva was always in touch with His own divinity; *He was the most powerful*. And so He felt the need to train some beings to digest power. These chosen ones were the ganas. And that was the difference, which never allowed them to become like Asuras: The training from Shiva about one's own divinity.

"Will I go to a time in the future then," asked Shamshan Nath. "And wait for your arrival?"

"No," smiled Shiva enigmatically. "You shall travel into the past and begin from there; a past where we had not even met, where I was not even Shiva yet, just Rudra. And therefore you shall be the perfect person to welcome me. I shall not recognize you, and that will afford me a blank slate for learning. A tabula rasa. From there to the state of Alamgrasa, divinity revelling in divinity," said Shiva a bit dreamily. "You know, Shamshan Nath, I yearn for something I never had. Being the Primal Guru, I have never had a Guru for myself. You shall be the Guru this time, Shamshan Nath. *You* will teach me mysticism all over again." Shamshan Nath was mesmerised by Shiva's words. To be a teacher to the greatest teacher in the world! He knew it would not be long before he embarked on his great journey and mission, to receive Shiva Himself, in an altogether different time, as his student. He therefore hung on even closer to these last moments, these last wisdoms spoken by his beloved Shiva, before the roles were to be reversed, as ordained. In those concluding moments, his mind wandered back to his own initiation; to the time when Shiva had accepted him in His own inner-fold of disciples and introduced him to the mysteries of tantra. He, too, was dreamily happy.

It had been a long journey for Shamshan Nath before Shiva actually became his teacher.

He was born in the eastern bay of Bharat where people were rice eaters, ate fish and spoke a sweet language. A huge percentage of them were fishermen, and life was simple:

Go fishing , catch fish, eat fish, or exchange fish with others who were skilled as artisans and craftsmen, and get them to make something for you in turn.

But Shamshan Nath's was an impoverished family. They did not even have their own boat for fishing and his father had to rent one out every summer, at an exorbitant price of half the catch of the season. He had never even owned a new fishing net, and would dexterously fix the same old one in his onshore time, at least two days each week.

"Abhik! Come my son, give me a helping hand with the net," his father would implore, but Abhik, as he was called much before he became the Aghora Shamshan Nath, was not interested.

He had watched this cycle of men eating fish all their lives only finally to die themselves. Ironically, those who lost their lives at sea, in their watery graves, were devoured by the very kin of the fish they had been eating.

"There had to be something more to life than just catching fish for all your life; there must be something that differentiated humans from fish," thought the young boy. He was clearly different in his orientation than his tribe, who thought nothing more of fish than Jal tori, vegetable from the waters.

When your inner orientation is so different, it has to happen:

One day, Abhik just left.

He saw a band of mendicants roaming in his city, and was intrigued by their attire. They wore even less on their person than he. But they did not look impoverished of mind. They joyously sang a song , thrusting their begging bowls even at the poorest, imploring them to fill their bowls with rice for the day. They had this magical quality of making the poor feel rich. It seemed to Abhik, that they had done their lot with fish and fishing, and had turned to something far greater. Something that he was looking for.

"Who do you sing of?" he asked one of them who appeared to be the leader.

"I sing of the Timeless one,

I sing of the oldest yet the ever young,

I sing of someone, whom you have not met,
and yet, I sing of thee,” answered the mendicant and followed it up with a hysterical laughter.

“May I come with you?” Abhik had pleaded, and that began it all.

Abhik meant the fearless, the aspirational, and it was this dynamite mix of fearlessness and aspiration that made for Shiva’s nameless seekers.

The nameless in search of the Unnamed was the quintessential play of Life, ending in the Shamshan, cremation ground, where in death, the Lord of all life may ultimately be found—The Nath.

It seemed, the nameless aspirant of Shiva had been christened Shamshan Nath as the most perfect reminder of the Self carrying itself, looking for itself, and finally dissolving back to itself. This was to be the great summary of all spiritual seeking, the *summum bonum* of God Himself.

Shamshan Nath did not sleep that night. He was travelling through the past in his mind, but in a way that it was almost real.

An involuntary, but wide smile dawned on his face. He realised he had been doing this for at least five hours, till the morning sun came out. After his morning ablutions and oblations, and a quick but intense session of Tantric Yoga, Shamshan Nath went to the palace to bid farewell to Brahma.

“Come, come Shamshan Nathji,” said Brahma. “Have you eaten your breakfast?”

“Oh yes,” replied Shamshan Nath.

“Why don’t you have some with me?” asked Brahma, as He raised a pitcher of fresh milk. It was rumored that Kamadhenu, the divine bovine herself as Surabhi, sent gallons of her produce to Brahma as a morning salutation.

“Yes, that I will gladly accept,” said Shamshan Nath gratefully. These were the unmissable perks of being Shiva’s own gana. Perks that just came about beautifully, as a reminder of the bigger picture. These were the times when a moment of respect washed down the memory of endless hours of penance.

Shamshan Nath drank up his milk in one straight motion as though to wash down a lot of Aghora heat and torment.

“I will now take your leave, my Lord,” he said.

“Ah, all good things must come to an end, Shamshan, my friend,” said Brahma.

“Only, to begin again,” He added with a wink.

“Thank you for being with us on this very special occasion,” said Brahma. “Here is your Peshgi.” He gracefully beckoned an attendant to come forward with the gifts. It was a silver tray on which were placed four pouches of velvet. “A thousand pieces of gold for you, in each pouch” said Brahma. “ And four

pouches in celebration of my little prince who shall one day be the King of all four vectors”.

“Thank you, my Lord,” said the Shaman as he clutched the pouches, then emptied them into a rag he pulled out from his own langot. Throwing away the pouches, he said rather philosophically, “What use is the husk to a man who appreciates the taste of rice. As for your son, He is the creator of space itself; of what vector do you talk? North, south, east, west—these are all divisions that got birthed in His mind.”

“You really are stretching this, aren’t you, Shaman?” said Brahma.

“Think what you may, my Lord,” said the Shaman. “But your son howls because He remembers His previous stature, His expansive being, His earlier life.”

“Is there life earlier to me, Shaman?” Brahma was now showing a certain impatience.

“Yes Brahma, there is. And it is what you hold in your arms as a tiny bundle now. *This* is the Lord of all life, now reduced to an infant in your fold. Take care of both Him and yourself.”

RUDRA PASUPATI

Hearing the Shaman, remembering that He was once the Supreme being, Lord of all, Shiva, who had by now been brought to Shamshan Nath by a chamber maid for a last look, cried even louder.

He could not see Shamshan Nath. Instead, He saw Brahma meditating on one leg, and uttering His own name, “Shiva Shiva Shiva.”

But Brahma was looking a lot younger. It was another recollection, from another time. Brahma meditated for almost an eternity to propitiate Him, before Shiva presented Himself and granted Him a wish; any wish. “Be born as my son, O Lord of Lords,” asked Brahma, and at the time Shiva thought it would be a good idea. “Why not have a father and see?” He thought. “Why always be the World father?” as He mumbled, “Tat Asthu...”

And now, when He felt irritated at the aunties, fear at seeing the Shaman, and the overly played out dominion of Brahma as father, suddenly the sense of reduction overcame Him. “Stop this mock role play!” He wanted to shout, but all that came out was another howl. It dawned on Shiva that He had lost the power of Vach. He could not speak. He could only make crying sounds. “What a strange first bonus for taking birth,” He thought.

But hidden subtly, almost like stealth within the waves of irritation, fear and subjugation, He felt a familiar emotion. Anger. And the anger made Him warm; it made Him feel good. He let out another howl. This time, Brahma recognized the unmistakable roar of a trapped lion. It was then that He spoke the name, “You are Rudra, my son.”

‘Rahood’, the howl of the Rudra, was designed to emanate much more as the call of the wild and terrible, rather than a piteous howl of a timid baby.

A loud neigh rented the air, almost as an echo to His own indignance. Rudra spotted the royal horses that drew Brahma’s chariots, flash their big teeth as though to snap at that air itself.

He quickly shifted His eyes to the pet tigers in a royal buggy nearby. Then He glanced at the elephants, and finally looked skywards to a flock of Brahma’s

own swans flying in formation. Looking at His newborn son observe all life forms, Brahma was quick to understand a very deep reminder, and said aloud, for all to hear, “You shall be Pasupati, Lord of all animals.”

Rudra let out a victorious smile. Pasupati was a title, not a name.

It was a first proclamation of things to be.

One by one, the animals came and looked at Him with much gentler eyes than all the humans. There were deers, cows, horses, rabbits, dogs, and even a couple of magnificent tigers. He felt comforted in an unspoken welcoming spirit, quite unlike the revellers who were loud but pretentious. He also felt a genuine Lordship because the animals did not look to Him as a baby born for the first time; on the contrary, they shared the instinct of the Shaman, that this was the return of an old associate.

It turned out that these pasus who had come to see Him at birth, were just a handful who had ventured into the village. They were Chieftains in their kingdoms and actually they represented packs and herds and hordes of others who lived in a densely wooded jungle.

Rudra liked these jungle people right from the beginning, and sure enough, in time, as He grew up, He came to love the whole jungle. He was most unlike others. The humans hardly ventured into the deeper sections of the forests, and this fear became especially noticeable after the sunset. On the other hand, Rudra was always enchanted by their green beauty and spent more of His time there, than anywhere else in the village or the royal city.

It worked well; the humans were scared to follow; they thought and spoke only negative things about areas outside their villages, advertently marking boundaries, and inadvertently creating greater limits in their minds and spirit. But Rudra found it exceedingly pleasant; this so called jungle of scary beings. In fact, if there was anything the animals noticeably lacked, it was the human trait of being annoyingly intrusive! And they were friendly.

Not knowing a phonetic use of their tongue did not render them unable of a conversation. They actually came up most forthrightly about whatever was on their mind, in a simple language of signs, filled with feelings that conveyed their messages clearly. And that worked well too.

Brahma and the attendants just accepted Rudra's jaunts into the forest, some of which lasted for days and weeks together, as part of life and the future that Rudra was to bring upon them all. This was the greater virtue of Brahma's time:

...making solitude and seclusion a part of life, as a mode of addition, but that of a

seeking solitude and seclusion was not taken as a mark of oddity, but that of an already evolved spirit. Of course, only those who were somewhat evolved themselves, saw it Brahma's way.



THE UNKNOWN YEARS

Even as an adolescent, Rudra was of strong built. And soon He started becoming aware of His physique. Every morning, as He bathed under a favourite waterfall, He would take time to see His own reflection in the still waters of the pool. Sometimes He posed in techniques, which could be described as a yoga of flexing. The animals laughed, even as their doe-eyes widened in loving admiration. This would prod Him to carry the act out even longer; something He assiduously avoided in the company of His father's Raj Darbar, the Royal court. Clearly, it was in the jungle, where the Lord was on show: unabashedly, yet securely.

His physical attributes were the epitome of paradox. His skin was wheat colored but lustrous; tight but fresh looking, like that of a young child. His hair was thick and matty, but had a well-groomed effect. He liked to wear it long and loose, and it was similar in character to the freefalling rush of His waterfall. His eyes were sharp. Not big, but piercingly magnetic.

Saraswati once remarked, "Rudra, you have this amazing quality; your eyes smile." Saraswati was Brahma's consort and hence Rudra's mother. She was the Goddess of wisdom and art, and her observation acknowledged Rudra's divine beauty.

He had a jawline which tapered His face into the perfect confluence of a resolute and compassionate man, which He actually was. The chin was measured to perfection. Neither too big to impose, nor too small to be missed. It sported a beautiful cleft, which, like His mysterious eyes, seemed to smile, complementing a dimple on His right cheek. His ears were small, and did not protrude as ears normally do. He wore earrings in them, which were stylish in their simple

appearance; also tapered finely like the rest of His countenance. It was the only gold He had on His person. He did not like gold.

It made Him feel hotter than normal, and knowing His own traits quite well, He tried always to avoid anything that roused His temperature even by outward contact. He had broad shoulders, a big chest, powerful arms and calves that rippled with each step He took. He was the archetypal handsome mountain man.

His gait was like that of a lion—powerful. Replete with the authority of a King, and yet graceful, like the humble inhabitant of a great jungle who, knowing His own existence to be transitory, moves on.

The walk back to His thatched hut would always be more of a run. He knew the track like an expert scout, and jumped across each hurdle with an unerring memory. He seemed to know each tree, each bush and each plant personally, but the extreme of His animistic trait was that He even treated the rocks with the respect of life. He always felt they smiled back at Him.

Back in the hut, the animals never once disturbed Him as He meditated.

Sometimes, He opened His eyes after hours of inward concentration, to see a deer looking at Him curiously! A snake or two cuddled peacefully in a cozy corner was not uncommon either. It was unbelievable, that sometimes, bumble bees hovered around His Kamandalu, desperately looking for the source of a sweet and enigmatic aroma that would emanate almost every time He went into meditation. It was as if the animals knew meditation was the only thing worthy of watching in the humans; the only thing that they didn't themselves have, or, for that matter which wasn't outrightly copied from them.

But with Rudra, the arrangement was fair. He loved to watch the lions, the jungle dogs, the wild asses and goats and even the monkeys. He had observed the minute details of their bodily functions and imitated their morning stretches in His yoga.

Seeing this, the animals felt a gratification; they felt an immense dimension of themselves in His presence. He liked each of them for what they were. He realised that they were more wronged than doing wrong; that they were scorned, only because they looked different. He saw that mankind had an obsession for devising labels. Humans loved to customise descriptions of other beings, so as to suit their own parameters, ignoring the beauty of Nature's bigger plan. He realised that to look for beauty only in beauty was a subtle ugliness.

He joked with them about the lighter side of everyone's looks including, many a time, His own. His sense of humour unburdened them and they felt worthy. They knew they were not just beasts; they were part of a divine plan. An important part. And He was here in their midst, as Pasupati. Just His presence seemed to exorcise them of an age-old sense of being unwanted. They began to think of Him as God.

On His part, Rudra wondered *who indeed, was the God of the banished?* Surely a selective God was not God at all; not owning up to all of creation as His own, would in His view, diminish the role of such a God. This was His intuitive understanding. Was Rudra being divinely ambitious?

Probably not; He disliked competing. Competition too, He felt, had the most ugly results in its seed.

Such was His understanding from the jungle, where life lived itself out in perfect harmony. Even when there was an established food chain, even where the lion was a King, the deer had his share of the waters, his share of the mountains, his share of life. You didn't compete with anyone else; you just spent a lifetime discovering the miracle of life. And that too, not by analysis and dialectics, but simply by the act of living ,itself.

The harmony of the jungle was in stark contrast to the deceit that existed in the city. The conniving pursuits of men, and ironically, even the demigods amazed Rudra. He noted that they frequently devised schemes and made plots in the name of a larger good, when actually, all they wanted, was to carve out their own little kingdoms, away from the already existing kingdom of Nature itself. But the lions of the jungle were not like that at all. They were natural kings, who ensured no wastage of life for game, no plunder, and certainly no divisive schemes. Rudra liked the lions' way.

So there He was, growing in the jungle, not in the kingdom, enjoying a creation bubbling with the varied frequencies of all its creatures. Unlike the other children of Brahma, He did not show any interest in the kingdom, yet easily fitted into the role of a true King. Easily, the lion's way robed Him with one virtue after yet another. One day the tigers came to him, holding out a skin. "Please accept this as your blanket and meditation seat," they implored with reverence.

"A meditation seat? Made of a tiger skin? I don't understand," said Rudra.

"This was our old chief. Before He passed away a few years ago, He had already prophesied that a great human-like being would come in our midst, one who would respect the jungle way, and treat all creatures alike... He had said, the arrival of this man would usher a great harmony for us. We know *you* are that

man, Rudra. The chief did not live long enough to ‘see’ you with his own eyes. But we will be most honoured if you took this skin as your meditation mat so that our old chief ‘feels’ your presence even though he is not present amongst us now.”

Rudra was touched, and as He solemnly accepted the skin, the tiger spoke again, “And my dear friend, one more request...”

“Yes?”

“When *my* time is done on this earth, will you, honour me by accepting my skin too, as your own belonging?”

Rudra felt His eyes go moist with feeling as he managed to affirm “Yes”.

Soon enough, the deer followed suit. Next, the oxen gifted Rudra their horns. It almost became the norm that when animals passed away, they wanted to leave a part of them behind with Rudra, so that even after they had served their time on the planet, Rudra would remember them fondly. That is how the jungle adorned Rudra in its love. In perfect harmony and sharing. Rudra was swarmed by different creatures of the jungle, all of whom wanted to gift Him something from their tribes, from their homes, because of the pure love and high self-esteem that He evoked in them. And it became the way of Rudra.

Bit by bit, He began to undo all the things that society had taught Him. One day, He took off His gold earrings as well. It was symbolic of having almost completely renounced the palace life almost completely. But Rudra was only renouncing the palace lifestyle, not life itself.

As easily as the Prajapatis were giving rise to a whole new urban culture, Rudra was always at home with the naturally established order of Nature, of life itself. Perhaps that is why He allowed stories about Himself to be floated and rumoured among the city people. It did not trouble Him at all that tales about ‘The Terrible Rudra’ abounded. This was quite in character with society: If you were not present in its midst, you became the subject of talk. If you were not present to affirm or deny what was being said, *anything* could be said about you! Society relished rumours, and Rudra was a favourite in fuelling their imagination. One rumour in particular, had been blown quite thunderously out of proportion: ‘Rudra left Brahma’s palace and joined the forest creatures, because He discovered one day that He was some kind of secret demonic creature. He felt more comfortable with His own kind who lived beyond city limits. He abounds, where other mortals fear to tread. He, is not human! He has unspeakable magic powers, which he uses to control all the denizens of the forests from atop a mountain. He, is the wielder of thunderbolts in an angry sky.’

Rudra actually chuckled at the thought of people imagining Him like that.

He knew all these were false beliefs, deliberately floated by society for their own motives. The same society that often ostracized snakes, saying “Snakes bite each other for their own survival” Nothing could have been further from the truth.

In fact, it was society that harmed each other all the time, for their own survival. But sometimes, false beliefs served well to avoid the real damage. If, for example, the ‘big bad man on top of the mountain’ was actually a good man; a man with strong convictions for the welfare of all, and not just a handful of scheming elite; And if His convictions were strong enough, such a man could actually catapult Himself into the ultimate samaritan who maintained the balance of harmony. That people were in an awe, albeit a negative one, could actually be an opportunity to practise a positive influence. Rudra was the epitome of such a practice. He had noted that the captains of society were obsessed with rejection, whereas He loved *all beings*. So, He in turn, did just that; He rejected society in favour of ‘real people’.

And felt close to the snakes who were shunned on a wrong notion.

Personally, His mind always went out to two things: The first were the snow-clad mountains He could see but did not know.

The other, the woman He knew, but could not see.

He loved Her. True, He hadn’t even sighted Her; this woman who was the center of all His dreams, but there was a mysteriously obscure and delightfully sweet remembrance of being drowned in a tidal wave of long, perfumed hair. A remembrance of that most intoxicating voice calling Him, “Nath.”

A lying together on rose-petalled beds and playful laughter that trilled the skies, in what seemed an endless time.

But it had ended.

She was the most important one, who, through Her unmatched love, had made Him realise more than what all other creatures put together had acknowledged. He was not just Pasupati; He was Pasupati Nath. Not just the Lord of animals, but also the undisputed master of their very soul. It was She who had brought Him to the more intimate relationships, She who drew out the tenderness. But this was weird: He couldn’t remember Her face. Every time He came close to remembering it, She flitted away, like a dream, a mist, or more appropriately, like the ending of a trance. And then, what remained was just the snow-clad mountain, and its snowy silence. The memory of Her scent and voice haunted Him. He sensed that His two haunts were linked and decided He would hike to

11111. He sensed that his two haunts were linked and decided he would hike to the mountains to find out the reality of the woman. And that is how Rudra's tryst began with the mountains and higher reaches of life: in search of a timeless love.



THE MATRIKA MEN

Before dawn, sometime during a winter month, while most of the world lay asleep, a young ascetic was walking briskly through a forest. It had become a habit with the young Rudra to start His day like that, without waiting for the sun. His pace was brisk, yet steadfast; the gait graceful, yet determined. He looked straight ahead, yet was aware of all His surroundings. And He thought of nothing, yet His mind was full of God.

Today was special. He was headed for Kailash.

He had been walking for a while, when He felt the scorching heat of the noon sun, which had by now risen to burn bright in its typical trait. It was directly overhead Rudra, who was unmindful of the fact that He had already left the forest behind. He was now at the foothills of the sparsely inhabited and somewhat arid flatlands preceding the mountains.

Rudra suddenly realised that He was thirsty. Now, with His God-saturated mind coming back to ground reality and resuming its routine function of worldly senses, He heard the sound of water. It was a stream flowing nearby, gurgling loudly as though in chant of an old beloved.

Rudra marvelled at the ways of Nature; how things appeared just when you needed them most. The ways, that were woven in an ingenious manner, like a magic matrix.

Drinking water was a passion with Him; it was almost a ritual, a prayer. Rudra drank long, like one who, being one with the ocean, could drink it all and merge it in Himself.

It was only after He had quenched His enormous thirst, that the sense of hearing came to fore, with the sound of crying. It was a baby's wail.

He followed the sound to its source—a baby boy lying under a pine tree, unclothed and uncared for in the wilderness, where an obviously helpless parent had abandoned him. Perhaps an unwed mother or perhaps, a weak father; who would know?

The baby seemed to sense this act of primal betrayal, and catching Rudra in his eye, started wailing even louder. In an auto response, Rudra's hands reached out to pick the baby up.

But in another split second, the action was reversed almost as spontaneously and the hands came back to Rudra's sides.

A horrible thought had struck Him. How could He possibly tend to the baby? On the journey that He had undertaken, He would Himself have to spend days in solitude, only to come down to the mainlands once in a while, to beg for alms for sustenance. He would never be sure of His own meals and knew there would be times He would have to forego them. He had accepted this impending fate, as His own choice. But caring for the child would be a totally different matter. He couldn't impose the same fate upon the child. Rudra began to turn, and the baby sensed a second betrayal. This time he went silent and copious large tears started flowing from his newborn eyes. Rudra found His own eyes moist in empathy. He began to pray to a God He did not know; began to converse with an unspoken voice that He longed to hear.

And the thought struck Rudra. "Imagine what would happen to this world if God were to abandon care and feeding of all His creation, leaving them in the wilderness?"

"Now," thought Rudra stoically. "If this God could take care of the entire world, all the creatures and beings in its fold, why couldn't He, Rudra, then take the responsibility of just one child?"

"This is it," He thought resolutely. His mind was suddenly made up. Rudra picked up the baby, wrapped securely in a tiny napkin like a family heirloom, and held him tightly to His chest.

He girded his loins to resume His journey with His new treasure.

Slowly, but much more surely, He started walking to the mountains, once again. He had looked for God. He didn't remember seeing Him, but knew there was a great past association. He 'felt' God in His bones, He could sense His presence in the air, He could imagine God's smile concealed within the mysteries of life. Sometimes the presence was more, at other times less, like an ambivalent signal. But He knew this—someone had to be looking after this whole world; someone had to be running the show.

had to be running the show.

He must have walked for at least two different phases of the day. The sun had started becoming mellow, as though becoming a friendlier co-wayfarer on the journey, when He sighted another village. Relieved to know the baby would not have to travel for very long, Rudra started hastening His pace, taking fresh strides towards the village.

It was then, that He heard the sound of horses' hooves on the ground, galloping from behind Him. Looking back, He could see dust from the ground going up in the air. A few horse-riders were charging His way.

Rudra braced Himself as He shifted the baby to the other side of His chest and stood upright, as though ready to be inspected.

"Hail Brahma!" said one of the riders; his plumed turban suggesting that he was the chief of the party.

"Hail Brahma!" Rudra replied with a smile.

"This baby, where did you find him?"

"By the stream," replied Rudra.

"He belongs to us. We need to take him back home. We must return him to his grandfather," said the turbaned rider.

"Oh, but how do I know he is one of yours?" asked Rudra, tensing Himself a little more, His forearms showing a definitive bulge.

"First *you* tell me... where did you find him?" said the rider in a harsher, authoritative tone.

"I already told you, did I not?" answered Rudra. "I said I found him by the stream."

"The stream is at least a two day walk from here," said the rider. "How can that be true?"

"I walk briskly," replied Rudra. "Now, you tell me, how do you say the baby is one of yours?"

"He is the son of our chief's son, the crown prince. And because our prince is absent, it would be accurate to say that this baby himself is our crown prince," said the rider. "He has the royal emblem tattooed on his left arm."

Rudra gently uncovered the baby's little arm to see a snake, a green king cobra tattooed there. Its eyes were coloured red. Below it, in Devanagari script were written two syllables. Da and Pa.

"You can see the syllables; they convey he is of royal birth. Devputra," said the rider. "Here is the talisman of the Chieftains of our tribe," he said, drawing out a

pendant from a pocket on his heart.

Rudra inspected the pendant. It was in gold, and had the same mesmerising snake with the red eyes, except that this was three dimensional and peered at Him as though alive. Below it, on a small band serving as a nameplate, were etched the same syllables, Da and Pa.

“So where is his father?” asked Rudra. “And why, if he is as precious as you claim, was he left piteously abandoned? Is that the way you welcome your royal family to this world of yours?”

“I must say, for a traveller new to these parts you have a lot of courage to speak to me like this,” said the rider. “Nevertheless, I sense a mysticism about you; a goodness. There is an astute vibe about your intention, and so I shall tell you more than I need to.”

“We are not a tribe of warriors,” He continued. “Our chief is not a king. We are Shamans. We occupy ourselves in the worship of Matrika, the Primal Mother, dedicating our lives to understanding, respecting and participating with Her mysterious ways. We uphold all the life patterns and the weaves that She creates in all the forms of Her creatures. We have been blessed with some Shamanic techniques of reaching the spirit of all creatures, through the spirit of Ma, who is seated at the center of all. These techniques are the accumulations of centuries of Tapas and have been vouchsafed to us by our ancestors. For eight hundred years, we have not left our own surroundings for the city, and have never bothered about mainstream humans. They are too involved with the inert elements of Prakriti, like gold and silver; too involved in decorating themselves with these. They miss the more subtle vibration of the elements of life forms. We seek the quiet repose of knowing the inner self. We have learnt to magnify the inner adornment of the spirit itself.”

Rudra was impressed by the rider’s short speech. But wanting to clear a doubt , He asked “So where is the father of this child? How come he is so careless about his abandoned baby ,when you claim your tribe is so naturally intuitive towards Mother Nature ?”

“It is not him who has abandoned the baby!” shouted the rider. “Our crown prince, on the night that this baby was born, had a dream in which the Matrika spoke to him in the form of the moon. He never told us what She said exactly. But declared that he must leave for the mountains; he had to look for something, and that declaration was enough for us. Now that the baby was here, the tribe would have their crown prince. Our Chieftain is still agile enough to look after

would have then crown prince. Our Chieftain is still agile enough to look after our welfare for a few more years.

‘Hmm’ Rudra prompted.

“About three years ago, we had a stranger who had walked into our village, which is not usual. No one treks these parts of our lands, it only happens once in a blue moon, that someone decides to come this way, like you did,” said the Rider.

“And?”

“And He was almost dying of thirst, having wandered for days on end without any clue as to where he was headed. When we took him in, he was almost dead...”

“Hmm...”

“Our Shaman doctor nursed him back to health with his skillful knowledge of herbs. We took this man in as one of our own; he said he was homeless, that he had been excommunicated from his kingdom on charges of robbery. He swore these charges were false. Our chief believed him and directed us to take him into our care and fold.”

“I see,” said Rudra.

“Our chief never makes a mistake in judging the vibration of a being, and yet with him, he was wrong. Damn Lobhkumar! We should have known he was only interested in cheating us ; that he was, in fact only looking for a chance to get to our heirlooms, and precious treasures, just like a common rogue. I never liked him from the beginning. And it was I, indeed, who caught him red-handed, when, on the night of the full moon worship, he sneaked into the chief’s vault hut, obviously to steal our precious artefacts.”

“This is quite a bizarre story,” remarked Rudra. The Rider looked at Him sternly.

“Oh, don’t get me wrong,” said Rudra. “I am quite intrigued by it, please carry on!”

“Our chief, who should have punished the loathsome Lobhkumar severely for his breach of trust, instead just asked him to leave .

A second excommunication!

None can survive in these parts of the world for long on their own. But Lobhkumar had learnt enough of our gypsy ways.

Enough to live for a few months while he looked for an opportunity to spite us, yet again,” said the Rider angrily.

“Again?” asked Rudra.

“Yes. And it came when we were celebrating the birth of this baby. Grounded as we are, we do have this habit of losing ourselves in celebrations, especially on the moon worship nights. Lobhkumar knew this trait of ours only too well,” said the rider wistfully.

“And he sneaked into the prince’s tent just when the chambermaid went to answer the call of nature. She was gone just for a few breaths and he slipped in, the rascal! He picked up this baby and ran away with him. When the maid came back, she raised an alarm on not finding the baby. That changed our mood of festivity, to one of anger and shock. This scout...” he said, pointing to the rider on his left. “Was quick in seeing the evil Lobhkumar’s track near the tent, and we went on his trail with God speed. But Lobhkumar had taken off the shoes from all our tracking steeds. And that gave him the vital lead he was looking for in his villainous flight. It struck us that he had conveniently ‘borrowed’ Puspakghora, our unicorned horse for his own escape. There was no way we could have matched the Puspakghora’s speed. It took us three days to catch up. That too, because Puspakghora had overthrown the rascal, on finding an opportune moment. Even ordinary horses can sense a bad incumbent on their seat. Puspakghoras are much more mystical, with an even keener sense of vibes...”

“It’s quite amazing, really,” remarked Rudra.

“But unfortunately, this was only after the ungrateful wretch had abandoned the baby to spite us. He did not even allow him his infant belongings and out of sheer venom, took his clothes away, leaving him in a place where he said we would never find him,” said the rider. “But you did find him for us,” he smiled. “So what about Lobhkumar?” asked Rudra. “Did you find him?”

“Yes indeed, we did,” said the rider tersely. “And though I said we are not warriors, we killed him instantly.”

Rudra looked attentively at the rider as he continued. “We are not warriors by nature, but if the need arises we can summon the spirit of fight in our blades.” He looked to his saber, which Rudra now noticed, had been drawn all through the long conversation.

There was an immense air of truth in the words of the Rider.

“Here, you can have him back,” Rudra offered, raising the baby all bundled up carefully towards the rider.

“Thank you,” said the rider sincerely, with a beaming smile as he took the baby in his arms. “This is the difference between a noble intent and a viciously selfish one,” said the rider, his tone turning completely gentle. “For we know only too well, it was the greed of the scoundrel that made him kidnap the baby, so he

could strip him off his ornaments and fine clothing. He just wanted to grab anything of value, before he decamped. Curse be upon his ungrateful soul, not even sparing a baby...”

Even as the rider was completing his exhortation and invectives, suddenly, there was the dull sound of something making contact with the earth, and one of the other riders plonked off his horse to the ground. A rusted arrow tail protruded outwards from his left chest. He had been killed in one lethal strike. Before anyone could even reach him to help, they saw themselves surrounded by a group of heavily armed and vile looking men.

“You killed our mate! Now, prepare to die!!” said the most terrible one among them, as they drew out their swords and hatchets.

“The thugs have arrived!” cried the riders.

The thugs were an ominous band of dacoits who lived in fringe tribes, whose official vocation was to attack and rob hapless travellers of all their belongings, often after mercilessly killing them.

Rudra sighted the nearest thug, and instantly found Himself flying through the air at him. In one deft movement, He had relieved the surprised assailant of his sword. With another simultaneous action, He struck a lethal blow to a thug on His left and in the backward motion, severed the head of the one on His right.

Two more thugs, who now charged at Him, were easily stabbed with the menacing saber, which was oozing blood as if it was coming from within. At this point, the whole bunch of thugs left everything else to attack Rudra.

Rudra was swift in response. His entire body moved with one great synchronicity. He did not know what came over Him.

He was not thinking and doing things; He *became* the doing.

All He could see were the bodies of the thugs flying, hacked into pieces, one by one, without any resistance whatsoever. And the vague realisation that He was the one whose sword was doing the hacking, like a supreme warrior.

It was over within minutes. Everyone stood in visible disbelief.

“You killed them all!” cried the rider. “You are a great warrior!”

“No, I am just...” Rudra did not complete His own sentence.

Looking at the baby securely clasped in the rider’s arms, Rudra said, “I think I will take your leave now. Take care of the baby.”

“Oh, but you cannot go away just yet ! Please do come with us as our honoured guest. You must meet our chief and the mother of this prince. Let us celebrate together, the arrival of this baby, your friend, into this world!”

Rudra acquiesced into a smile. He suddenly realised how tired He was, and He felt the hurt in His tensed muscles just then, nudging Him like a gentle reminder that they could do with some relaxation.

“Yes. Thank you. I think I will accept your kind offer.”

“Follow us,” said the rider with a smile. “Give Him your horse!” he commanded one of his men. “ And you take the horse of one of the thugs. Get all the horses home, they all belong to us now and will be under our care.”

A SHAMAN MAGIC

The village lighting reminded Him of the festivities at the time of His own birth. The Chieftain, grandfather of the baby, reminded Him of His own father, Brahma. The turbaned rider, now seated on His left as they watched the performances reminded Him so much of His own magi, Shamshan Nath. Even as He was remembering him, the rider offered “Have this drink, a toast. Long live the prince!”

“What is it?” asked Rudra, even as He raised the goblet with the intent to finish the content.

“Oh, just a little something Matrika gifted us! It is a time-tested intoxicant. Long live the tribe of the red-eyed Shamanags!”

“Shamanags?” asked Rudra

“Oh, we are the ancient Shamans, the Matrika men, but we are also great cousins of the Nagas,” said the rider.

“I see. Long live indeed,” said Rudra. “And to you, my friend,” He said, clinking His goblet with the rider. “And to you, my friend,” He winked at the baby. He finished the whole content in one go as He had already willed. “This is delicious,” He said. “What is it?”

“Soma, my dear,” said the rider. “A drink of the Gods. But be careful, we humans don’t have the capacity to digest its magic.”

“What magic?” asked Rudra, helping Himself to another glassful.

“What magic?” The words started echoing in His mind. Magic magic magic...

The performers started smiling, whizzing past Him. Were they upside down or was He imagining things? There was a very pleasing perfume in the air, and He could taste some nectar in the moist and gentle wind, as though it was serving Him the Soma. He could sense a form of a veiled server. It was a woman. Was *She* the one in His dreams? This was insane. But it was great fun. There was a ‘spiked up’ feeling in the Soma. Pleasingly tingly.

It was a first time for Rudra, but it seemed He had always known this feeling. He got up to reach out for the veiled woman. “Who are you?” He fumbled. She giggled and flitted away, just like in His dreams, just like a tease. “Wait! Wait,

where are you going? Who are you?" He cried, even as she completely disappeared. "Who was she?" He turned to ask the rider. But the rider was not there. Shamshan Nath was seated in his place, flashing his gold teeth at Rudra. Suddenly the rider was Shamshan Nath, the Chieftain was Brahma and the baby, was He, Rudra Himself.

"He is awake, pass the antidote," He heard the unclear words waft by.

It was the rider again, with his turban looking starched and fresh.

"Where am I? What happened? Where is Shamshan Nath? Brahma? And the mystery girl?" asked Rudra.

"All the mystery, Shamshan and Brahma were in the Soma you gulped without heeding my warning, dear one!" said the rider with a wink. "Soma is not easily digested by humans, especially the young like yourself."

"You mean, I was hallucinating?" asked Rudra.

"Well, yes and no."

"Yes, because what you saw is what you wanted to see. It wasn't real in our place and time. And no, because..."

"Yes *and* no?" asked Rudra

"Our ancestors told us, this is the very gift of Matrika; in Her bosom there is no such thing as time or place. She may weave whatever your mind can conceive. And therefore, whatever it is that your mind conceived with the Soma, somewhere, in the bosom of Matrika, it is a truth, not hallucination. Besides, we are all one living consciousness. Even the sinful Lobhkumar."

Rudra nodded to convey that He understood. Actually He was more intrigued than ever before. His head was still spinning from the drink, the festivities, and more than anything else, His amazing visions. Visions that ended separations between one character and another; between one time and another, one land and another. Visions, which showed Him that what we perceived with our senses was just that: a perception.

In reality, 'Everything' was just one big mass of energy playing with itself. This vital lesson of a perfect non-duality was etching itself in His mind, and strangely, also in His heart. But here He was, Rudra again, and it was the Rider who was peering at Him, not Shamshan Nath.

"I really must take your leave and continue on my journey to the mountains, which is what I set out for," Rudra managed to utter.

“What did you set out for?” asked the rider.

“I told you, the mountains,” said Rudra.

“No, I mean, what did you set out for in the mountains?” asked the rider.

“I don’t know, really,” replied Rudra, suddenly feeling like both the baby and the wretched Lobhkumar: Neither knew where they were headed, or why. As He had seen already, there was a bit of all in Him; the baby, the shaman, the king, even the directionless robber and the magical unicorn puspakghora. Was the soma trance still in effect? It all felt so surreal. But also, it gave a mysterious thrill—the mix of not knowing what was going on, and yet knowing it was some kind of play of that undivided energy.

“There is this image I have had for a long time...” He replied.

“A girl?” asked the rider.

“Yes! How did you know?” queried Rudra.

“Oh, it’s always about a girl,” said the rider. “We are men too,” he added with a smile.

“Yes, but I don’t even know what She looks like, let alone Her name. I just know that She *Is*.

“Sati,” said the rider.

“What did you say?” asked Rudra.

“Sati. It means one who is,” said the rider. “It is another one of Matrika’s wisdoms. To understand that consciousness just *is*. And it is forever. This is the state of Sat, Truth. The knowing of this state is Sati, the True.”

“What you say is going above me,” said Rudra. “But yes, it feels good to hear. I must go now. Our friend, the Sun seems to be in as aggressive a mood as yesterday. Only that today I might not encounter such a charming rider as yourself,” Rudra smiled.

“Yes,” said the rider. “All good things come to an end, only to happen once again. You have passed us many times my friend, but like the wind, you are unmindful of who you touched along the way, even though for them, it becomes the culmination of their life.”

Rudra was startled at the overwhelming emotion in the rider’s voice. It was as if he knew something Rudra did not. “Take this little tiffin and flask with you, Rudra,” said the rider. “A little rice for the way. And the flask has water,” he laughed. “No more Soma for you, you’ve done enough for a week!”

“For a lifetime,” laughed Rudra.

“You have no idea what your lifetime is, my friend,” replied the rider. “Are you

... ..

still dizzy?’”

“Yes,” Rudra conceded.

“Is there a ringing sensation in your ears?” asked the rider.

“Yes! Yes, there is,” said Rudra. “How do you know?”

“Let me help you with this,” said the rider, and lunged forward towards Rudra, quickly catching each of Rudra’s ears between the forefingers and thumbs of his own hands. He proceeded to pinch them in a firm, but skilled way.

“What are you doing?” Rudra began, but then stopped. The tingling sensation had given way to a calming and consistent buzz.

“Does it feel good?” asked the rider.

“Yes, it’s so pleasant,” said Rudra. “It’s almost as though someone is gently chanting into my ears. I can hear a word...it is OM.”

“Enjoy it,” said the rider, as he gently removed his fingers.

“What is this, another Shaman technique?” asked Rudra, laughingly.

“Yes, it is. The nerve centers of the ears don’t just hear things; they balance them. Balance is in the ears, my friend. Not in the feet,” he smiled. “In fact, we even pierce the ears to keep these Nadis in perpetual balance.” Rudra noticed that the rider, masculine as he was, was wearing earrings. And remembered that He had taken off His own a few years ago when He left Brahma’s palace for the forest.

“Shall we ask our artisan to make a set for you, a small token of our gratitude?” asked the rider.

“Will that be possible?” asked Rudra.

“Of course, but you do realise you will have to get your ears pierced.”

“Of course,” said Rudra.

“And, the earrings have to be of gold,” said the rider.

“But I don’t like gold,” Rudra protested.

“I know,” replied the rider. But gold is a must. The element that gets to reside in those earlobes of yours, in order to help balance things, must itself be already in a state of perfect balance. And, of all elements, Nature has accorded this to gold.”

“So be it,” said Rudra. “But can I give my own design?” He asked, seeing that the rider’s earrings were perfectly rounded, and which reminded Him of the earrings women wore. “To be honest, yours look a little effeminate.”

“Ha Ha Ha! You forget we are the Matrika men. But you are a Purusa.”

“Aren’t you Purusa, too?” asked Rudra laughingly.

“We are, but you are Purusa as in masculine soul.”

“Aren’t you that, too?”

“There is only one Masculine soul. The rest are all Matrika,” replied the rider.

There is only one masculine soul. The rest are all maatras," replied the rider.

"What about all the men, the warriors, the devatas?" asked Rudra.

"You are talking bodies, I am talking souls."

"Do souls have a gender?"

"No."

"Then?"

"You will find out what I mean," said the rider. "Let's get back to the earrings shall we? Ours are called Nanti. I'm a little curious, what design do you want?" he asked.

"I want them to be tapered," said Rudra. "Thin at the top and spread out at their bases, like the crescent moon," replied Rudra dreamily.

"Wonderful!" said the rider. "So shall it be! And we can call them Rudra Nanti!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, that way our names will be linked," smiled Rudra.

Within an hour the artisan had dexterously carved out the finest pair of earrings from the purest gold sanctioned from the Shamanic treasury.

In that time, the Shaman doctor had already pierced Rudra's ears.

"That didn't hurt at all," said Rudra. "What ointment did you apply before making the incision?" He asked. Both the doctor and the rider burst into laughter.

"What's so funny?" asked Rudra.

"You won't guess," they said. "Never mind, we will share our little secret: it was the remnant of some of the Soma you drank last night."

"The Soma?" Rudra exclaimed.

"Yes, Soma has the quality of an antiseptic and we use it for this purpose and also for major medical purposes."

"What if you run short of the Soma?" asked Rudra.

"Then we have Bhang," they said.

"What's Bhang?" asked Rudra.

"Oh, so you have forgotten?" said the rider. "After you had two goblets of Soma, you drank a whole pitcher of Bhang," he chuckled. "That's when the guards of the shamanic residences said of you that you must be a formidable warrior."

"Anyways, while Soma is a nectar begotten from the placid lakes in Kailash, that too on the solstice when the old Gods dance, Bhang, on the other hand is a plant that grows here happily on its own throughout the year," the rider explained.

Rudra remembered the curious looking hand shaped leaves He had seen at the end of the forest.

"You do seem to have a great knowledge of all these things," said Rudra.

"And it has been a great learning. Tell me. do we know each other from

somewhere?” asked Rudra. “Have we met before?”

“Maybe...” said the rider ambivalently. “It depends on your consciousness,” he smiled. And Rudra found Himself smiling in great resonance. It was a moment of Oneness.

“You do seem to have a great knowledge of all these things,” repeated Rudra, as He came out of a small Samadhi. “But I shall finally take leave now,” He said.

“Yes. From here, Puspakghora will take you to the very base of Kailash. From there on, you are on your own,” the rider said.

Rudra noticed that the artisan had quickly replicated another pair of earrings, which he handed to the rider. The rider took off his old ones and in a deft action, put on the new ones.

“Aha, I see you are copying my design!” laughed Rudra.

“Not just I, the whole Shamanic tribe shall hitherto wear Rudranantis designed by our great mystic friend, Himself!,” said the rider.

“I am truly flattered,” said Rudra as He sat erect on Puspakghora. “Thanks for everything. Farewell.”

“Fare thee well, my friend,” said the rider. “Till we meet again. We will surely meet again, but for now, it is time for you to meet some of your old friends,” he added, even as Rudra turned and sped away.

Perhaps Rudra did not hear him, which was just as well, because not knowing it made the meetings with old friends remain new.

KAILASH

Rudra absolutely loved the crisp air of Kailash.

There was a very pleasing aroma in the air always, which Rudra thought, “was the smell of freshness itself.”

There was no sense of time; only the golden sunrise and sunset would indicate dawn and dusk.

He loved all the birds and beasts that came to visit the mountains from the forests at their baseline. They were in absolute contrast to the people He had known in the city. Always natural, always spontaneous, always unabashed in their play, unlike the contrived displays in speech and gestures in the mannerisms of society. These beasts were exactly the kind of beings that would be termed ‘Uncouth’, He thought to Himself, but smiled because His own spirit resonated with them. “This is the way to be; in the lap of Nature itself, where one is natural,” He thought.

He loved observing the little birds as they walked up to Him, foot by dainty foot, and peered at Him with their slanted necks.

“Hello! I hope I meet with your approval,” He said many times, and thought that the birds fluffing their feathers into a coat at their necks, meant some kind of affirmation.

The animals were very few, wild, beautiful and tenacious. Thinner, but much stronger than their cousins back in the forest, they shared the same quality of being unintrusive. It was here in their midst, atop snowy rocks that Rudra decided to meditate for hours each morning. They too, watched Him with widened eyes just like the forest friends. Sometimes it seemed they were just highly attained rishis in disguise! Which was quite plausible, because the genuine rishis were always stalked by the mundane kings to fulfill their greedy desires, by some kind of magic. For hundreds of years, the rishis who were most articulate in their knowledge of spirituality, eloquent in their speech of the highest divinity, had failed, when it came to the kings. They had never been able to make the kings understand the absurdity of their wishes. Who would go to the mountains to find magic, only to come back and use it for city gains?

And like the rishis, it was here that Rudra realised that all the treasures one wanted, all the riches of the world, were within one's own spirit, and needed just a little prodding to manifest themselves into a pure joy. Could this realisation have come in the cities? Indeed, yes, because divinity was omnipresent, so too, self-realisation could have happened anywhere. But the mountain solace seemed to greatly hasten the process.



TOUGHIANS

Sometimes, Rudra would go down to the greenlands between the mountains and the forest, where some really large animals lazed for hours on end. He loved it when even these animals, ‘the big boys’, were friendly. The oxen, in particular were huge and very strong, but whenever Rudra looked into their eyes, He would sense, a gentleness. “This is the way to be,” He thought again. “Gentle at heart no matter how strong you are.” One day, He wondered how much they weighed, and if He could actually lift one of them up. Closing up to a really huge ox, He gently put His hands below the ox’s stomach, and started to lift him in the air. He managed to lift him till His own waist, and then slowly dropped him back on the grass. The ox, in turn bowed his head and rammed himself into Rudra, albeit gently, sending Him rolling on the grass.

Rudra understood this was in play, and sure enough, in the days that followed, this game of affection and strength testing became a routine.

One day, as He saw the herd of oxen approaching the greenlands, He noticed a head above the rest, almost as if a man were walking erect. It was a strange sight. This thing, it *was* like a man; it had the body of a man, but it was built like a bull. The chest must have easily been among the largest that Rudra had ever seen. When the humongous creature came right next to Him and thrust its face forward, Rudra noted that it did certainly have the face of a bull. There were two magnificent horns on the robust head. The bull smiled, displaying pearly white teeth. But what shocked Rudra almost out of His skin was when He heard “Namaste Rudra.” The bull actually spoke to Him! It was His first encounter with a Minotaur.

“You speak?” Rudra uttered, feeling somewhat silly for asking the obvious, only to reconfirm it. He actually couldn’t believe what He had heard.

“Yes, I learnt your language, my Lord,” replied the Minotaur.

“My Lord? You know me? We know each other?” asked Rudra.

“I know of you, and I have always wanted to know you, and be with you as my Lord,” replied the Minotaur.

“And why is that?” asked Rudra.

“Because I want the best for myself,” replied the Minotaur, flexing his chest to its enormous fullest. “I want to be the best friend of the best Being in the cosmos, nothing less. For I am Nandi,” He thundered. “Nandi, the strongest Minotaur that has ever been, will ever be, and I, Nandi, will serve only the greatest Lord as my Master and best friend.”

“Oh well, I am flattered,” replied Rudra. “But I am nobody’s master, I am by myself here, and all these are my friends.”

“Hahaha! You joke well!” thundered Nandi. “You *are* the Master of the world, and you are my best friend, and no one gets to you without getting by me, from now!”

“Why should anyone not get to me?” said Rudra irritably. “Why would I need you?”

“Perhaps you are the one new here, perhaps you do not know that beings, even some animals, can be malafide, and I need to be your guard, now and for ever,” replied Nandi stubbornly.

“You will guard me from who, exactly?” asked Rudra bemused.

“Not who, but what,” replied Nandi.

“Alright,” Rudra was intrigued. “From what?”

“Evil intent,” replied Nandi. “And loneliness,” he added softening his voice.

“Lonely? Why would I be lonely?” asked Rudra, looking at the rest of the oxen.

“Because anything is possible to anyone. We do not always remain with the herd,” said Nandi. “We have to be strong at heart, no matter how gentle we are,” he added mysteriously.

Rudra was amazed at the insight of the humongous Minotaur.

He had only learnt one part about the denizens. *Gentle at heart no matter how strong*. But here was Nandi teaching Him the rest of the wisdom... *strong at heart, no matter how gentle*.

“Alright then,” He said, punching at Nandi’s chest in affection. “We are friends from now on.”

“Forever?” smiled Nandi.

“Promise,” said Rudra, this time holding His hand in the air for Nandi to hold in a gesture of friendship. As Nandi clasped His hand back, Rudra could feel an immense power, a live current, as if bonding itself was animated into life. The friendship was to go on to become a camaraderie that would be celestially famous.

“You are one tough chap, aren’t you?” smiled Rudra

“Yes, Master, I am a toughian,” said Nandi, flexing his chest again.

Rudra laughed at the vocabulary of the beast. He thought it was most unbeastly and innocently childlike. He smiled at Nandi’s flexing act, not missing the fact that Nandi followed into an immediate expansion of whatever Rudra said to him. So it was that Rudra began to spend His days in happiness and in joy, in fun and games with His forest family, and mornings of deep reposes of meditation in the heavenly mountains.

He had virtually all the self-containment that anybody could ask for. It was as if He had made the beasts and birds His family.

Over time, some more beings, who were different from humans, and from the other beasts as well, started joining in, creating an even more extended family. The word had spread that Rudra never asked anyone their antecedents, never questioned their strange appearance; it was enough for Him that someone wanted to be part of His family.

“We *are* one big family,” He would tell His friends.

“Ah, but we are different,” they would say. “Look we have three eyes, or then two noses, some of us limp or then stammer; our breath is called foul by others, we are different.”

“Everyone is beautiful,” He would re-assure them. “You all have your own beauty! You don’t have to have two eyes just because we have two; you could have three, because you see more!”

“Oh, but we are told you also have a third eye,” the beasts would smile coyly and hug Him. He was so understanding, so empathetic, and so humane.

Then again, at times, insecure with their own appearance, they would ask sincerely, “What are we, really? Are we from other planets; are we from some other time? Why are we so different? What are our origins and our purpose?”

“You are the Elementals,” He said.

“Elementals?”

“Ultimately we are all elements. Some of us are formed distinctively into humans, lions, tigers, the oxen, but ultimately we are all from the elements, aren’t we?”

So you are beautiful in your own way, with features that mark you out. You *are* different, but goodly different; some of the most beautiful are unlike any other, aren’t they?” He said, looking at Nandi, who beamed and swashed his tail in the air like a saber.

“So,” He continued gently, “you, are simply, the elementals.”



THE MYSTERIOUS BEAUTY

Life went on harmoniously, easily, peacefully, with no worries.

One thing nagged Him, however : He never got to the mystery of the woman. She appeared daily, without fail, at the end of each meditation. So much so, He had come to know Her as the end of all things. And yet, as the rider had said, She was 'Isness'. Sati. She who 'Is'.

But She never manifested even once outside the meditations. It was as if She was building up a tremendous amount of energy all this while; taking Her time to explode into a magnificent manifestation. One, that the whole universe would never have seen before. That is what Rudra started wanting: For Sati to actually manifest.

When the want becomes so much, it happens. One day, She came in His meditation and even as He stared at Her, She returned the stare with an enchanting smile. She didn't flit away, like always. Rudra edged His way towards Her, like a man might do in a desert, on His knees, edging towards the water that will give life. His movement resembled that of an inebriated man. He had been meditating ceaselessly for seven nights and the result was that even in His thoughts, He was staggering.

"Who are you?" He finally asked.

"I am you, Rudra," She said. "But to make things simpler, I am Sati."

"I love you," Rudra uttered, surprising even Himself. "I have been dreaming of you even though we have never met. How do you know my name?"

"I love you too, Rudra. You say we have never met. The truth is, we have never been apart. Ever."

"This is going totally over me," said Rudra. "What are you saying?"

"I am your eternal wife, your love, and as you say so many times-your life," said

Sati. "But you will remember all this only when you are Shiva again, Rudra."
"Shiva?"

"Try to go back to the future, my Lord, where I await you and where we are always."

"Where we are always? Where am I?" asked Rudra. "This is Kailash, is it not?"

"Yes, it is. We never left. But you need to go look into the future.

Be Shiva, Rudra," said Sati enigmatically.

Shiva!! On Sati's saying of the name, a tinkling of bells began, joined by chimes from across the snowy vales, growing into a crescendo. It seemed also that visually, the mountains became surreal, suddenly reflecting each other on their snowy chests.

Or, had that been happening all this while with the sun's rays, which were now glowing brightly into noon?

Sati started becoming larger than all the images towering over the mountains. Towering over all, almost covering the entire landscape in a panorama, and yet, She was sliding away into the background. Rudra felt a fear that He would lose Her. Uncomfortable as it was, there was something very familiar about it. He had known this fear from a long time ago. What kind of uneasy déjà vu was this?"

He began to swoon.



SHIVA:THE TIME TRAVELLER

When He awoke, Rudra was Rudra no longer. He was Shiva. Not just Shiva, the ethereal mass of energy, but Shiva, the able bodied yogi, in sooth. It was like He had exited a mega trance. Sati was nowhere in sight. But suddenly, Shiva knew who He was. He had travelled back and forth in time, and ‘seen’ all there was to see about His own genesis. He had seen Himself as Shiva even in a previous life cycle, where Brahma worshipped Him and asked Him to become His son, Rudra. He had seen Shamshan Nath, and the arrangement of being born in this life cycle. Most importantly, He had seen Himself together with Parvati already, much before Shamshan Nath or Brahma, or any other person was even born. He had seen that the whole world was their creation.

He had understood that the ‘forgetfulness’ of His own eternal Self was a magical ploy only to enjoy an apparent transcience.

He now finally understood, how *being omniscient did not mean knowing every event that was going to happen, but to know deep within, that He, was eternal and boundless.*

He was Shiva again, the timeless meditator on the mountaintops. And as always, this was Kailash.

The tinkling of the bells became louder. As surely as He knew He was Shiva, He also knew why the bells tinkled.

Somewhere, a thousand miles away, Sati was being born in the palace of Prajapati Daksha.

He would come to Earth as Brahma’s son Rudra; and *in turn, Brahma would also pave the way for Sati, to be Shiva’s wife on Prithviloka.*

Shiva smiled at the unfolding of His own play. True, He loved the wide-eyed deer who were His constant companions as Pasupati Rudra. But He longed to be Pasupati Nath, the husband of Sati.

The bells tinkled once more.

BRAHMA'S WONDER: A WORLD FULL OF WATER

When Brahma first put His mind to creation, all He could think of, was water. Perhaps, because Shiva's love for water was etched deep in His memory, or perhaps, being the very first of all creation, He was very aquarian in outlook. He created a vast ocean, in the semblance of the ether that He had rested in, before Shiva and Shakti manifested him as Brahma and then ordered him to go forth and, in turn, manifest a whole world. The ocean of the world was imaged intelligently by Brahma in the reflection of the Om Vyom ether that preceded this actual world made by him. It was a befitting tribute to his own source.

"It is good," He said to Himself, as He saw the huge ocean all around Him. Then in glee, He began to create creatures that swam about hastily in these waters.

"It is good," He said to Himself. "All is good."

But the creatures were born with a hunger. "And what should we eat?" they asked Him. Brahma had not thought of that. If any creature had to eat, what would it eat, other than another creature? What was this thing called hunger? No one knew how to describe it, but they all felt it, and sure enough they all began to eat each other. Size became a determining factor: the large ate up the small. And so it went on; those who ate became larger, and went on eating to satiate their growing appetite. It was indeed a vicious circle, which began right from the beginning. Brahma looked helplessly at this scene of macabre greed and division, of selfishness and brutality, of ignorance!

"You are siblings," He thought. "You are all born from me." He sank down with the vague knowing that somehow, it was his own ignorance that had caused this primal ignorance among the creatures He created. All He had wanted was harmony, goodness. And this... this was the beginning of sibling rivalry.

To eat your 'own kind' for survival. How gross was that! He had been ignorant of the basic instinct of creatures, which existed even from when they were first created, right from their very birth.

Wistfully, He wondered if there had been a creation before this; a creation from which these creatures carried forward these deadly instincts.

One creature in particular became huge by eating up dozens of others. He looked monstrous, not at all like what Brahma had originally designed. Looking

greedily at Brahma, he said,

“What else can I eat? In this watery creation of yours, all the smaller creatures are already in my belly.”

“Hold on, let me think,” said Brahma, feeling a little uneasy. It was the kind of fear one gets when he ‘makes’ an accident.

“I cannot hold on,” replied the monster. “I think I shall eat you,” he said menacingly and started coming towards Brahma. This was a mess! Brahma started swimming for His life across the ocean; how vast it suddenly seemed. How terrible the meaning of Infinite had become. And there was no shore.

Brahma hadn’t even had the chance to create one as yet.

He prayed fervently. Finding a word in his own frightened heart slipping onto his tongue... Shiva, SHIVA!!

Brahma had to swim for at least a hundred years before Shiva actually heard Him and arrived at the scene for His rescue. But it wasn’t as if Shiva had become less kind. Both Brahma and Shiva did not take into account the cosmic gravitational lag that occurs when any new creation is made. After arriving on Prithviloka, Brahma had taken a few hundred years to create the oceans. But such was the gravitational shift, that in the timeline of Shiva Shakti, it had only been a moment since that Brahma had made His first creation, and in just the next moment, He was running away from it all; swimming hopelessly for His own life, barely managing to murmur a divine S.O.S to Shiva.

Ever so gently, as one might tenderly cup a little fish from a bowl before changing the water, did Shiva retrieve Brahma out from the ocean.

As He placed Him on the ground near His lap, Brahma saw that He was finally ashore.

“Thank you, my Lord,” Brahma did not forget His etiquette, and suddenly, not just gratitude but also the meaning of loving one’s life became clear to Him.

“What happened?” asked Shiva.

“Didn’t you see?” Brahma asked. “These creatures I made, my mind-born children, wanted to eat me for their own survival, the ungrateful wretches.”

“It happened a bit too fast,” said Shiva. “I forgot to change my time to match yours, and as a result, you had to struggle for much longer than what I realised.”

“Oh, my God! It was an endless despair!” said Brahma.

“I am sorry again,” said Shiva. “I was just having a little chat with Parvati and barely took my eyes off you for a moment. Time is the best teacher of relativity.”

“But I had no idea that I was in a time zone!” said Brahma.

“Would you like a cup of herbal tea?” asked Shiva.

“Herbal tea? What’s that?” asked Brahma.

“Oh, something which though is warm, cools you down,” replied Shiva.

In the distance, Brahma saw Parvati throw some black seeds on the ground. In a matter of moments, a lush green leaf sprouted out and which then magically grew into a whole bush. Parvati selectively plucked off a few leaves with an ease which showed this was not the first time She was going to make this tea. She then started boiling the leaves in a vessel on a fire She had just lit. An enticing aroma filled the air. Brahma felt a peculiar sense of calm already.

“Come on, try some,” said Shiva as He handed Him a mug.

Brahma took a deep swig and almost burning His lips, said, “This is amazing! Heavenly!”

“Sip the tea, Brahma, don’t rush drinking it,” said Shiva. “If you really want to savour the essence.”

And then, seeing that Brahma rather obediently started sipping instead of gulping, Shiva asked, “Want to try creating all over again?”

Brahma was quiet.

“It’s alright Brahma,” said Shiva. “There’s always a first time to do things; who knows that better than you! But then, there’s always a second time, as you deserve to know!” He winked at Brahma. It was a clincher: the wink made Brahma feel that all was in fun, all a great team play.

“If you shall guide me and be by my side, I will try again,” said Brahma.

“I am always by your side, Brahma,” said Shiva with an overwhelmingly passionate tone of love. “You don’t require much guidance, just remember to sip your tea,” He winked again.

That became a lesson to Brahma on creation; how to enjoy the tea you make, how to savour its essence, sip by impassioned sip.

He looked skyward then at the ground that Shiva had placed Him on, and then with a formidably determined look, He started walking towards the ocean He had made.

Brahma suddenly understood His role as a cosmic tea maker.

The world was His teacup.

THE STORYTELLING SAGE

“Wait a minute, Gurudeva! So who really was the father? Was Brahma the father of Shiva, or was Shiva the father of Brahma?” asked a perplexed Shaunaka.

“Haha!” laughed Suta. “Shiva is the father of Brahma. But when Brahma created the whole world, then Shiva entered it as Rudra, His son. That way, the Universal Father got Himself a father.”

“I see, just as the universal teacher got himself a teacher in Shamshan Nath,” said Shaunaka.

“Yes. Just like that,” said Suta.

“And so the mystic circle is complete. I see.”

“Yes. So the mystic circle is complete,” Suta smiled at his student.

BEGIN WITH A HEAD

“A world swarming with creatures must have a head creature who organises them, guides them and disciplines them,” thought Brahma. “I must begin with that head, who shall owe total allegiance to me, and all the creatures shall owe theirs to him. Ah, that should be perfect! Now if the creatures are Praja, the constituents of a group, so too their chief will be Prajapati, the Lord of the Praja. There was a certain haughtiness and arrogance in Brahma’s mind about the authority of a head, and immediately He manifested a handsome and very arrogant looking man.

“You shall be Daksha, my mind-born son,” announced Brahma to the virile looking youth who now stood in front of Him, like a product in front of its assembler, ready for a final inspection before despatch into the journey of the marketplace.

“What shall my role be?” asked Daksha, the new born.

“You are destined to be a chief, a Prajapati,” answered Brahma.

“What is Praja?” asked Daksha.

“It is the tribe of your own kin, all who shall follow you,” said Brahma with a gleam in His eye.

Daksha heard the words ‘shall follow you’, more than the words ‘tribe of your own kin’. He beamed.

“So where is the Praja?” he asked.

“I am just making them for you,” said Brahma. “I had to begin with you first,” He said.

“Ah,” Daksha beamed again.

Brahma secretly smiled to Himself at His prowess in sipping the tea, and his newfound wisdom in handling things.

“Begin with the best first,” said Daksha arrogantly as he looked at his own image in the shallow of the ocean. “That should be right. And what is my relationship with you? Am I your chief, too? Or are you my chief?”

“Why, I am your father, Daksha!” said Brahma. “You are my first-born son!” Daksha liked the sound of the word ‘first-born’. It was something that would be etched in his memory for all his life, and guide his every move, his every thought thereafter. It made him more arrogant than before.

mood thereafter. It made him more arrogant than before.

Daksha had a very authoritative appearance right from the beginning. He was born a youth, not a child. He had the arrogance of an adolescent. One who knows that his beauty and charm have just blossomed; one who is aware of his magnetism and uses it to serve self-interest. One who considers himself a leader, and yet, paradoxically thinks that the leader is all that matters.

He had sharp eyes that pierced whatever they stared at, with such a force, that Brahma himself faltered for a moment while designing his nose, and left a hook in its shape.

“Oh, I am sorry,” said Brahma. “Let me re-do your nose.”

“Leave it as it is,” replied Daksha, haughtily. “It is rather distinguished, don’t you think?” he said, once again basking in his own reflection in the water, proud with his self acclaimed good looks. He was quite in love with himself.

“It shall be the mark of a leader,” he concluded.

“Ah, yes!” mumbled Brahma. “You are the leader of all my progeny, indeed.”

“Father, shall I rule over all the beings you create? Not just the humans?” asked Daksha ambitiously.

“The human race shall be the most intelligent of all,” said Brahma with a strangely visionary expression on His face. “It shall have dominion over all the rest because of the mind I give it from my own mind; and you, Daksha, shall be the code setter, the law maker, the disciplinarian of the humans. By logic, therefore you shall be the ruler of all,” declared Brahma rather pompously.

“Yes!” said Daksha, in a monosyllable that conveyed both pleasure and superiority.

Impatiently, he waited for his Praja as Brahma got on with the job.

Brahma began with fish: first the smaller ones, who were given time to explore the depths of the ocean. While they did so, Brahma sipped at the cosmic tea again, this time with the knowing of a real patriarch. Once the small fish found their crevices in the corals and made their homes in secret underwater caverns, only then the bigger fish, and the deviant amphibians were made.

As a result, this time, even though the large fish, like sharks and whales, were brought into the gambit of the production line, the harmonic balance stayed in the seas, not throwing up any more tumultuous waves. Brahma smiled again, and sipped more tea. Daksha was getting increasingly impatient.

“When are we going to create the humans, who shall be my own tribe?” he asked.

“You, Prajapati, have to wait for the humans. First, let me get on with the other species. Yours is to be the most evolved species on Prithviloka; you are to be the best of creation, and you always have to wait for the best, my son.”

Daksha beamed at the thought of being the best, being at the top of all creatures.

USAS, AT THE DAWN OF LIFE

But unknown even to Daksha, there *was* one person who preceded him in the creation of Brahma. Before Brahma even considered making a son, He made a woman. He had taken time to examine Himself carefully, and His amazing mind thought of making something similar and yet different. He thought of the word ‘companion’.

He had been looking at the form of Parvati very intently when She was scattering tea seeds and later making tea for Him. Parvati was a feminine entity, She was the alter ego, the better half of Shiva; She was His very power, Shakti. But She was not yet manifest on Prithviloka as a woman, just as Shiva was not yet a man. They were Gods, they had no human form; when Brahma saw them, they were ethereal masses of energy.

But the ethereal semblance of Shakti had made Him think differently. Yes, He would create a companion for Himself, just like Shiva had, and She would be called a Woman.

Brahma giggled with delight at the primal prospect He was thinking for Himself. He and His companion would make the first pair of the world, modelled after Shiva Parvati, who preceded the world of this life cycle; the world that Brahma was about to create. So it was that at the very beginning of creation, Brahma took time to create His most beautiful creation: Radiance, the beginning of all life itself.

She was the first; she made her appearance first, before all things else. It would be she who would roll out all of Brahma’s creation.

And as she heralded the first day of creation, He said to her lovingly, “You are Usas, the Dawn.” Apart from making her the primeval radiance, He also gave her the form of a woman’s body.

Now, while Daksha was busy watching the production and manifestation of his tribe, Brahma’s thoughts wandered to the beauty He had already created.

Quietly, He walked away from the scene into the horizon, where Usas glowed magnificently.

“You are beautiful,” He said to Usas. “I have created a wonder worthy of myself! Come, let us fall into embrace,” said Brahma.

But Usas was shy. “I do not know what embrace is,” she said. “I just alight from

But Usas was shy. I do not know what embrace is, she said. I just aught from the sky and head softly to the ground.”

“Embrace is to be together as one,” said Brahma excitedly, as He approached her.

“You are my own extension, come let us be one.”

But Usas was embarrassed and began to run away.

“Do not flee!” cried Brahma as He started to run after her.

She turned into a doe, to acquire nimble legs for a swifter escape. But He turned into a deer, and followed.

She became a mare and went into a gallop.

He became a splendid stallion and kept up the chase.

She then turned into a lioness and growled at Him.

But He became a lion and only roared back in expectant laughter, as He grasped her fondly in His powerfully inescapable forearms.

In each grasp and embrace a thousand offspring were born.

“You are Shatrupa, of a hundred beautiful forms,” said Brahma excitedly and ever so fondly. And Usas smiled radiantly again.

Such was the loveplay of Brahma and Usas. It lasted till dusk and Brahma turned to her and said lovingly, “You, Shatrupa, are Usas, the dawn of life, and yet you are also Sandhya, the dusk.”

THE STORYTELLING SAGE

“Thus too, some said the magical Usas, at dawn radiated the beginning of day, and at dusk became Sandhya. Usas was the birth of day, a day of Brahma’s life,” said Suta.

“But Gurudeva, wasn’t Saraswati the consort of Brahma?” asked Shaunaka.

“Yes, She was,” answered Suta.

“So then, what was the relationship of Usas with Brahma?” asked Shaunaka.

“Usas was the primal creation of Brahma. The celestial seed of time itself on earth, radiant as the dawn. But Brahma gave her a female entity also, to let earth have progeny.”

“Oh, so Saraswati was Brahma’s consort, whilst Usas was His primal conception of time and life?”

“That is correct,” said Suta. “Saraswati came to earth to become Brahma’s consort after the birth of the world, after Usas had already ushered in the first dawn.”

SOCIETY

Due to the cosmic gravitational lag and time parallax, Brahma's day meant a few thousand years of His creatures', and so, all life was accomplished on the first day of Brahma's creation.

It may have been a mistake to hide the making of Usas from Daksha.

All the while when Brahma was playing out His love games with her, Daksha's tribe had been created, and they had even established themselves in a stoic society. Society was the first entity that came into being, even though Brahma did not create it. It was a rather funny thing; a getting together of things created, to create in turn an entity that had no individuality of its own, yet had a formidable effect on the very individuals it comprised of. Whatever it may have set out to be, whatever its goals, if society had to be described in one word, it was *opinionated*.

It killed individual growth, and no one could raise the voice of reason above whatever it would declare as a verdict in any given situation. It was this society that saw Brahma's eloping with Usas as a sin, and shouted judgmentally "He has committed incest." Daksha, though aghast at the pronouncement against the character of his father, found himself unable to veto the Praja he commanded.

It was Brahma's first lesson about numbers. Might, was right.

"He is not worthy as a God," they continued. "We shall not offer Him prayer.

Let us propitiate the great Lord Vishnu to maintain our lives, and let us propitiate God Shiva to destroy this Brahma. His role is over anyway."

Such was the disloyal worldliness of society; it would immediately dump anything that it felt no longer served its purpose.

"Do away with Him!" the cries became even louder.

Brahma felt the same sinking fear, as when His own first creation was ready to eat Him. However this time, Shiva's words came to His mind. "Remember to sip your tea."

No sooner had He thought of this, Shiva appeared on the scene.

"What is the matter here?" He asked.

"Brahma is guilty of incest! We cannot have Him as our God. He has shamed us by conjoining with Usas, His own daughter, and not once, but a thousand times in a thousand different ways, which are unspeakable," they said, looking at all

in a thousand different ways, which are unspeakable, they said, looking at all the stallions, lions and deers with undisguised contempt.

“Fierily truthful Shiva, you must end His life now. It is your role as Destroyer.”

Shiva grimaced at being commanded by the rabid bunch. Nevertheless, keeping His calm, He said, “But He is your own creator. What kind of people would want their creator to be finished?” He too looked at the stallions, lions and deers; they were in perfect harmony, in perfect understanding of the love act of Brahma.

They exemplified gratitude.

But the self-appointed bosses of the people were unaffected by the subtle indication that Shiva wanted to make. They were socially upfront but spiritually lumpen, righteous but unkind, assertive but ungrateful.

“You are Sarva the archer, Rudra the terrible, Shiva the Destroyer. It is your duty to rid us of wrong elements in our midst, and incest constitutes the worst kind of degeneration. Pick up your bow, sever His heads and end His saga!” they said in unison.

Brahma just could not believe how much had happened in His own creation of one day. One day of love and they had displayed a hundred years of hatred.

Daksha was mute. He loved his father dearly, but he wanted his crown to remain forever.

Slowly, Shiva walked up to Brahma, who was by now shaking with fear.

The creator of all was about to experience the end of His own life. But Shiva whispered in His ear, “Do not worry Brahma, I shall cut only one head of yours; that too, the one which shall not limit your direction. You shall still have all four corners of your world in your vision.”

Brahma had five heads; one for each direction, and then one that simply topped them all as an extra. It looked skywards, always in a kind of celestial snobbery.

“It is this one that can go,” said Shiva. “This is more of a vestige, and distracts you from your current job.” And so saying, relieved Brahma of the fifth head with an expert and swift shot from His bow.

Brahma did not even feel the pain. And in fact, He felt relieved of a mental pain, a guilt. Shiva was the only one who had recognized the fact that Brahma had not given birth to a daughter; He had created a Woman.

Pleased with their power, the society caretakers went home. They were the ultimate; they could even have Brahma beheaded. And Daksha was their chief.

He was the most powerful of all. Why then, had he kept quiet about his father?

Was it because he took his job as the upholder of the law seriously?

Or, was it because he subconsciously wanted to ensure that he would be even

more powerful than Brahma?

Brahma, the innocent father, now with four heads still intact, left for His own abode called Brahmaloak, far from the social malaise.

In a strange and mystical way, Brahma's severed head came to fall on Daksha's shoulders. Not literally, but it was as though he grew a snobbery that Brahma had just been relieved of.

The cosmstatic balance of the Universe remained.

In the meanwhile, Shiva, in the act of meting out compassionate justice to Brahma, had nevertheless Himself become guilty of Brahmanicide, the killing of the Knower of God.

This suited the haughty Daksha and his brood even more: the marginalising of one God, and the tainting of another. It was the beginning of bad-mouthing Shiva. Soon, as was expected, everyone began to forget it was the social captains who had, in fact asked for Brahma to be beheaded, and then cleverly shifted the blame to Shiva. True to their power games, they felt it would benefit them to cast Him in the role of a mercenary.

Daksha was quick in organising himself into a successful ruler. Understanding the penchant of the society to hoist itself on top of individual will, he furthered the cause by creating 'posts'. It was miraculous, how a title could make a man think more of himself than his actual deeds. So, someone became a captain, the other a superintendent, one became a 'Keeper of the faith' and the other was called the 'Warden of good', and so on. Daksha went on creating titles and posts and kept on expanding the society he had birthed. Daksha himself was the ultimate chief; after all, he had been born as Prajapati.

He was the happy center of all he grew around himself.



SATI, SHE WHO ALWAYS IS

However, it was not long before Daksha felt his father's instincts rouse within his own self; He also felt the passion of Brahma for a woman. He married not one, but two.

The first, Virni, was absolutely beautiful. Perhaps, even more beautiful than Usas. Evolution had begun its progression. Life was certainly blossoming further with its beauty.

Daksha's nature was moulded much like Brahma in character, when it came to fondness and passion: almost bordering on lust, albeit privately.

He fathered five thousand sons with Virni, called Haryashvas. Next, they had another thousand sons. And then, sixty daughters.

The second wife of Daksha was Prasuti, the daughter of Manu.

Manu was a very important son of Brahma. He was the law giver.

And therefore, in order to make his own governance even more credit worthy, Daksha thought it was important to bond with Prasuti. He did marry her, but it was more because of his love of governance; Daksha did not fully appreciate the *feminine principle manifesting itself as a woman* in Prasuti.

He loved her only for the power she brought along. His stoic demeanour had completely divested him of the finer aesthetics of real love. He had only twenty-four daughters with her. It must have been some kind of matriarchal blessing from Goddess Shakti to Prasuti, that it was these daughters who shot into prominence, and not the six thousand strong, private army of sons.

Daksha did not appreciate the assertion of the feminine principle; but the divine Shakti's law of compensation was infallible: She chose to be born as Prasuti's daughter, Sati, Herself.

Sati. The greatest magic that creation had ever seen.

Even as a child, Sati was magical. She was a sheer beauty. The first thing about Her that struck the viewer were Her eyes. She had big, soft and beautiful almond-shaped eyes like a doe. Prasuti called Her 'Mrignayani', the doe-eyed. They were like a Sorceress's magic, hypnotizing anyone into a virtual trance. Her dark pupils floated in a surrounding of what seemed like a sea of pure white. It was as though She contained a whole universe within. A universe wherein one would drift and get lost, mesmerised by how beautiful beauty can be. Her complexion was breathtaking. To call it translucent was an understatement. It was luminosity itself, as if She had a moon inside Her, which glowed at all times in the softest way. And yet, when the sun arose, Sati's soft complexion golded into a glow even more dazzling than before, as if She contained the sun!

Even as a baby, She had the most luxurious hair. It was jetblack and contrasted very well with the luminescence, doubling the effect of hue, giving a paradigm meaning to the word 'colour'.

Such was the presence of Sati; She seemed to be the explanation of all things, the summation of why Nature made luminosity, colour and a myriad of those other delights. All of which came together in Her, manifesting visibly, to give an embodiment to beauty itself; She was not just the effect, She appeared as Hetu, the Cause.

When She laughed, Prasuti remembered the tinkling of all the bells she had heard in her dreams. Her innocent laughter was God's little trinket bell; divinity itself, in blissful chime.

Her lips were shaped as if Kama's love bow had doubled itself lovingly into twins. And when Prasuti dabbed them with sweet rosewater, she noted that was already their natural colour; a freshly blossomed rose in the pinkest of nature. She was petite-limbed, but there was a sure strength in those limbs, a standing. She had wonderfully shaped fingers, but there was a different dimension when these fingers converged to shape Her hand; there was a holding of all things. She was born as the epitome of demure femininity, yet there was a vibration of power about Her.

The earliest visitors said in one voice, "Seeing Her is to see God. It is Darsana itself."

One by one, came seers and sages, Kings and magis from distant lands to have a glimpse of Sati. One by one, whoever came to have darsana of Her, became divinely besotted with Her at that first sight.

"Mrignayani," said Saraswati. "She is so pretty: the perfection of beauty."

Prasuti loved the name given with such admiration by Saraswati. "Mrignayani,"

sne echoed lovingly to her child.

And then came the great magi who was rumoured to be a celestial peacekeeper. He was Brihaspati, guru of the devatas. Even Daksha arose to honour his arrival. He was not from Prithviloka, but from another galaxy, and was said to precede even the most ancient of the seers in Brahma's creation. He arrived, to 'see' this living manifestation of God.

This was the glory of Prithviloka: it hosted the birth of Gods themselves. Daksha took him nearer to Sati's cot. The magi couldn't take his eyes off Sati. It was as though Mother Nature had swallowed the seed of all that represents beauty and then taken birth to manifest many times over into this exquisite being.

He looked only to Her feet. Then, stretching out his arms in a gesture to lift Her, he looked at Prasuti and asked for permission, "May I?"

"Of course, my lord!" said Prasuti. He gently lifted Her in the air, above his own head, and when She was high enough such that Her feet were above his own head, he gently kissed them. Looking at the rest of the visitors present in the chamber, who were rather taken aback at this gesture, he said, "When can one actually get to kiss the Mother Goddess? To kiss the feet of Her, at whose sanctum we all manifest... Ah, it is when She is a baby Herself!" He chuckled and continued, "Who will even try to show his magic, by bestowing his blessings on this divine child? Who, indeed, will not ask to be blessed by her instead?" He touched his forehead to the dainty feet again. Baby Sati's toes twirled on his forehead, as if it was a playground that had awaited their arrival.

And then, the chief magi of Prithviloka arrived from the celestial Heavens. He was Narada, the Supra Rishi who preferred to keep his older title, Muni. It made him feel younger. Munis were those who sought stillness in silence. Rishis were those who, arising from the depths of silence, spoke out scriptures for the benefit of others. Narada was the most vociferous speaker. He was synonymous with the Akashvani call from the Heavens. Also, he had a great penchant for presenting himself impromptu in any controversial scene, with his astral abilities. His clarion call 'Narayan Narayan' which meant 'God, good God' was often the precursor to ominous warnings for the coming future.

For example, Daksha had six thousand heirs to his empire. But that not even one would remain to rule was obviously ominous. The six thousand princes who were born to rule and further Daksha's society had been led into renunciation of the world by a wily Sage.

That Sage was the same magi: Narada.

But he was not always a doomsday prophet. Sometimes he visited on pious occasions. He liked the role of being a great magi. Sati's birth was one of the most Pious occasions

most of his occasions.

“Narayan, Narayan!” cried Narada chirpily as he manifested himself directly into Daksha and Prasuti’s bedchamber, merrily skipping the trivia of gateway guards. “Aha! The Heavens are singing of the descent of the great Goddess Herself. Where is baby Sati, my divine mother?” he said, not unlike a jester, because even as he spoke, his eyes were already transfixed on Her.

Of all Her visitors, of all the appreciation of Her beauty, of all the indescribable appearance and reactions, Narada’s was classical. He dived straight for Her feet. “At thine feet keep me always, mother,” he said. Tears actually began to flow from his eyes. “Why are you crying devarishi Narada?” Prasuti asked him, her own eyes flowing resonantly like a dam of unleashed emotion. “It is joy, mother Prasuti,” said Narada. “This is the nature of divine joy; it flows like a torrent of your inner being.”

Everyone who came to see Sati was struck by Her appearance. Daksha himself was especially taken in by Her extraordinary beauty. He flattered himself as the progenitor of magnificence, and Sati was the living proof of his self-ideation. But as usual, in his arrogance, he missed the fact that this was Pristinity Herself in sooth, far more pristine than he ever was, more pristine than even his ideation. He came from Brahma, and Brahma came from ShivParvati, who was actually Sati Herself, but Daksha missed all that. Quite like Brahma had done at the birth of Rudra, Daksha too, basked in his own glory: the prerogative of a father to admire the power hidden in his own loins. Where would he have the time to think of the beginning of things, before himself? Why would he even consider the deep self-introspection of what there was when even he didn’t exist?

And so it was, that each was happy in their own kingdom; Sati in this joyous role of princess, and Daksha, smug in his own world.

Sati’s beauty only grew with each passing day. She was beautiful not only in Her appearance, but also in spirit. From the very beginning, She exhibited in Her demeanour a fabulous confluence of royalty and humility, aristocracy and gentleness. She loved the perks that had devolved upon Her because of being born a princess. She especially loved, for example, the personal tending Her maids gave Her. She looked forward to them, and implored them in her irresistible ‘baby sign language’, to pamper Her with a massage, sometimes twice a day; breaking into squeals of laughter and giggles as they worked on Her infant body.

~~~~~



But it was with the toy dolls that She displayed an extraordinary reaction: Her motherliness came to fore. It was as though She had always been a mother, even though She was just a child Herself.

One day, Brihaspati again walked into the palace of Daksha. Brihaspati was the priest of all the celestial beings; his mere arrival was auspicious.

“Ah, what a lovely child!” he exclaimed as he set his sight upon Sati.

“Normally nature gifts one with an outer beauty or an inner glow; it is rare when she gifts both. This child is radiant like the luminosity of Gods, a miracle, like creation itself!” he remarked.

“But of course,” said Daksha haughtily. “She is my daughter, Dakshayani!”

“You think too much about yourself, Daksha,” said Brihaspati, brushing him aside. “Learn to look beyond your own persona; lift your eyes to the sky and you will see where your horizons end and those of the celestial beings only begin.

This is not Dakshayani, this is indeed Bhagvati Jagdamba Herself!”

“May I have the honour to lift Her in my arms?”

“Yes, of course,” said Daksha, enjoying this new authority he had, in deciding who would be allowed to pay homage to Sati by holding and caressing Her.

“She will marry the most powerful being on earth, the most coveted husband, the Lord of Lords!” said Brihaspati, as he lifted Sati in his arms and gave Her a deep and paternal stare.

“And who might that be?” asked Daksha, visibly pleased, for Brihaspati was not only a celestial being, but also, he was the Guru of all the devatas; such a statement coming from him meant surely that he was speaking of a great personality indeed. Daksha was quite thrilled at the prospect of having a powerful son-in-law;

Surely, that would enhance his own range in society.

“It shall be Lord Shiva,” said Bhrighu. Daksha noticed that Rishi Bhrighu had walked into the Chamber as well. Bhrighu was married to Khyati, another one of Daksha’s daughters, which made him his son-in-law. But he was also a great favourite with Daksha, being an expert astrologer who could predict forthcoming events with amazing accuracy.

“Shiva? Who on earth is that? When did He become a Lord? How come I do not know of Him?” asked Daksha in his usual manner and flourish with which he glorified even his own ignorance.

“Shiva has existed before any of the Lords you have known. He has been present much before they were even born and He will remain a Lord much after they are gone ” answered Bhrighu in a style which was full of mystical verse as always

gone, answered Bhrighu in a style which was full of mystical verse, as always.  
“So is He created before or after me, by my father, Brahma?” asked Daksha, a little irritated, but nevertheless curious.

“Who is to say anything of Shiva,  
Whose whole self is an enigma,” said Bhrighu.  
“You talk of Brahma, who beholds with awe,  
In His son, the Father.  
Saraswati listens in bewilderment,  
The knowing of this master.  
Learning whence forth His mouth Siva mukhi,  
She sprang as mother of learning,  
The primal daughter,” Bhrighu sang.

Daksha saw a strange expression on Bhrighu’s face, and noted how his eyes were lit up as though firmly illumined by some kind of truth he believed in. He decided not to question this matter of Shiva anymore. But Bhrighu was not done.  
“How short your memory is, revered father-in-law,” he suddenly quipped.

“When it comes to anyone other than you.”

Daksha grimaced at Bhrighu’s audacity and wondered at the dare in him. Yet, being curious to know more, he allowed him to continue.

“Don’t you remember having met Shiva before?”

“Have I?” Daksha fumbled, a little uncomfortable about what may be revealed next.

“You do remember your own father, Brahma, being hounded by society with the insinuation of committing incest with Usas, do you not?”

Daksha flushed into a fiery red, partly because of the remembrance of the humiliation he had seen his father suffer at the hands of his own society.

And partly because he remembered his own mute role when the ignominy was being heaped upon a hapless Brahma.

“Usas... Father Brahma... society...? Why that was aeons ago, virtually at the beginning of all things!” he said. As the whole memory came flashing back to Him, he realised he could never actually mute an earlier episode of being mute spectator. Daksha suddenly became aware that he had acquired the habit of shrugging his own shoulders.

“You do remember the God called upon to terminate Brahma’s role? Verily, it was Shiva who was propitiated for this.” Bhrighu was still in a trance like mood, sounding far more like a Kshatriya warrior, rather than the Brahmin knower of God that he was.

It struck Daksha like a thunderbolt; Shiva's face and persona, His body language when He had come to the scene of the protest against Brahma.

A scene that now replayed itself in Daksha's selective memory all too clearly.

"Oh yes, I do," he fumbled again. This time, with a tone of surrendered condescension. "Yes, I do remember now."

"It is that Shiva who shall take Sati away as His bride," said Bhrighu, wording his message carefully, deliberately.

'Take away'. These were the words Daksha chose to hear louder than all else, as was his habit to filter messages for a more self-centred understanding.

They had the effect on Him of stoking his arrogance, an arrogance that was woven into his very being.

"Sati has just been born, Bhrighu," he spoke angrily. "Much as I admire your prophetic predictions, sometimes you go too far into the future. We shall see when we shall see."

Bhrighu noted the waving of Daksha's hand as though to push the air away from himself, and understood it as a signal that he was now being dismissed from the Chamber.

The growing years with Sati were an absolute delight for all around Her. Even Daksha couldn't help a smile escaping from his lips every time he saw Her. She was just adorable. She could walk into any situation and make everyone happy, immediately lifting their spirits with Her radiant smile and chirpy words. Prasuti was quick to realise Her 'power' over Daksha, and many times used this to wiggle herself out from his otherwise stubborn vetoes on issues. Daksha could be fixed and fixated even about simple things, like the colour of the bedroom walls. He had never learnt to hand over any decision to Prasuti, even in matters which required a woman's touch. He had in fact, never learnt to hand over decisions to *anyone else*. Over years of careful manoeuvring and weighing down the *other* by pulling rank, the concept of consensus had successfully been frittered away into mere formality. His courtiers for example, and the society captains, knew even his grimaces or hidden smiles as indications of No or Yes.

Mostly, he was a 'No' person.

Prasuti had noted a curious phenomenon. Each year at the time of the repainting

of the palace, Daksha would habitually declare ‘gold’ for the paint in his chamber. Each year, Sati too, would exclaim how lovely the pink flowers on the cherry blossom trees, looked in spring. “Can’t I sit in the Royal Gardens for more time please?” She would plead. “I love the pink colours!”

“Then, my darling, I will have your bedroom, my bedroom, painted in cherry pink!” he would say.

“Better still, I will paint the whole palace pink!!” he would declare pompously, leaving Prasuti chuckling at her device and weapon.

Prasuti remembered the wise teachings of her Guru Vashishta to her when she was herself a child. “In the beginning of creation, weapons were just instruments to fortify oneself. They were weapons against the vagaries of nature, so to speak, and hardly connoted opposition; rather a co-operation, a way to find one’s own way alongside creation. A roof was a weapon, clothing was a weapon, storage of water and grains was an armoury, all designed for benefitting the self. It was only with the passage of time that instead of being a deterrent to mishaps and misfortune, weapons themselves deteriorated into hurting the other,” Vashishta had said. “Learn to fortify your womanhood with the gifts of weaponry Mother Nature has gifted you. Learn to use your beauty to disarm any opposition” Now, a mother herself, Prasuti looked at Sati.

Sati’s innocence was so pristine, it was in the weave of self-fortification, like the most complete dance with nature. And remarkably, it always worked wonders at penetrating Daksha’s stubbornness. A smile from her could make him come out of his pensive and introvert spells. It could transform him into becoming almost as merry as the rest of Nature’s happy creatures.

Sati was Prasuti’s great weapon.

At other times Sati could astound them with Her wisdom.

Once, Daksha was celebrating Her fourteenth birthday. As always, the whole palace had been decorated with the most lavish ornamentation and décor. But this was not to say that the smallest of details were not given the greatest attention. Daksha saw to everything personally, inspecting all the preparations a week before the day itself. Beautiful silk ribbons flitted in twists and turns and merry curls, to usher in a dance for all the children who would be arriving. Dolls and toys were placed in what seemed like an imitation of a battalion of the royal

virtual army, in all four corners of Utsava Bhavan, the Celebration Hall. Sweetmeats, which had been cooked in abundance, were a pleasing sight and let out an equally sweet aroma. Everything was in pink, including all the sweets. Even the Royal guards were asked to plume up their turbans with pink feathers! Sati was turning fourteen in another hour and *one hundred and fourteen* women were playing music! Daksha had put in one hundred extras for Sati's posterity, and therefore his own lineage. This was his own, somewhat brash, but nevertheless touching, way of wishing a long life for his dearest daughter. The women looked as though they descended from the Heavens playing the harp and veena, as if Saraswati Herself had entered the spirit of each one of them. Return gifts had been made dexterously for each individual child after scouts had found out their favourite toys. Special platforms had been raised in the north corner to seat the rishis, magis, devatas and other celestials who would surely present themselves; none would miss Daksha's daughter's birth celebrations. At least that's what Daksha thought. He wasn't too far from the truth: none would miss Sati's birthday for anything, She *was* Daksha's daughter but She also was loved by them more than their own children. Everyone of Sati's friends and playmates felt as if they were celebrating their own birthday; each one was lavished with all kinds of extravagant goodies. Daksha had even arranged an entertainer for each table for only five children seated there, and of course, the jester was dressed up in pink!

It was simply an enchanting party. Everyone enjoyed themselves to the fullest, to a point of exhaustion; till their bodies just could not take in anymore activity; and their spirits too, were saturated with Happiness. Everyone who attended had a similar realisation: Even extreme joy can exhaust one by the end, and thus it is, that all things have to come to an end. And the festivity stops, at least for some time, till a new space is made for more good things to manifest; 'A new occasion...like Sati's next birthday itself', they all thought to themselves. It was time to leave; all the guests were blessing Sati. Everyone exclaimed that it was the most auspicious day in the year, because She was born on this day. While Daksha was gloating at their praise, Sati replied to each one politely, "Thank you all so much. I am blessed indeed, to be blessed by you! And thank you for bringing me such lovely presents. I shall enjoy them all." She said, dazzling them with Her smile again. And then suddenly, as if She had read their mind about having to wait for Her next birthday, She quipped, "Life is a gift wrapped in many layers. Enjoy your birth. Everyday."

## A VENDOR FOR ALL CREATION

Sati grew from playing with dolls and toys to make-believe games.

It was routine for Daksha to organise sumptuous meals in evening banquets for visiting State guests. Lavish dinners in the most pompous ambience were arranged many times in the year. When their family and children accompanied these visitors, it also became mandatory for Daksha's family to attend. Though She was polite and brimming with royal etiquette, this was all terribly boring for Sati. She would always secretly wish for the dinner to end, so that She could go back to Her own room, back to Her own fascinating world; one that was full of Her own imagination.

Once, in one such banquet, She stealthily collected some of the peanuts that were being served. The waiter looked at Her, somewhat confused: Sati, who had the appetite of a bird, was actually going after the peanuts like one who had never seen them before! Deftly, She put handfuls of them away in a little bag She had tucked safely in Her royal dress, which had layers and layers of cloth to conceal Her little secret. She just couldn't wait for the dinner to finish! When it finally did come to an end, She ran gleefully to Her chamber. Dexterously, She emptied out the contents of Her now bloated bag into a box, which originally used to house some of Her jewelry. Safely tucking the box back into the cupboard, She dived into bed with a smile on Her face, and tried Her best to sleep. She got up several times during the night to quickly go back to the cupboard and open the box, each time delighted to see the contents-peanuts! At last, She did fall asleep dreamily.

The next morning was a Sunday: a holiday for all, and also holiday *from* all royal activities. Since Daksha's visitor and his family were returning home, and he had accompanied them to the borders of His own kingdom as a farewell gesture, it became a day without any agenda for Sati and Her sisters. This was perfect. It was a bright, sunny day and Sati glowed in equal radiance with Her new plan.

Calling for two of Her attendants, She ordered them to have a table loaded onto Her buggy. Next, She told Her valet to take the royal buggy to the last portion of the Royal garden; this was a portion that had a Square where the public could

also join on holidays. It was the venue where the queens would meet with the people, along with their families for interactions on special occasions. But today, it was Sati's own little plan; She did it all by Herself. "Set up the table right here," She said, pointing to almost the end of the Square, which was next to the public walkway. The attendants hesitatingly, but nevertheless unquestioningly did as they were told.

"It's alright, you may step back now. Behind me, please," She said. Next, Sati excitedly took out a large poster She had drawn early in the morning. It read 'Peanuts for sale at the lowest price! Only a bronze mohur for a handful! Get another handful for free!' Sticking the poster deftly on the table with Her own royal pins, She laid open the exquisite jewelry box, to expose the peanuts. At first, the few people around simply read the poster and looked at each other with bewilderment.

"Come on, come on!" said Sati chirpily. "Come buy delicious peanuts, and you will get twice the amount as you would in the market place!"

No one came forward. Sati kept on repeating, calling, imploring, "Come on, get double the peanuts for your money!"

Finally, a soldier, a poor constable who was just returning from a field duty from a far-off outpost, approached the table. "Young lady, I am just returning home, and wanted to buy peanuts for my children. In fact, I was going to the market, but your peanuts look lovely. Here's my mohur. May I have my two handfuls?"

"Yes, here you go," said Sati, as She pulled out a little bag and put two generous handfuls of peanuts in them.

"Aren't you giving me much more than the shopkeepers?" he asked, seeing that Sati's little hands were virtually spilling over with peanuts. In Her generosity, She wanted to give as much as She possibly could.

"No!" She laughed back. "These are tiny hands. I wouldn't want to take a chance to cheat a loyal soldier of the Raj, now, would I? In fact, I would like to give you a third handful as bonus. You are my first customer after all!" Sati quickly gave him yet another handful.

Seeing Her generous measure and more generous intent, He quickly put his hand in his pocket and pulled out another mohur. "In that case, young lady, I will take another two handfuls please," he said, twirling his moustache, and looking at the sky, smiling.

At this point, the chief guardian of the gardens came to the scene.

"What are you doing, soldier?" he yelled at the constable. "How dare you make

purchases from the princess? And who are you smiling at?”

“I smile at the sky, my Lordship! I smile that our lives are in the hands of bounty Herself, I smile that our princess is going to look after our children generously. The future is good, and I am proud to be a soldier of the land of this princess.”

“I will have none of this!” shouted the guardian.

“Oh, but the purchase has been made,” said the soldier.

“Yes, the deal has been done,” conjoined Sati, putting the two mohurs away into Her purse, and in a spontaneous movement, clutched at two more handfuls of peanuts. She hurriedly delivered these into the hands of the soldier; her promise must deliver!

The soldier had by now assumed a bowing position, as a posture of gratitude. He quickly put the peanuts in his own army bag, and scuttled off.

The guardian decided it was not going to be of any use to argue any further, nor indeed would it be appropriate, because Sati, being princess, was, after all, senior to him. Nevertheless, even as He gently took Her dainty hand in his sturdy one, he scolded Her in a compassionate tone. “My dear princess, it does not behove you to become a little shopkeeper. You, are the ruler of us all...you cannot be playing vendor woman and selling peanuts to passersby.”

Sati only smiled as he continued, “I am now going to take you back to the palace, and I shall have to report this matter to the king, you know?”

What was he to know, that this was Shakti’s favourite play, it was Her very role. She was vendor to all of creation. Honouring in Her divine way, all the rules of the human play.



# GUHA VASHISHTA

Sati had an adventurous nature from the very beginning. Going outdoors was her passion. She loved royal picnics and Daksha would organise many of them for Her every month. But even on the picnics, She would not confine Herself to the spot where the royal tents were pitched by expert scouts. She would love to wander into the nearby hills, for example, or run to the stream that flowed in the vicinity. She would meander into the forests and inspect all the different flowers, trees, and fruits. She loved fruit. So tickled were Her senses that She would actually salivate when She saw fresh fruit on trees.

And She was an expert in choosing the sweet ones, always. It was as though She was the embodiment of Mother Nature right from the beginning, carefully viewing Her own produce and loving it to the maximum. Daksha, the otherwise unadventurous, unrelenting, almost spoilsport father, would always allow Her these meanderings. Of course, he had a posse of his best-trained guards to follow Her at all times. Not for intrusion, but for security.

But even the guards, in all their sincerity, could only guard Her against a hostile outsider, not against Her own wandering.

It was on one of these curious explorations that Sati discovered a mysterious cave; A cave that would lead Her to the most beautiful path for the rest of her life. It was also the cave that would realize all of Daksha's worst fears, as though it was his own abyss.

Sati could never forget that day either. She had just reached the top of a hill. Now, sitting comfortably on a rock and surveying the valley below Her, She was just about to have a sip of water from Her royal flask, when She heard a strange but pleasing sound.

It was human but sounded so different from anything She had heard before.

‘Aum... Aum... Aum’ it went on, in a mesmerising repetition. She loved it and felt completely drawn towards it. And then, She found Herself trying to follow it in a response that didn't feel self-willed, It was like a magnet beckoning.

The sound grew louder, firmer, more mesmerising. She trailed behind it, lightly, like air itself, all the way to its source.

Once She reached the mouth of the cave, She could hear two more words:

‘Namah Shivaya...’

namah, Shivaya...

She didn't hesitate even for a moment to step forwards with Her tender limbs, bowing Her head slightly, so as not to hurt Herself by banging Her head against the roof.

The guards, who were always a distance away, did not see Her disappear into the cave. And as a result, they thought just that; She had disappeared.

There was a strange aroma, again mysterious, like the sound, but pleasing to Her second sense, the sense of smell.

In the distance, She could see the dark cave lit by a heavenly glow, the orange hue rising towards the ceiling, elated Her spirit of sight. And She realised it was a fire.

She felt Her own soul light up in a burning blaze of warmth, of a hitherto unknown ecstasy.

It was then that She spotted the hermit. He was old but firm, and his eyes were closed as he chanted 'Aum Namah Shivaya, Aum Namah Shivaya.'

*Shivaya*. It was this word that made Sati almost jump out of Her own being with a divine pleasure. She wondered what was going on. The hermit spoke, with his eyes closed, "Aum Namah Bhagwate Ma. Welcome, mother."

'Mother'? The word brought Sati back into Her normal awareness. She turned around to see if another person had entered the cave, but there was no one other than Herself and the hermit.

"Welcome, Sati Ma, Jagdamba!" said the hermit again, this time opening his eyes very gently as if they were about to open a whole new cave of mystery. Sati felt a little alarmed, but this was a new kind of feeling; it wasn't fear, it was a thrill of the unexpected;

a thrill that something unknown, is *now* going to be known.

"I have waited for this, for four hundred years. Come, please take your seat," he said as he pointed towards an extra deerskin lying right in front of him.

Sati felt like She had known this man for all those four hundred years, and more. She settled down, comfortable both in body and in mind.

He looked at Her with a glance that was full of the kindness of an elder and yet had a certain awe and respect of a child.

"Sati, do you know what brought you to this cave?" he asked.

"No," She replied.

“Do you know what brought you to this world?” he asked a second question.

“What brought me to this world?”

“Yes. It is the same one that wills both. Find one and the other you will know,” said the sage mystically.

“What brings us to this world... our parents’ affections, their desire. We are all a fulfillment of love, a manifestation of togetherness,” Sati replied, with Her eyes looking only at the deerskin snuggled below Her, which had by now taken on the contours of Her light frame on itself.

The sage smiled. “Ah, desire... affections! I must appreciate your maturity, forthrightness and etiquette. Spoken like a princess, indeed. But this body as you know it, is just a shell. It comes by procreation. But procreation is not the whole of creation! With each birth, a higher power participates with procreation and thus, comes creation. It is God who wills you on this earth.

Here, have this prasada,” he said, taking a roasted walnut from the fire.

Sati took the walnut with Her head bowed, and as She slipped it in Her mouth, it burst upon Her palate with a wonderfully smoked essence. Just as Her fourth sense, the sense of taste, got invoked, She started to feel a mist in the cave brushing against Her.

It was the awakening of the fifth sense, the sense of touch.

The touch of the mist was divine.

“God?” She asked.

“Yes, God. Shiva, to be precise.

It is Shiva who wills all things. But with you in particular, it is Shiva who desires.”

“So, it is Shiva who brought me to this cave?”

“Yes, the whole universe is His cave, Where He awaits your arrival by His hearth.”

Sati looked around as if to spot Shiva sitting in the corner of the cave, and asked, “So, where is He?”

“This is the interesting thing,” said the sage. “He awaits your arrival, but until you come, He won’t appear Himself!”

“You mean...”

“I mean, God has not manifested Himself to us as yet, and it is thus that we await your arrival with the greatest earnest

await your arrival, with the greatest earnest.

Your birth signals that now, the birthless one Himself is to arrive. So too, you are the generatrix of all things, little mother.”

“Generatrix?” Sati asked.

The sage picked up a thin stick from the logfire, and brushing it against the ground, he stubbed its burning end. Continuing his action, he then made a horizontal line across the mud of the floor. Sati watched intently as he shaped two more tapered lines downwards, making an inverted triangle. He paused as the stick was now at the bottom of the triangle, and then slowly and with a great, predetermined focus, began another line, further down to the left. With another flourish to the right, he made another line, and then tapered it back to the point, to create an ascending triangle, conjoining with the first.

“From One to Two... only to become ‘one soul’ again...” he said,

“it’s only a matter of time, till a whole design is understood in the drawing of a first line. A seed contains a tree; the first contains all there is, it contains the second, the many. Only a matter of time.”

Sati looked at the figure, and realized that drawn together, a downward and an upward triangle created the hourglass, the Keeper of Time.

“Only a matter of time, and yet, the second has to receive the first,” said the Sage enigmatically.

“Ah, it is all about arrival, with my Lord,” he said and broke out into an amazing verse with the softest tone:

“When you do arrive,

Will I, be a step behind?

Is it something with my invocation,”

he looked at the fire, and then at the hourglass on the ground, and continued,

“Or simply, that you set the time?

And when my salutation and rituals are done,

will you say again, it is your arrival, for which I have come?”

Sati was absolutely mesmerised by the song of the Sage. All five senses already drowning in this delicious wave of divinity, it was as if he had now tapped on Her forehead and initiated the sixth sense, of intuition. Her soul actually submerged into an ocean of bliss.

“In order to merge, we submerge,” said the hermit.

Sati was going into sweet trance.

“We do not drown, we emerge. You do not find Shiva, He finds you.  
Dive, dive within, dive deep and there, shall you meet...”  
She heard the hermit’s words in Her bliss.

“Princess! Princess Sati!”

It was as if someone was shouting to wake Her up from a deep, lovely sleep. The guards came tumbling in to the cave.

“Are you alright, princess? We looked for you everywhere! Is everything okay? Who is this man? What are you doing here? What is he doing?” There was a barrage of anxious outbursts.

“I am quite alright,” said Sati. “There is no need to worry. I have just had the most wonderful time with Baba,” She suddenly realised She had addressed the sage in an endearing way which was reserved for Her father.

“Baba,” She repeated, this time with awareness of the title. “So where do I begin to look for Him, where will I find Shiva?”

“You do not find Shiva,” said the hermit. “Shiva finds you.”

“So what am I to do in the meantime?” asked Sati.

“Surrender,” said the hermit.

“Surrender?”

“Surrender your senses, give them leave. Like you are comfortable now in body and in mind, surrender too, your very being, and repose in your self,” said the sage. And then added very loudly, “Tana mana dhana, Aum phut!! Sab kuch tera, kya laage mera. The body, the mind, the all; all into the celestial essence, none of it is me! All belongs to Thee!”

And then gently, once again he smiled, “Surrender, as I once surrendered to you! Ah, but you can only surrender to your own higher self.”

“You surrendered to me? Higher self?” asked Sati, completely bewildered.

He drew himself close to Her. “My name is Vashishta, little mother,” he said.

“Rishi Vashishta? You are Rishi Vashishta!!” Sati exclaimed.

“Yes.”

“Oh, I am fortunate indeed! To meet the Guru of my mother, indeed, to meet the Guru of many celestial beings,” She said, simultaneously bowing to touch his feet.

Vashishta stopped Her midway, placing his hands firmly on Her shoulders, and said “You are the generatrix Sati. it is not proper for you to touch my feet

Sati, "You are the guru, and, it is not proper for you to teach my teacher. Verily, the entire world springs from your own self."

"Baba, I do not understand?"

"It was aeons ago," he continued softly. "But I remember it like yesterday." He looked around the cave. "I first found this place many years ago, and thought it suitable for the solitude required for meditation."

"You meditated here years ago?" She asked.

"Actually, I looked for you. I wanted to know if a Divine Mother actually existed; the source and birther of all there is. And if She did, I wanted to meet Her in person. Nothing less. I wanted Her darsana, Her divine sighting."

"And?"

"And here I sat, meditating for years. Eating nothing but a few morsels for bare survival, drinking water just enough to feel my own blood flow in these mortal veins. The only calls I attended were those of nature. It was only ablution, and the absolute."

"And?"

"And I went on like this. Feeling better, lighter, each day. But there was no sign of the Devi."

"Oh"

"Then, one day Saraswati, the Goddess of enlightenment Herself appeared, but only in my mind, and instead of blessing, said simply that my way of worship was wrong."

"Wrong?" asked Sati.

"She said that the great rahasya, secret of the Devi, is not just found in meditation, that Her way comprises of love and feeling."

Sati's eyes brightened up.

"That I must therefore seek Vishnu, and He would teach me the real way."

Vashishta stoked the fire again. "And so, I changed my direction;

I started looking for Vishnu, praying to Him day and night.

But of Him too, there was no sign." He looked at Sati.

She nodded gently, affirming Her empathy to this strange phenomenon of an unseen magnetism, an elusive presence. The absent, that was always present nevertheless.

"And then one day, He arrived," said Vashishta.

"Lord Vishnu?" Sati was excited.

"No, the Sage Narada."

"Oh!"

"But that is fine. Before God, His message arrives, and Narada is the astral messenger," said Vashishta.

“Yes! Then what happened?” Sati was clearly getting involved in the story.

“Narada greeted me fondly. He told me my time had come. My desire to meet Vishnu would be fulfilled. And that he was here to escort me through the skies, to the great Lord Himself.”

“Ah!! Then?”

“Then I put on my new robes and announced my readiness for immediate departure . I could wait no longer,” said Vashishta.

Sensing Sati’s own eagerness, he continued without waiting for Her prompt.

“It was the height of luxury,” he said. “Narada took me through chamber after chamber in Vishnu’s Palace, in what seemed an endless tour. Each hallway, each room, each chamber was illuminated by sparkling lights, filled with the most enticing aromas. Gentle music was playing from an unknown source. Then finally, we came to another door and Narada said to me, “Prepare yourself O Vashishta, to meet your Lord. The moment has arrived.”

“And?” Sati said again, very excitedly.

“And we went in to yet another hall, which turned out to be a bathing chamber, and there He was, Lord Vishnu, taking a royal bath, attended on by celestial beings. His eyes were shining like they do when the Gods have a fill of their favourite Soma; nectar as they call it.”

“Oh, my God!” said Sati.

“Yes. That was God,” said Vashishta. “And the moment I thought to myself, that this is vulgar, Vishnu spoke.

I can never forget what He said. ‘The vulgarity is in your mind, Vashishta!’ The words have been etched in my spirit ever since.”

He looked at Sati again. “Everything , Sati, is how our mind perceives.

Vishnu became my Guru, and taught me a completely new way to pray.

He taught me the respect for all things, including wine and exotic food, love and intimacy, feeling and emotion. So very different from the asceticism I had, the austerity I had trained for. He changed all that with what He called ‘The great learning’. “It is the Tantra”, He said. “The way of the greatest Lord of all, Shiva. Tantra is to know that all things come from God, and thus too, all things are is sacred.” Vashishta stared at the entrance of his cave as if he was remembering the whole big world outside.

“All things are naturally sacred, till our mind taints them by its own perception into the profane. And thus I learned gradually nothing is inherently good or evil. All these are just notions, just our labelling. Labels that are made with limited awareness and biased learning”

“Biased learning?”

“When we are born, we take all that is told to us, as the truth. But the real truth is that one man’s truth is not another man’s salvation. We all need to find our own truth.” replied Vashishta

“Yes, I see,” said Sati.

“You do, do you?” smiled Vashishta. “So here’s the enigma: even though, in the end, the Truth *is* one!!”

He looked at Her benevolently. “And then, I did find you.”

“I just do not know what to say, Rishivar,” Sati said.

“Do not say anything at all,” said Vashishta. “Some of the best transmissions are in silence.”

“You, as you are now, do not remember all of this. That too is by your own design. You designed a certain forgetfulness, only to get it back in your memory, bit by bit.”

“Why would anyone do that?” asked Sati.

“Isn’t it evident? Mystery always enhances the play. Mystery is the greatest sport, the greatest pulsation of life. And the mystery of life itself, is the greatest mystery, known only when you are known, Sati.”

“All this is intoxicating, Rishivar,” She said. “But going totally over my head.”

“Trust me, nothing is over your head!” laughed Vashishta. “I had to surrender to you. But you only have to meditate on your own self. You directed me to Vishnu, who taught me the tantra, but paradoxically you only have to follow the asceticism that I knew before the tantra, to find yourself,” he concluded.

“Find myself? You need to tell me how to do that. How does anyone do that?”

“I have waited for this moment all my life,” said Vashishta. “For when I did find you, you took a promise that one day I shall assist you in your finding yourself! Such is the divine play indeed!” He said. “That moment has now come for me to initiate you into that great finding. Come closer Sati.”

Sati slid nearer to him.

Vashishta then looked at Her with the most magnetic smile, and suddenly said, “Repeat after me three times... SO HUNG!”

“So hung,” said Sati nervously.

“SO HUNG!” repeated Vashishta with even more vigour.

“SO HUNG!” Sati was louder.

“SOOOO HUUUNNNGGG!!” said Vashishta in a loud but strangely drifting voice. Sati looked into his eyes to see that they had rolled up, exposing only large white portions like an endless ocean: the pupils were gone, like birds into

an eternal flight.



an eternal light...

There was Gold everywhere. Gold in the mountains, gold in the valley, gold in the sky. It was a golden luminosity basking in its own unending lustre.

When Sati opened Her eyes, a golden sun was at Her window. She was in the palace.

Suddenly She remembered everything that Vashishta had taught Her. She remembered every detail till She came to the part when She repeated 'SO HUNG' after him the third time. Sati went into the same trance as She had in the cave.

And then She awoke again to see a gold shimmering dawn.

Again, She drifted down to the scene of meeting Vashishta in his cave, heard the resounding 'SO HUNG', and a disappearance into gold, yet again.

This happened three times before She knew She had reached Samadhi.

A spiritual déjà vu.

And She saw Her own hair raised in the ultimate arousal. The arousal of one's own self.

She remembered the fabulously mystic teaching Vashishta had given Her about the self, the generatrix:

"The self is an amazing thing: One disappears as soon as one contacts it; the disappearing *is* the meeting. The self is not so much about materialising a thing, as it is about vanishing."

"Ah yes, Gurudeva," She sighed. "I have disappeared even though I am back in the palace..."

"But the gold remains, look!" Sati was startled to hear Vashista. But when She looked around to see Him, She saw that he wasn't there. Was this magic?

Where was She? In the cave or in the palace?

Sati realised She was going through a series of Samadhi.

Gold. It was like the primal essence, the primal self-luminosity was glittering in every atom after this spiritual experience. She felt different parts to Herself She never knew existed before. But She didn't feel any different from the golden light that entered to light up Her room from Her own window.

And then, She became aware of a ringing in Her ears.

'Shiva Shiva Shiva'. It was strange. Rishi Vashishta had initiated Her with the mantra of 'So Hung', but now, the name in her head doing the rounds was only Shiva. The thought of Shiva penetrated like an arrow in Her bosom, and She actually felt Her heart flutter, like a well-gotten target. She had never seen an

image of Him, but suddenly, there He was, right in front of Her, dancing on mountain skylines, long-haired and well muscled; a mesmerising figure that seemed to rivet the earth with the sky.

And then She remembered what Vashishta had told Her. “You are the one for whom Shiva incarnates, for you are not different from Shiva.”

“Advaita,” Vashishta had added after a pause.

“Advaita?” She had asked.

“Not two, you are one,” he had said. “Repeat after me, So Hung!”

‘So Hung’ had magically transformed all duality into a sweet, blissful oneness.

But the moment She opened Her eyes from that vivid dreamality, She thought of Shiva.

So this is how it worked: in trance you were the one without another; the moment you exited the trance, you pined for the other. Suddenly, Sati knew the whole purpose of Her life.

Daksha was quick to note the change.

There was a definite look about Sati that told him that She had transformed into a woman.

“What kind of picnic was it?” he thought. “Where one outgrew themselves in the outing.” He watched Her like a spy.

And every observation confirmed that She was now a different person. The childhood had evaporated in the caves of the mountains, and the palace now had a princess who was ready to assert Herself, ready for life.

But Daksha was not ready. He was never ready to allow anyone their flight, least of all, his most favourite daughter.

This paved the way for what was to be the greatest plot in the created universe so far; at once the greatest adventure and the greatest tragedy; the greatest coming together and separation. And he, with his persistent possessiveness, was to be the pivot of it all.

Sati, on Her part, was more of Her spontaneously free self than ever. She announced Her intention to go every morning to worship the ancient Shivlinga in the royal forest reserves. The Shivlinga was so old that no one knew its history, not even Daksha or the noble ministers of the court, nor too the sages who were rumoured to have meditated in the mountains long before the city of Daksha had come into full being.

But the Shivlinga was there, in its monumental presence.

An enormous and beautifully carved out marvel, in mystic grey granite. All around it was the lush green of the forest, and the contrast of grey and green gave it a yet greater mystic feel.

A snake or two were always seen cuddled around it, as though to assert that they were a permanent part of Shiva.

Flowers strung together as garlands, put on the Shivlinga by worshippers, were undoubtedly more transient than the snakes, but nevertheless lay alongside in devotion.

It was common for Shivlingas to have a name. Usually the devotee of Shiva who had constructed a Shivlinga would name it by adding the suffix of Ishwara to his own name, thus acknowledging Shiva's supremacy and also immortalizing himself, in the bargain.

Almost all the devatas had ritually made a Shivlinga. So there were Indreshwara, Varuneshwara, Agnieszwara Shivlingas.

They were magical and purported to be standing in the winds, fire and the celestial sky itself.

They formed the earliest places of Shiva worship, much before the Jyotirlingas that would become popular in later times.

But this, the colossal forest Shivlinga, grounded as it was, had a magnetism to it, which none could compare. True to its enigma,

it was unnamed. No devata was even born before it existed; so who would name it?

But it did have an extraordinary title - 'Sristi Iswara Maharaj',  
The Lord of all creation itself.



## **SRISTI ISWARA MAHARAJ**

Sati loved Sristi Iswara Maharaj. Whenever She approached the forest, She felt Her feet breaking into a run; She could never just walk. In the forest, She thought She clearly heard the leaves rustling into a chorus of invitation, singing ‘Sristi Iswara Maharaj’.

Sati thought that they sang to Shiva, but in Her haste to get to Sristi Iswara, what She did not notice was that the leaves were actually bowing in Her direction when She ran deep into their midst.

This became a daily ritual: She would not stop running till She reached the enigmatic Shivlinga, Her heart beating and the leaves pulsating with Her run till she arrived at the Sristi Iswara.

Faster each day was the run and the pace of life, faster this divine heartbeat, the mystic crescendo that had become all -encompassing. So fast, that She would almost fall in sweet collapse at the Shivlinga.

And then She would remain there in bliss, for hours on end, day after each passing day. Till the days turned into months and the months into a year. Her entire life itself had become an offering, Her time a rosary count.

And then, one day, Shiva appeared.

He was magnificent.

Tall, and beautifully chiseled. His chest was large and firm.

A cobra wrapped around His neck was peering down at this chest, as if he had been doing that for an eternity.

Sensing Sati’s presence, the cobra arose swiftly from what seemed a blissful slumber, and darting out a forked tongue, he looked at her with hypnotic eyes, putting her into almost a magical spell.

Shiva wore a tigerskin and innumerable brown beads. The beads were woven together like rosaries and cosied themselves all along His upper torso. They were also draped around His arms in tight embrace as amulets. In His right hand He held a rustic looking trident, the Trisula. Tied on the top of the trident was a little drum, shaped like an hourglass.

Sati noted that even as the trident was held perfectly motionless and steady in Shiva's secure grip, the stringed beads on the drum were still in a gentle motion. It was as if the perfect centerpiece to the forest symphony had arrived, a subtle and strangely seductive rhythm.

The rustle of the leaves was now like a heart beat. Or was it indeed Her own heart that was becoming louder in a most indiscreet way? She realised She was losing control, and that this heart had a mind of its own. How She longed to be that cobra, who was both possessive and possessed; or that Trisula, or even those beads, or somehow, all of them!

She swooned and fell into His empty arm, in a perfect fit, like it was indeed an embrace waiting for Her, as a balance to the Trisula.

When She opened Her eyes again, She saw Him staring at Her, totally unmindful of all the eyes of the forest upon His own self. The only eyes that mattered to Him, were Hers. And He had transfixed them into a hypnotic lock with his own. Hypnotism had taken over the entire mass. Even the leaves and the trees seemed in a daze, momentarily immobilised.

It was a moment of oneness. It was a moment of 'meant to be'.

It was a moment that contained eternity. Was it just a moment that was all of life? Was it that all of life was just a moment in the transfixed trance? All a magical scene, where She saw Herself as His creation, in His own eyes.

Sati had the same ecstatic feeling as in the 'So Hung' cave, the 'So Hung' gold, and She felt the same bliss, yet again.

They started meeting everyday. Each meeting was a greater happiness, a beautiful waking, which was surreally dreamy. But Sati had stopped wondering if the dream had indeed come true.

She liked this dreamality. And so, another year passed in love and happiness. She would often ask Him things about spirituality, and hear His answers out with rapt attention.

"Tell me Shiva, what is the whole world play about? What is God, what is consciousness and what is its play?"

"In the beginning was only The One.

And He thought may I be two, may I be many.

The One and the Many

to love, and to be loved.

And so the universe came into being.

Life is still The One, playing with itself, discovering itself, with many, many layers to its own gifts," He said enigmatically.

Sati remembered Her own childhood quip in a flash. "Enjoy your birth every day", and slid into Shiva's arms. "We are one, we are one, indeed," She whispered softly, even as Her tired eyelids lulled in a droop together and She tilted Her own head on His shoulder.

"Yes," He smiled.

"Oh, why then did I search for you? Why did Guru Vashishta ask me to search for you?" She persisted dreamily.

"Ah, the mystics say it so well: when you explore for God energy, you do finally embark on the fact that you are God's energy, exploring," He said even more enigmatically.

"Oh Shiva, you are so profound! What am I to do, how to cope with your thoughts?" She looked up, into His eyes.

"Just be. A great mysticism lies in this. There is no greater.

Just be the way God meant you to be, and listen to His heartbeat in all that you see.

Just, be," sang Shiva.



## HUMESHA

“Sati,” His voice worked like an awakening call.

“Sati,” He repeated. And He did not say anything else; there was nothing else to say.

Shiva repeating Her own name like a mantra on His lips was like a thousand poems sung. The divine singer, who voiced eternity in each moment.

“Shiva,” She managed to utter the mantra She had indeed been repeating a million times over.

“Yes, my dearest?” He answered.

“Shiva, will we be together?” She asked.

“We are together,” He smiled.

“No. I mean will we be together always, like this?”

“Yes, we will always be together,” He answered.

“Is it possible for one to be conjoined by her Isha? Please don’t wake me up from this dream...”

“Humesha,” He whispered softly.

“Humesha?” She asked.

“Hum, Isha. When the divine finds its plurality as one, it is forever. “This is no dream, Sati, it is the coming true of the dream,” He said with a soft, but sure, voice, gently putting Sati’s feet on the ground. They stood face to face, His arm still around Her. There, where He planted Her as if She had always been there, and whispered in sweet resonance, “Humesha.”

One day, She asked Shiva, “When are we going to wed?”

“Whenever you wish,” He replied. “Today?”

“Haha! Not today my Lord!” Sati laughed. “You must ask my father to give me away as a bride to you, and then he would be arranging the most fabulous

celebrations, which is his style and his prerogative.”

“Yes. A fabulous celebration of your marriage is his prerogative, also,” Shiva smiled. “I will ask him for your hand very soon.”





## THE ARRIVAL OF TIME

He went the very next day. Unlike all the others, Shiva did not ever wait for a different phase of the moon to signal Him His beginnings. He went by His own instinct and emotion, and this time it was overwhelming.

It was a sunny morning, and Shiva was feeling good. He readied Nandi for a ride to Daksha's palace. Nandi himself was in a hurry and charged in true bull fashion to their collective destiny. Together, they made a momentous sight: the Rider and the Ride. Raising merry dust with their hooves, every moment relegated to the past. It was like the perfect symbolism of the ride of time itself, as they rushed forward to embrace the future.

And soon, they reached the outskirts of Daksha's kingdom. Nandi's furious run was still heavy with the vigour of purpose, still robust with the virility of expectation. Women plowing their rice fields looked up to see this unstoppable creature heralding his master just past their midst. They were here one moment, and off the fields in the next. But the impression would be a life-lasting one; the farmer women knew it was not just a rider that was being heralded, but a whole new time itself had arrived.

Once they reached the walled city, Nandi slowed down into the most majestic trot that outdid any stallion of a trained royal cavalry. He was, after all the one-man cavalry of the most royal being. Both the men and the women, who had come to the marketplace for their usual chores, momentarily forgot what they had come for, and found their gaze transfixed on this unusual sight. Shiva waved

back nappily at each man, bowing politely to each woman.

Nandi thought it appropriate to bellow loudly and shake the bell around his neck, almost in a dance. The effect was magic; all the marketgoers found their whole being rushing, with an inexplicable joy that radiated visibly in their smiles.

Shiva and Nandi reached the main gates of the palace.

“Who are you? What brings you here?” asked the chief guard politely, but firmly.

“We are here to see King Daksha,” replied Nandi, as Shiva just smiled.

The guard was taken aback that the bull could speak; nevertheless he managed to shoot out his next interrogative. “What would you like to see the King for? You have to take a prior appointment. He has to meet many people on a daily basis, even heads of provinces have to await their turn, sometimes for days together.”

“I bring to you no head of province, guard!” said Nandi a little louder. “I bring to you the Supreme Master of the mountains, the Head of all heads, The Great Lord Shiva Himself!”

The chief guard was a seasoned observer. He could tell that Shiva was no ordinary man, even though He wore no ornaments that evidenced His Chieftainship, as the haughty bull was proclaiming.

“I will tell you what I *can* do for you,” he spoke. “I will put in a word to the minister for protocol, to see if he can fix a meeting at short notice with His Majesty.”

Nandi let out a gentler and approving bellow.

“But what should I tell him that you would wish to talk to King Daksha about?” asked the guard.

“I have come to ask him for his daughter Sati’s hand in marriage,” replied Shiva softly, with the smile across His face now looking much bigger, somewhat like the first sighting of the moon when it just ascends on the horizon.

Again, the chief guard thought it in the best wisdom not to question such an assertive intent. It had to have the backing of a conviction steeped deep in self-belief, and that moonsmile had every bit of self-luminosity in it.

“Very well,” he said again. “Give me a few minutes, I shall go to the minister immediately. You can take a seat in this waiting hall, where you may wash up. A cup of herbal tea will also be served for you,”

Shiva and Nandi moved in the direction he pointed out.

“My Lord,” said the chief guard as he entered the chamber of the minister for

protocol.

“Yes?” the minister looked up from his table where he was sketching a curious chart.

“There is a rider in the waiting hall, who says He wants to meet King Daksha right away. He does not have any prior appointment.”

“Hmm...” said the minister. It was a prompt.

“My Lord, when I asked Him about the nature of His business with the king, this man said something astounding!”

“Um hmmm...” said the minister, his eyes widening now.

“He said he was here to ask for princess Sati’s hand in marriage from the King!” finished the chief guard in military precision, looking at the minister.

“And?” asked the minister.

“And, my Lord, I felt a certain aura about this man, a certain authority, a royalty, an enigma, but surely something powerful and good. Very good.”

“Hmm...” said the minister again.

“And His ride was a bull. A bull who could speak! And he announced his master as Shiva, Lord of the mountains!”

“It is Him! AH, IT IS HIM!!” shouted the minister excitedly. “I knew it is Him! I knew from the moment you walked in, that the time of Shiva has come! Look at my calculation, see this chart! I just completed princess Sati’s horoscope, and I knew that Shiva would come to take Her away as His own Bride!! The most royally acclaimed ever will be our princess Sati!”

“My Lord,” mumbled the chief guard, suddenly feeling a sense of unreality. How could the minister actually be making a chart about Shiva’s arrival at the precise moment of His arrival?

Was it the lines on the chart that guided Shiva’s movement, or was it Shiva’s movement that manifested those lines on the chart like a magical permutation? It was surreal.

“My Lord, indeed your astrological calculations are like the magic of Chitragupta’s own writings-never a mark off, always happening as you say. Chitragupta, the celestial recordkeeper who knows even secret details of any life, like a picture of a thousand words.”

The minister suddenly clutched the chief guard. “Do you know I have waited all my life for this? I am going to become the brother-in-law of Lord Shiva Himself, indeed the God of all mountains, of all life!”

And then hugging the guard, continued, “Do you know our whole tribe is going to be part of the greatest event in the cosmos, the wedding of Shiva and Sati!”

to be part of the greatest event in the cosmos: the wedding of Shiva and Sati! The minister was none other than Bhrighu, Daksha's son-in-law, who had foretold of Sati's marriage to Shiva even at Her birth.

As He walked through the corridors that separated his own chambers from that of the Center Court, Bhrighu felt a certain acceleration in his blood, a racing of the pulse, a throbbing of the heart. He was a daily visitor at the court, and a welcome and important one at that. Daksha always had bonus time for Bhrighu, and heard him intently on whatever he spoke. Such was his trust and repose in this particular son-in-law. But today was different; Bhrighu knew that. What he had to announce to Daksha today, would be a crucial turn in Daksha's life. It would be the turn of all of life known so far.

Bhrighu hastened his pace more, even as he steadied himself from within.

"It's alright," he told himself. "You have waited for this moment in cosmic history, you have trained yourself for it, and you can do it."

Soon, he was right next to the centrum, and he could hear the voices of a serious debate going on.

## GOD PROPOSES, MAN DISPOSES

Bhrighu was not really given to serious debate himself, as he respected solitary contemplation far more. But he understood that in Daksha's scheme of things, consensus was always made visible, even though the end was always fixed to turn out as Daksha willed. He wondered what these men in velvet robes and shimmering jewelry really prized most in life. He wondered at the endless musings without any gain in the knowing of one's own self. The facade of being busy, when one really was going through a rehearsed motion. He wondered how much of their life did such people enjoy, or even cognize.

But he also knew that all the involved players felt very secure in this strange court pantomime, which they played out daily.

And sure enough, it was business as usual for Daksha, until Bhrighu arrived at his court.

"Ah, Bhrighu, our splendid soothsayer!" said Daksha rather pompously as he spotted Bhrighu entering his chamber.

"What do last night's stars foretell for our kingdom; what message does the morning sun bring for the people of this glorious land?" he continued, taking his eyes off Bhrighu and scanning the entire court, watching with intense satisfaction the attention that was riveted on himself.

"It is surely the break of a great dawn, your Royal Highness," said Bhrighu.

"Surely it is a day that will alter your life, and thus the lives of our people, and personally a day that I have waited for almost all my life!"

Daksha stopped inspecting the courtiers. He suddenly became attentive and looking directly at Bhrighu, asked a little cautiously, "Oh really? What is that news then?"

"He is here," said Bhrighu, looking out of the main window, at the sun, which was by now shining bright.

"Who, the sun? Of course he is here!" said Daksha impatiently, not escaping the nagging tug that something else was happening, *someone else was here*.

"I speak of Shiva. He, who some say lights up even the sun," said Bhrighu.

"The only one I know who lights up the sun is my father, Brahma!!" said Daksha, alighting from his throne, all charged up. Suddenly he felt something he had never felt before: it was his heart beating fast. He didn't like the feeling.

It was as if the normal rhythm had been completely taken over, completely changed; he was uneasy, as though something was going to be hijacked away from the comfort zone he was so used to. His left hand lifted itself upwards and gently cupped at his chest, but that did not stop this frenzied pace.

In fact, the heart started beating harder, as if it had a mind of its own. The ministers sensed something was wrong and Bhṛighu lunged forward, thinking he may have to support Daksha, who was becoming increasingly unsteady.

“I am okay. I *do not* need any support!” said Daksha angrily, as he tried to regain his composure. “So what is this time that is being heralded that you talk of? Who is this Shiva?”

Even as Daksha spoke, suddenly, escorted by the chief warden and two guards, Shiva and Nandi made their entrance. All eyes, without exception, went onto the duo. The warden announced the arrival of Shiva.

“Your Highness, I present to you, He who calls Himself Shiva, and His companion, a minotaur, who goes by the name of Nandi!”

“Salutations, King Daksha.” All those present heard the polite but royally assertive greeting of Shiva.

Daksha, upon hearing the salute, felt his head instinctively bowing, even as he managed to mutter, “Greetings.”

“Greetings,” he repeated, a moment later. “Welcome to Kankhal.”

“Thank you,” said Shiva as He smiled and started to make His way towards a seat that Daksha had pointed to, while addressing Him. Nandi also followed; his eyes were still surveying all the council like they were in some kind of a tournament. Nandi was always alert for a tournament; it was in his nature to sense one, even if it wasn’t announced.

Shiva sat comfortably, and began again, “Greetings, Raja Daksha, it is indeed a pleasure to visit Kankhal and Your Majesty’s splendid court.”

Daksha did not speak. Instead, he kept looking at Shiva, waiting for more.

“Your Highness, your land is beautiful, your people are beautiful, your buildings, your aesthetics, your etiquette, are all...very immaculate. Worthy of the celestial beings themselves.”

“Ah yes, we are the very first of creation, you know?” Daksha beamed. “And you, where are you from? What brings you here?” he asked crisply.

“As of now, we have come from the mountains,” said Shiva. Nandi has been with me in Kailash for many years now. Before this, I have been living in the plains, but those are territories very far and very different from yours, almost like a different world.”

“The mountains?” asked Daksha. “We do know the mountains.”

“No,” said Shiva. “The plains I lived in earlier, were very different from here.”

“Then what brought you to the mountains, and from there, to what do we attribute this honour of visiting us?” asked Daksha.

He was uneasy about what was happening, uneasy about what was going to be, and he wanted to fast forward to the point where he no longer had to wait in suspense. His pulse was racing madly now and it took all his self training, all his ‘Aham Brahma Putra Asmi, I am the son of Brahma’ esteem, to look Shiva in the eye.

“Your Highness, everything here is beautiful. You truly are the sons of Brahma; your tribe is first among all. But...” Shiva continued.

This was it, Daksha knew even as he queried, “But, what?”

“But there is no beauty such as Sati, your daughter, the princess of Kankhal. And it is She who draws me here. She, Who Is.”

Daksha was outraged. “How dare you!!”

He leapt from his seat. “How dare you even talk of Sati, you stranger!”

Do you have any sense of propriety at all? Do you know where you stand, to whom you speak to?” he thundered.

“I wish to marry Sati,” continued Shiva, unfazed. “The most beautiful woman in this universe. We love each other. And I wish to ask for Her hand in right honour from you, Her father. She reveres you, and we need your blessing.”

It was like the earth shook.

It was like the cosmic shock.

Daksha was reeling visibly, under the impact of what he clearly thought was an outrage.

“How dare you!” Daksha thundered.

“He asks for your blessing, my son. He who’s blessing the whole universe craves!”

Someone else also thundered in from the hall entrance.

It was Brahma, who had come to repay Shiva and Parvati for having saved Him from the first creation, and then having saved him a second time in the second creation.

Brahma, who came to overrule Daksha’s pompous decisions.

“Father, I will not!” Daksha replied angrily, even as he folded his hands in namaskar to pay respect to Brahma.

“You will not what? You will please not persist with your vain and foolish tantrums and egoistical displays Daksha!” thundered Brahma again

andams and egoistical displays, Daksha. —uttered Brahma again.

“Me? And foolish? Father how can you say that! I loathed Shiva from the time he severed your head. And despite this, the rumour that he has also been born once as Rudra, your son in another time cycle. Do you lack discretion completely, Father? Do you not understand who is a better son to you?”

Daksha had raised his voice in retort.

“You do not understand cosmic creation, or cosmic timeline, for that matter, Daksha!

It is Shiva who created me; then I created the world, including its inhabitants, all the creatures, and you and Rudra too. But Shiva *is* Rudra too, in His full Godhead,” said Brahma.

“Ah, father! You create a son who commits Brahmanicide, He severs your own head, and yet you ask for me to honour him? He is not even my equal. We are both your creations and I am Prajapati by your own promise,” Daksha hollered again.

“Shiva severed my head because *your* society, *your* chieftains, *your* ungrateful followers wanted my end. Your courtiers raised their ugly head against my universal fatherhood. Your men gave rise to ugliness. Your men were no different than the wretched water monsters of my first creation, completely bereft of gratitude.

You speak of the motives of Shiva? He was the only noble soul in the whole episode. *He gave me an escape and refuge* by cutting my own arrogant head, inspite of this costing Him the sin of Brahmanicide and followed by His consequent suffering.

Even though He was born as my mind born *son* in my creation, it was Shiva alone, who understood what fatherhood meant; Shiva as Rudra, made me understand only a good father can be a good Son.” Brahma paused as if he were reliving all the scenes once again. “And I plan to exercise my learning both as *His son and your father* !” Said Brahma, visibly emotional and charged. “I do not understand what has come over you? Why are you calling Shiva your father when you are the father of Rudra? Have you gone insane?” Daksha shouted.

“You foolish man!” Brahma said angrily. “This is God, standing in front of you, asking for your daughter’s hand. Shiva is akin to my father. He is the father of your father, Daksha. He is the Father of all!”

“And this,” He went and got hold of Sati’s hand. “This, who you think is your daughter Sati, Daksha, is the Mother of the Universe. She is my mother!!”



“But... I am your son, the Prajapati, father!” Daksha protested. “And how can you have a father?”

“Will you put an end to this silly ego of yours or should I do it for you, Daksha? What a misplaced pride you have in being my son, when I myself am the creation of Shiva. How many times do I have to tell you that?” said Brahma, in a curt and sharp tone.

“By Sristi Iswara Maharaj... Father, what are you saying?”

“I am saying He is Sristi Iswara Maharaj, you fool!” said Brahma.

“And this...” he continued, drawing Sati nearer, and deftly taking Shiva’s hand in his other palm, continued, “is what I created you for, you silly man! *I created you so that you may be father to the Mother of the world.* So that you may give your daughter to Shiva in marriage, locking permanently a place for all of us in eternity, as Gods! For we can be Gods and Devas and Prajapatis in one world cycle or then two, But Shiva is Sadashiva-always the Supreme Godhead, it is He who has, and who always will ensure our future for cycles and cycles to come” So saying, Brahma put the hand of Sati into the hand of Shiva.

Brahma had exercised His right as the father of the father of the bride. This was a new side of Him; so assertive, that speechless and dumbfounded as Daksha was, he sensed a queer feeling arise in his own Being. What was this contradictory emotion that arose in his heart?

As a father, he hated even the thought of giving Sati away, and yet actually liked the newfound assertiveness that his own father, Brahma, was brimming over with.

“The little girl you are suggesting is going to be a great Queen, *is that!* She is Durga Bhawani whom you implored even from the time you were not married, to be your little princess. But unbeknownst to you, it was Shiva who implored Her never to leave His side. There *never* was a time when He was not married to Her!” said Brahma, with conviction.

Brahma’s declaration put Daksha on a time travel to the hoary past, which had been obscured by his self-centered present. What had been forgotten steadily crystallised in the eye of his mind, a remembrance and understanding of it all. The cosmic sequence made him fall on his knees with a thud.

Daksha understood that this was the only thing to do. He acquiesced. But, in complete coherence with his innate nature, he began with a condition.

“Shiva,” he said with a resolved firmness, “I shall give you my daughter as a bride; I cannot ever say no to the wishes of my divine father, Brahma.”

Brahma beamed with pride, nodding His head to all the courtiers in

acknowledgement of His own power over Daksha.

“But...” Daksha resumed quickly.

“But what?” asked Brahma, a little irritated now.

“But Shiva must agree that I am the primal Prajapati, and that the way in which I do things in my court should always set the norm for society.”

Shiva smiled. “Of course, hasn’t it always been that? You *are* the primal Prajapati of course, and what you say sets the example for the court.”

“Yes, but it shall always remain that way,” said Daksha. “If you, the great God, wish to be my son-in-law, this is my condition. I must remain always a Prajapati,” Daksha completed his self-aggrandizing desire.

Shiva smiled again, in agreement, even as Daksha’s wish for a prized positing was already in place; *what had not yet happened was Shiva’s own longing: to be always together with Sati;*

a togetherness for which He would do anything.

“Tat Astu,” He gently whispered, and raised His right hand at Daksha, the father-in-law to be.

At that point, Nandi grunted, “The merry men would, in any case, live with us in Kailash, and be out of the precinct of Prajapati Daksha’s rigid rules.”

The cheering of the ministers in the hall, “Hail King Daksha! Hail Brahma! Hail Shiva Sati”, drowned Nandi’s sarcastic mumbling. “Blessings to the marriage that is to be!”

And so it came to be that the marriage was finalised.

## MY GIFTS ARE NOT SILVER OR GOLD

Shiva hummed something to Himself, as they met in the forest the very next morning.

“What? Are you singing to yourself?” teased Sati.

“No, I am not!”

“You are, too!” laughed Sati. “Else, tell me.”

“Everything was decidedly different this morn,” said Shiva.

“The sun shone bright, much brighter than yesterday.

The stars, see my love... were still up, they refused to go away!

sparrows whispered to each other excitedly,

the bees were already stumbling in drunken ecstasy,

and, did anyone note the trees as they swayed?

Some strange delight in the air.

All this, for you, my Love...”

“Ah! A poet!” said Sati.

“My gifts are not silver or gold for thee,

my words are my gifts, my poems, me,” continued Shiva with a soft smile.

“That, is lovely,” said Sati as She slid into the familiar embrace.

“Sometimes I feel we have always been like this,” She said. “It feels so right!”

Shiva looked down at Her head and softly kissed it from atop. “Yes, this is how it has always been,” He said.

# A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

There was frenetic activity in Kailash.

Every elemental had a look of superiority on his face and was running up and down, sometimes in circles, sometimes with a purpose, at other times in strange motions borne out of excitement.

Shiva was getting married! This was no small thing. Shiva, Lord of the universe was getting married! It was elementary knowledge then, that this was indeed, a universal event. And they were part of it. Of course there was reason to be excited. And there was so much to do! The preparations were broadly centered around two parts; one, the taking of Shiva in His full splendour to Daksha's kingdom. And the other, the bringing back and arrival of mother Sati in Kailash. The elementals had already divided themselves into two groups; whilst the women started decorating Sati's chambers, carefully thinking of Her woman's needs in the snowy reaches of Kailash, the men prepared for what they liked best. Bhang and Soma, fun and frolic, music and dance, laughter and chance—all things happy and boisterous was the boys' way of making preparation for the journeys!

"We must have enough provisions for the journey, both to and fro," they yelled as they piled up the vats containing Soma.

And strangely, they were also in charge of Shiva's 'make-up'.

The sun also seemed immensely happy at the goings on, judging from the festive red, ribbon-like wraps he had put around all the crisp, golden rays to announce the day.

"Will you be putting on some of this, or then this, or this?" asked Nandi excitedly, as he barged in to Shiva's chamber.

"What is all that?" asked Shiva.

"Oh, it's different kinds of make-up for you, sent by some of your many admirers as a pre wedding gift, my Lord!" said Nandi happily, as he knelt forward and opened the first box to display some very fine powder that smelled like jasmine.

"What is that, Nandi? Is it some kind of lactum? A dried milk?" asked Shiva.

"Oh no, my Lord, no! It is the dust from a very remote and cool planet from a distant galaxy, brought for you in this equally remote box made of walnut

ustian galaxy, brought for you in this equally ornate box made of walnut carvings from the oldest tree of that planet! Rahu has sent this for you. He says he carefully kept it for the last three hundred years as he waited for your wedding.”

“Haha!” Shiva laughed, visibly amused.

“This one here is the powder of the pollen dropped from the mysterious golden butterfly, which happens only once in the special constellation of the solar eclipse that occurs for an hour, to be followed immediately by a lunar eclipse. Though my astrology is not too strong, I would say this is also an extremely rare time. Lord Indra had Urvashi and Menaka especially collect and pack this for you.”

“Um hmm,” Shiva smiled.

“And this one, my Lord...” said Nandi even more excitedly. “Is actually from the dried up corals of the ocean, which are found, according to Varuna devata, in one dense, underwater forest known and accessible only to him. He says he has personally directed the fine grinding of this coral which is a perfect balance of silver and grey, giving a splendid hue of the moon.”

“And then, this...”

“Nandi!!” Shiva stopped Nandi by the tone of His voice.

“Nandi! Have you lost it? Why on earth will I be putting on makeup?”

“Because, after all, it is your wedding, my Lord! And you should look good, you know...”

“Ah, I have considered that,” said Shiva. “But why for the sake of Heaven, will I not use my normal bhasma? Bhasma makes for a great makeup, don’t you think?” said Shiva, as He turned and Nandi saw that He had already smeared Himself with ash.

Ash, which when seen on cremation grounds, would give anyone goosebumps, but for the few who were privileged to see it smeared adorningly across Shiva’s yogic face, it gave rise to virtual ecstasy. Nandi remembered his privilege, as he felt the familiar ecstasy of seeing Shiva like this, rise once again.

“Make sure you do thank Varuna and Indra for these, but have them returned,” said Shiva. “And oh, by the way, Indra also sent Airavat, his elephant, as my ride for the wedding.”

“He what?” growled Nandi.

“Ah yes, I gave him the same answer,” said Shiva. “Why on earth would I not

use my old bull for the special occasion? Thanks, but no thanks.” Shiva winked. “So, that is why my dear Nandi, I always tell you, it’s not good to change too much, although a little change is inevitable,” said Shiva, putting His arm over Nandi’s shoulder and looking deeply into his eyes. “I know I am getting married and I shall have to usher in some change,” He continued. “But by Kailash, some things, I shall never change!” Nandi bellowed in ecstatic happiness. “Shall we move out now?” Shiva smiled.

The ganas were gathered in hordes outside the chamber. As soon as Shiva and Nandi stepped out, there was a profusion of garlands, slogans and happiness in equal measure.

“Har Har Mahadev!” shouted Bhringi. “Har Har Mahadev!” chorused the ganas. “*Bolo Shiv Shanker Ki Jai Ho!!* Hail our Lord, Shiva!!”

The cries rent the air increasingly, and then echoed back, as though the mountains had joined the chorus. For a moment, it seemed Kailash, the sturdiest mountain of all, was shaking.

“*Jai Ho Shiv Shanker Bhole Ki*, Hail our lord, Shiva,” said a gana. “*Jai Ho Kailas Parbat Ki!* Hail too, the Holy mount Kailash! *Sabse uttam yeh prabhat, Aaj Niklee Hai Shiv Ki Baraat!* Ah what an auspicious day has dawned. Today is the procession of Lord Shiva’s wedding itself! *Saari Sristi Naach Utthe Hai Aaj!*” he finished. “The entire creation is dancing!!”

One by one, they came and garlanded Shiva. Some hugged Him, others prostrated themselves completely, till Shiva raised them up gently, as though to put life back into them. Still, others blessed Him by placing their palms on His head, and Shiva accepted the blessings with the utmost humility. Although He was Lord and master of these hills and mountains, He knew some of the denizens were as old as the earth itself, and to be blessed by them, was indeed an auspicious omen.

One such woman managed to appear from behind some very fierce looking tribesmen of the Smasaan area. The Smasaanis, as they were called, were noted for their fierce ways and their impregnable isolation. It was rumoured that they were adept at black magic and concerned themselves with the most bizzare

rituals. Some said they were absolutely comfortable with death and dead bodies, treating the funeral pyres as a normal forester might light a bonfire to keep himself warm.

But Shiva had an old association with them; one that showed openly on His sincere smile as He acknowledged the tribe.

“Babham Bhayankar!” cried the tribe leader as he poked his spear skyward, as though to pierce a hole in an unseen ethereal enemy. “Babham Bhayankar!” chorused the rest of the tribe, as more than a hundred spears went up.

“Shiva Shiva Shiva!” suddenly shrieked the old woman, startling even Shiva with her abrupt and high pitched call.

Something about the appearance of the woman made Him look at her again, more intently. She was short, fair, and had wavy grey hair, which was let open—something a little unusual for someone her age. Normally, women would tie their hair up in a bid to make it look denser than it actually was, but this woman had a growth which was like that of an adolescent. She had wrinkles all along her face, wrinkles that traversed from one side completely to the other, like latitudes and longitudes; and almost half a dozen of them together gave her the appearance of an ancient mountain, replete with gorges.

Shiva noticed that she was extremely beautiful, and that there was something very youthful about her despite the wrinkles and the grey.

“Yes, mother...” He smiled.

“Do not call me mother,” she said rather shyly. “I think of you as my Lord—the virile and youthful yogi Deva!”

“Ah, but I am off to get married,” smiled Shiva, amused at her humour.

“Be that as it may, and I am so happy for you and your bride to be,” said the woman. “But I still think of you as my Lord, is there any stopping that?” She said teasingly.

“No, I guess you can think anything you wish in your own mind, because that is the privilege each human has,” said Shiva.

“And who said I am human?” cackled the woman. “I am just a flame that burns in your love, my Lord. Even as I watch the dead burn in the pyre. Fire levels all. And I saw not one, but two bodies being levelled today,” she said, bringing a strangely mystic smile on her face.

“Hold your tongue, woman!” Nandi lunged forward in anger.

But Shiva raised a hand and gestured him to stop; He saw instead, the face of a beautiful girl emerge on her wrinkled skin for just a flash of a moment, and then quickly merge back again.

“What is your name?” Shiva asked gently.

“Gita,” she replied shyly.

Shiva noticed He was in the region of the mountains called Mahakaleshwar, and promptly said aloud, “Gita Mahakaleshwar!”

She blushed completely and the elementals began to laugh.

“Gita Mahakaleshwar!” she repeated her new title. “I like it!”

And then she spoke strongly in an altogether different voice, loaded with conviction and knowingness, “It is all as you wish to play, my Lord. You are the King of the mountains, the King of the universe, Lord of all, but you have one lady from eternity, and She is the owner of He who owns us all.”

“And you do remind me of my son, Sunder,” she added. “So, I think I can revert my position and bless you as a mother, indeed.”

“Thank you,” said Shiva.

“*Shiv Sunder hi satya hai*, Beautiful Shiva is the ultimate Truth,” said Gita as she put both her hands on either side of Shiva’s forehead, to give a maternal blessing, kissing His matted hair.

Shiva bowed His head in gratitude. “Thank you, Gita. May I take your leave now?” He asked.

“Leave? Oh no! I am coming along with the procession too!” said Gita.

“Of course,” said Shiva.

“Tell me, Shiva,” asked Gita. “Do you know any chhand?”

“Chhand? What is that?”

Knowing that she had His full attention now, Gita closed up nearer to Shiva and said, “Don’t you know, when you reach the marriage venue, Sati’s bridesmaids shall ask you a riddle and will not let you proceed any further if that riddle is not answered.”

“Riddle?” Shiva already looked puzzled.

“A riddle,” Gita repeated. “But one which has to be answered in poetry.”

“So what am I to do?” asked Shiva, looking a little helpless at the thought of not being able to proceed to Sati.

“Oh, Gita is here now! Gita will tell you what to say, my dear Shiva.” And she lunged towards Him. It was a magical moment for her as she whispered something into Shiva’s ear, fully intent on hearing her, even in the midst of loud



festivity and chorus.

“Ah, I like it,” Shiva smiled at Gita’s secret whisper.

Suddenly, Nandi bellowed in what seemed like the sound of primeval thunder. It was a sound that literally filled the skies with the primal birthing of sound itself.

This was the call for the ganas to start the procession.

“*Satyam Shivam Sundaram*,” they sang along , taking a cue from Gita’s words.

The trek through the mountains was as expected: festive, robust, loud and merry. Every now and then a quaint animal would peer outside of his own cave to witness the band as it played along. “What is going on? Is a God getting married?” asked some, to which the prompt answer came, “Absolutely, our Lord is getting married!”

“Shiva is getting married? To whom?” Suddenly the excitement would double.

“To the noble Dakshayani, Sati! Princess of untold beauty, lady of incomparable virtue.”

“Oh! Can we join in?” they would ask.

“Yes, of course! It is an open invite, and Raja Daksha’s abundance has no limits. Come, join the party!” the ganas would say.

And so it swelled; the marching party to Daksha’s palace was reminiscent of the world coming into being, expanding, and moving joyously along a pre-destined path.

## SHIVA'S BARAAT-A MERRY KALEIDOSCOPE OF GANAS

It presented a truly unique sight, this party of Shiva—a happy blend of the most strange and varied revellers. The ganas and elementals, forest men and yogis, precariously old aged people and naughty young pranksters, all moved together. The appearance was straight out of a merry circus.

Some had four legs, others none at all, walking on their hands upside down, winking intermittently at everyone. Some had hair like the leaves of a tree, others looked as though they *were* trees, with human feet. Some were more than hundred feet in height; others were small enough to be carried in the palms of their larger friends.

Some had no neck at all; others had ears and noses fixed to the neck like appendages. Some were dressed in the finest velvets; others wore bushes as their attire, yet others wore nothing at all, except loincloths. Some were seated stoically on their horses; others carried their horses on their back! Some were playing flutes and gentle music; others were shouting with hoarse voices and pulling out the flutes from the players' hands. Some were perfumed with delightful scents; others were drenched in intoxicants. They were all specimens! A veritable potpourri of merry men, hitherto unseen. This was certainly not in conformity to a regular wedding procession; it was obnoxious, in terms of norm. And yet, it was not inimical; the only feeling that paradoxically emanated from their loud cries, was that of sharing and camaraderie, a pure joy in someone else's happiness. Loud and coarse, yet happy and innocent, was The Shiva Baraat.

Shiva Himself was all smiles, waving to all His people. He gave back an extra special wave when he saw a Sadhu salute Him from the crowds. No one understood why Shiva bowed in his direction. But the Sadhu, one of many in the hordes of Aghoris, was indeed an old familiar; he was Shamshan Nath. Shiva smiled again at how well it had all worked out.

The festive procession reached the outskirts of Daksha's kingdom. Again, the same fields with the same farmer women preceded the palace gates. But something was different: This time, the women were prepared for time

itself to take a ride into their lands and hearts. They smiled wide; the more adventurous of them waved, only to get some cheeky waves back from the elementals and merry men who were now going wild with joy. Some of them waved back in what seemed like gesticulation; others whistled catcalls, hurling joyous adjectives in the air, making them seem almost like profanities. This was the truth: the high point of happiness discriminates against none, not even profanity and profundity.

Waiting on the other side of the gates, was a royal reception party. The giant guards with their gigantic moustaches pointing upwards along with the plumes of their smart headwear, seemed advertently to symbolise a celestial welcome. Behind them, were the ministers, each fit to be a king himself, but remaining happily loyal to the great King Daksha. Next, were the rishis, many of whom were Daksha's sons-in-law, each famed far and wide in the world for his individual prowess in some field of public life.

The devatas formed the next circle: Indra was attending from Daksha's side, as were many others standing in observed regimen. And there was even God Vishnu Himself, dressed immaculately, visibly happy to bless the congregation with His presence. The innermost circle comprised of the women: Daksha's wives and daughters, and their friends. Although it was only because they were immediate family that they were so positioned, to the happy bridegroom Shiva, this seemed to be a sign that women were, indeed, at the heart center of all things!

Brahma was standing right next to Daksha himself, one arm around His son's waist in support, more moral than physical; Daksha had stopped reeling after he had been promised Chieftainship by Shiva.

"Greetings!" cried the reception almost in a chorus, almost like a song, even as the women folk showered the wedding party with flower petals and celestial pollen.

The elementals roared back some incomprehensible words and grunts, which seemed like noises, but they were actually respectfully reciprocating. Shiva bowed His head just slightly, in the gentlest manner, setting Him totally apart from His robust followers. But even He could not conceal His happiness, which was now manifest as a beaming smile.

"Welcome," said Daksha, and he put forward his hands slowly turning them towards the palace, in a respectful manner, albeit replete with the style of a great emperor.

Ever so gracefully, Nandi folded his legs, lowering his height and making way for His Lord to disembark. Shiva stepped on the grounds of Daksha's kingdom, and it seemed the ground was blessed.

Shiva, on the other hand, felt vividly the current of a little Sati playing on these grounds, nursing Her dolls, and selling Her peanuts, as if the scenes were being enacted in the present. As if the scenes were *always* being enacted in His heart, as His most favourite story.

Daksha stepped forward and put a garland of flowers around Shiva's right arm. Shiva lifted His arm, drew the garland next to His face, and its sweet fragrance wafted in, He bowed His forehead onto the garland, in respect.

It was a mark of acknowledgment and acceptance of the honour being bestowed upon Him. Secretly, He longed for the garland that Sati would put around His neck in eternal wedlock, called Jaimala.

Nandi and the ganas were given garlands as well. The elementals grabbed with both hands, sweetmeats that were being offered by the girls in the reception committee. Some pulled away the whole trays, roaring, "Let us relieve you timid souls of these burdens!! We, the Shiva men, have arrived, your prayers are answered!" they shouted boisterously, asking, "Which ones of you are not married, looking for a handsome suitor like us?" The girls flitted away, some of them giggled, but the more mature among them chose to ignore these little pranks as part of the festive mood.

Then Prasuti came to the fore with a gold plate on which was a beautifully lit diya, and started moving the plate around Shiva's face exactly in the way that Gods were worshipped in a temple. "Let me welcome you, dear Shiva, into our family. For you are my son now, and I, your mother." Shiva liked her instantly; he loved the idea of getting a mother.

"Yes, mother," smiled Shiva and lowered His head as a mark of respect.

Daksha, with a tinge of jealousy, asked Shiva to move forward towards the palace, where the ceremonies were to be held.

As the congregation was moving into the palace, suddenly, two of Sati's sisters lunged forward in front of Shiva and said,

"Stop! You cannot go any further!"

Everyone was a bit stunned. The roaring of the elementals came to a sudden halt.

Even Daksha's ministers and sons-in-law looked at the girls with consternation.

Daksha himself was about to reprimand them, when the girls spoke again, "You

cannot go forward unless you have satisfied our demand. We hear you are a poet; you have been singing poems for Sati, so we are told!" they giggled.

Shiva smiled, joining in their little game.

"So now, dear brother-in-law to be, you have these to please as well," the girls said, pointing to their own ears.

Shiva smiled, he was prepared for what was coming next.

"You, O romantic poet,

On the day of your marriage, have to sing!

share your thoughts with us, eager groom,

why are you in a state of tremendous bliss?

come now, tighten your kamarband ,

and O handsome bridegroom, give us a chhand " they sang.

Suddenly the diminutive figure of Gita popped out of the crowd. At first, she peered at Shiva with wide eyes and a goblin grin, and once she saw that He had noticed her, she winked. He gave out a broad smile, wondering at the acts of God's own devotees who think of everything, 'and by their provisions, are the actual miracle makers' He thought.

To the ladies, He announced,

"About the state you ask of bliss,

O lovely ladies, my thought is just this.

Isn't it in your custom,

to welcome the Groom, with a kiss?" He chuckled and concluded the chhand.

Everyone laughed and cheered the girls. "Go ahead, give Him a kiss then!"

Gently, the girls came up and planted a kiss each on Shiva's cheek, much as someone would kiss a sibling, brother, or even a father.

"The great privilege of doing this to God Himself," thought Bhṛīgu. "I must study these girls' horoscopes for their past lives; to have earned such merit."

Dakṣa directed Shiva respectfully towards the palace and led Him inside. To get on with the task at hand, as soon as possible , was Dakṣa's virtue.

Everyone understood that the function was now about to begin, and started following the two gracefully. Even the elementals were in a gentle formation, as if they knew exactly when to become divine like their leader, whom they loved so much.

Shiva was taken to a beautifully decorated Pandal.

Once again, there was gold everywhere. Everyone looked with astonishment at the way things were done up. The finest designers had been called to make everything from the big platform upon which Shiva and Sati would sit to be married, down to the littlest of details. Even the cushion pins were embellished with gold-like tiny flowers and set in perfect patterns on hundreds of seats for the guests.

One by one, everyone took their place; the ganas and elementals were given priority by the ministers, much to their great approval. Shiva and Sati were to be wedded in accordance with Vedic rites, of which Daksha himself was chief patron.

The stage was finally set.

All eyes looked for Sati. As was the custom, the bride was brought in, last of all. Shiva hungered for this play of Shakti to unfold; He could barely manage His incomplete self without Her.

And then, as if to make God know how one feels when prayers are answered, She appeared.

At the farthest end of the huge hall, Sati stepped in with the most divine grace, flanked by many sisters and friends, and clasped closely by Virni and Prasuti, both of whom had slipped away from the reception to usher Her in.

Sati's brothers held a silk sheet over Her head, making it appear as a new sky, a resplendent reddish-gold one, as though to signal the event at hand.

Red was the colour of Shakti; of vibration, of creation, of manifestation, of love, romance, progeny, abundance and well-being. And She was all that, and more.

She was Sati. She, who Is. Shiva drank in that first sight, in His old thirst-quenching way of drinking the ocean in one go. This first sight of her as His bride, got etched into His very soul; embedded deep inside the very center of His heart, to remain there for His entire life.



## **SATI SHIV JAIMALA: THE GARLAND OF ETERNITY**

Every step She took forward, it seemed celestial musicians were playing out their music, on the tinkle of Her anklets. The bated breaths of the entire congregation collected, was like a mass of cosmic prana, waiting to rush out into creation to dance to this music. Shiva's men bowed at the princess who was coming into their life as queen. Sati's own kin was startled that their little girl had grown into a young lady who was so obviously a cosmic beauty. Shiva's heart skipped a beat.

Sati was the most beautiful woman He had ever seen, and He knew in every inch of His body, mind and soul, that She, was His. And He, Hers. Forever.

He stared at her intently even as she took demure steps, coming towards Him.

He just couldn't wait for Her to be right next to Him, and let out a smile at His own eagerness.

Finally, She was right next to Him : His greatest wish had been manifested, the whole purpose of creating the entire world was now standing in front of Him.

Virni handed a jaimala to each of them and prompted Sati with a smile to put this sacred garland over Shiva. Sati did so, with the most gentle and loving action. Shiva too, put a jaimala on Sati, and the whole congregation broke into a loud cheer of felicitation and joy. Shiva then sat down near the Havan and Sati took Her place beside Him.

A place that would eternally belong to Her.

The pundit lit the holy fire and the one hundred and one junior pundits seated in an orderly row, began to chant mantras with immaculate precision and perfect diction. Daksha kept offering ghee to the fire every time the pundits would say, "Sva Ha".

The procedure was that they offered prayers and vows on behalf of the worshipers, which in this case, were Daksha and Shiva, and at the sound of 'Sva

Ha', the consonance was made in the offering.

Brahma offered the ghee from Shiva's side as father.

"This is unique," He chuckled to Himself. "I am, at the same time, the grandfather of the bride, and the father of the groom! Ah, the wonder of being a first God!" He laughed out in open happiness.

A more serious thought also crossed Brahma's pious mind, the memory of which still pained him ; the accusation of marrying his own daughter: it had been a cosmic inevitability. Who else would a Creator God marry but His own progeny? No one had ever understood that, except Shiva. And now, it seemed, by the very advent of this sacred event of His own marriage, Shiva was now expunging that cosmic inevitability from universal creation. Such was the magic of Shiva, such were Shiva's gifts of return to Brahma, for reuniting Him with His own half. The morbid part of being the father of one's own wife had now relegated itself to a distant past of creation and the Creator. This was the meaning of Shiva's Havan for Brahma. "SVAHA SVAHA," went on the pundits. "SVAHA SVAHA," chorused Daksha, Brahma and the congregation.

"SVAHA," said Shiva, His heart exploding with anticipation.

Sati, on Her part could only hear the pundit say, "SHIVA SHIVA..." She did not hear 'SVAHA', only 'SHIVA...SHIVA...'

"With this, ends the invocation of all the celestials, the devatas, the Gods that ever have been and ever will be. With this, culminates the marriage of Shiva, the mountain chief with Sati, the daughter of Daksha Prajapati. Sati, you may now put a band of gold on Shiva's finger; a band that will symbolize your holy matrimony and bonding for the rest of this life together."

Shiva woke up from a semi-trance state of bliss to hear the chief Pundit. "Not just this life, but eternity, Humesha," said Shiva softly. The Pundit looked up. He hadn't clearly heard, but Sati smiled back, and holding Shiva's hand in Hers, tenderly put a gold ring on His finger. The pundit nodded in approval. "You may now put the Sindoor on Her forehead as a sacred mark of this union," He said. Shiva smiled again and took off the gold band, which Sati had just put on His finger as a wedding gift.

Everyone was taken aback. What was Shiva doing? But Shiva next dabbed it into the box of Sindoor, and carefully cupping some in the ring, spread it over Sati's forehead in a straight line, as if to mark a new line of destiny for Her. Shiva was surprised at Himself, that His hand did not shake one bit, even though His heart was nearly exploding in cognizance of this final moment of sacrament that would unite Him and Sati.

"You are now Man and wife, married in holy wedlock in front of all these



witnesses; Agni devata, the Gods and the celestial beings, your men and ours, for ever more,” said the pundit.

Shiva arose, to find Sati arising by His side in perfect synchronicity, like a shadow. “Or, am I the shadow,” He thought. “She is the substance of my entire life.”

Together they bowed and touched the feet of Brahma and Saraswati, for having been Shiva’s parents. Then together, they touched the feet of Daksha and Prasuti, for having been Sati’s parents. Such is the mystery of the Gods: they are grateful to humans for parenting them into the world.

One by one, every one in the congregation congratulated the newly married couple, as also the parents and siblings. The elementals started roaring again, “Har har Mahadeva, Jai ho Sati Ma!!” Praising their Lord and his newly wedded wife, who was now to be the mother of their clan.

Nandi, the most robust of all, was crying like a little child, unable to control his tears. Narada too was crying, and at the same time saying, “Ah, the tears of joy, ah, the blessedness of being witness to this...” And then, looking at all those who looked at him, “Ah Narada, you are blessed!” he proclaimed to himself in an emotively charged voice.

Sati hugged Prasuti and Daksha. Her mind had never known such paradox. The dream had become a reality; She had become Shiva’s wife, the very thing She had waited for every moment after Her emergence from Vashishta’s cave; and yet, the leaving of Her father’s home was tearing at Her like another abyss. Little was She to know, that such a paradox, such a cleaving was to become almost a routine. Little did She know that the inherent difference in character of the two men She adored—Her father and Her husband, would grow to an abyss itself.

She did not know at all that Daksha’s acquiescence was temporary, that his persistently indulgent nature and stubborn arrogance would assert itself at another time, to demean Shiva.

She did not know that a time would come, when She would have to make a final choice between the two.

All She knew, was that *this*, was a great time, indeed.

# FUN, FEAST, AND FESTIVITY

The chief kitcheneer of Daksha's protocol held the high rank of a minister. That was how much importance Daksha gave to the entertainment of his guests.

The minister announced to all the guests assembled, "It is our great honour, the honour of our great King Daksha, and also of all the fortunate people of Kankhal to be able to host you for an occasion as important as our daughter, Sati's wedding.

With utmost humility, we request you to please proceed to the central dining area, where a humble lunch has been arranged for your pleasure." His repeated usage of the word 'humble' was only a matter of speech. In truth, he was just the opposite: pompous, like the rest of Daksha's brood. However, Daksha himself felt reasonably proud of his man, and smiled.

Shiva's ganas were going to be treated to a feast, which surely they had never ever dreamt of, leave alone eaten. As he ushered in the guests himself, his smile gave way to his trademark smirk. "This way please," he kept repeating after his own minister.

They went mad: The Shiv ganas, the elementals and the merry men alike.

The central dining hall was humongous. It could seat over three thousand people. In addition, there were benches for the junior officers or noblemen of lesser status, which could seat another two thousand.

The walls were decorated with the finest tapestry and paintings. Chandeliers comprising hundreds of candles lit several sections of the hall. Liling music was being played from all four corners by stunning damsels stringing Rudra veenas. But it was the aroma of the food that made the ganas go completely mad. They started jumping about and grabbing the plates, picking up full cauldrons and emptying them into their own plates and even garments. Some were seen stuffing full loaves of bread into their enormous gullets, which suddenly did not seem deformed any more, but were showing their tremendous utility!

It was as if most of these creatures were born to eat.

Others were pushing everyone else in a bid to get to newer dishes.

Even Daksha's ministers were not spared; women folk too, had to take care and daintily stepped backwards as the melee continued. Within no time at all, the dignified dining hall bore resemblance to an Akheda, an open air gym where

diminished dining hall bore resemblance to an Akhada, an open air gym where little battles of physical prowess and manoeuvre were routinely fought between sparring athletes and musclemen.

Daksha allowed his contrived smile to slip into an unadulterated frown. He looked towards Sati in a bid to get some empathy from Her. But She was looking dreamily at Shiva, too happy to be with Her eternal treasure to be bothered by trivia of mannerism and etiquette.

Shiva however, was amused.

“My Lord!” said the kitcheneer, visibly distressed, to Him. “They are excited, maybe over excited, don’t you think? Your ‘men’ are in a great rush...Or are they very hungry? If you could tell them there is plenty of food to feed a whole kingdom for a full week, perhaps they will calm down and this ruckus could be avoided...”

“They are not hungry. They are like children,” said Shiva.

“And yes, like children, get excited when wonderful things are happening in their lives. Getting your daughter, Sati, as their mother, is the best thing to ever ‘happen’ to these ‘men’, as you call them; Many of them, have felt motherless in the world where they were born, before they came to Kailash to join ranks with the ganas of the far mountains.” There was a striking depth in His voice, which immediately calmed the minister.

“If the provisions are enough, why worry?” Shiva concluded, “Let the children play.”

Sati too, smiled radiantly. The ganas raised slogans.

“Jai Baba barfani, bhookon ko ann, pyaason ko paani, Hail the God of the snowy abodes, who provides food first and so too, water for those who thirst!”

The ganas had the spiritual wisdom to know that irrespective of where the food and provisions came from, it was actually Shiva who was the real source. In this particular case, they did not stop at thinking of Daksha as host, but went directly to the point—why would Daksha host hobgoblins like themselves.

And they arrived at the same one answer they always arrived at: Shiva, of course.

But this time, they hastened to add Sati’s name as well.

Be as it may that the ganas were socially an unhoneed lot, but to the surprise of Daksha’s clan, very politically correct when it came to their own status; Sati was their mother now, just as Shiva had declared. The marriage had taken place, the bride was now on their ‘side’. Nothing could stop them from having a great time.

And so it was that everyone feasted. Not just on food, but on the great knowing that Shiva, their great mountain Chieftain had now been infused in full measure into a better half by Sati, the epitome of divine femininity! And that this, was the greatest event of many milleniums.

Dusk was now falling lightly upon the festive revellers.  
With feast-filled bellies that had slowed them down to almost a slumber mode, the wedding party started showing signs of a sweet sleepiness.

Shiva approached Daksha and requested, “Your Highness, it has indeed been a long day of tremendous joy and festivity. We have enjoyed your great hospitality and now, as dusk falls upon us, I beg leave to take Sati along with me to Kailash. The journey is long and we should begin now.”

Upon hearing this, Prasuti began to weep, quickly coming to Sati’s side, and fixing Her bridal garments and hair with the deft hands of a mother who had done this every day for twenty years;

A mother who had brought up this miracle for all Her life.

A mother, who knew, as all mothers do, that this sort of chance of tidying up her daughter like a little doll, would now not come again.

Daksha was secretly impressed with Shiva’s immaculate manner, which was doubly contrasted by the mannerisms of His party of goblins.

“Yes, of course!” I shall command my armies to escort you...” began Daksha.

Shiva did not allow him to finish. He gracefully raised His right hand in a gesture of estoppel.

“Thank you, your Highness. We will not require any such escort. Do not hitherto worry about your princess Sati. She is now the Queen of the mountains, which we know only too well. We do not need any scouts, just your good wishes will favour us along the way.”

It was Daksha’s first experience of Shiva’s resolute authority, and a complete overruling of His own.

“Ah, yes...” he managed to mutter. “Sound the guard then, make way for the royal party...uh... mountain party... to depart,” he corrected himself.

Everyone started moving towards the hall exit, and Sati bent to hug Her mother and father, yet again.

Nandi started stretching his legs and making small but forceful grunts; it was

like he was igniting his engines in readiness for the ride he had dreamt of: carrying both Shiva and Sati, to Kailash. He bordered on impatience, and was just a little short of asking the bride's side to hurry up, but one look at his master and he held his peace, grunting and stretching a bit more.

Shiva was very patient. He hugged all the family and His newfound brothers-in-law, the ministers, and rishis, In turn ,  
as each of them moved up to greet Him.

Finally, Chandra Kumar stepped forward. He was luminous, and a soft current flowed about Him. As he came nearer to Shiva, both of them sensed a strong emote. Chandra Kumar was popular with all people; he was very handsome and was married to twenty seven of Daksha's daughters. This made him Shiva's brother-in-law as many times over. As they embraced, a very different feeling came over him, and rather than crossing his neck with Shiva as men did in family greeting, he tilted his head on Shiva's shoulder, as a child might do with a father. The moment he did that, his luminosity glowed, as if it had received an extra charge, lighting up the whole hall, turning heads and charging them up in turn. A connection had surely been made.

Shiva ran His palm over Chandra's head and said softly, "We are brothers by destiny now, dear brother." Chandra regained his composure and smiled back in acknowledgment. "Yes, we are that!"

Shiva and Sati then began to move to the gateway, where Nandi had already positioned himself. They moved gracefully in rhythm, as One. Brahma, Saraswati, Vishnu and Lakshmi, along with all the celestials, began to shower them with rose petals. The musicians began a farewell tune, and amidst tears and goodbyes, the newly married couple exited the hallway into the wide open, where the sun was sliding down like an inebriated but happy soul about to rest in his cosy bed.

Shiva gently put one arm around Sati and lifted Her easily off the ground. He seated Her on Nandi, and then looking at the wedding party one last time, sat on Nandi Himself.

Nandi let out a bellow that startled everyone with its tenor. It was like the call of a truly happy celestial elephant. He got up steadily to his full height, careful that Sati would not feel a jerk, and hoisted his riders to a majestic position of an exalted throne.

The royal drummers started beating their drums, breaking out into a lilting rhythm. The Shiv ganas promptly drew out their damarus and started playing them with equal vigour. The confluence of the palace music and that of the

mountain men was, indeed fabulous—a divine jugalbandi.

And thus began Sati's journey to Her abode in Kailash, amidst drums and trumpets, roars and fanfare. Kailash, where She hoped to live happily ever after with Her Lord, Shiva, who was also the beloved Lord of the world.



## LOVE AND LEARNING

“So, what work do you actually do?” Sati asked coyly like any newly married wife.

“I meditate,” Shiva answered.

“No, I meant what work do you do as in *work*?”

““Yes, I have noted that when most people ask you ‘what do you do?’ they mean to ask about livelihood, vocation and income. Whereas, I have always thought that there’s so much more than just what a man does for a living. So much more that goes in to make a ‘way of life’...you know... he may paint or sing or play sport...” Shiva said. “But you meant to ask what I do for work, right?”

“Yes,” said Sati. “That’s what I meant.”

“I meditate,” He answered again with a strange smile.

“I don’t understand,” She said.

“For most people, a livelihood and a way of life are two different things. For me, it is all one,” He said.

“And you and I are one,” She said, drawing close to Him.

“Yes,” He smiled.

“So then, teach me about meditation,” She said.

“Yes, I will,” said Shiva. “I will teach you about meditation, and then...”

“And then?”

“And then I will teach you *about* meditation.”

“Yes!” She said excitedly.

“Actually, one cannot teach meditation,” Shiva continued. “Just as one cannot catch the moon, even when you clutch at the sky. Meditation is like that: it cannot be clasped by pointing, it must be from within, from practice.”

“So, can’t you be a Guru for meditation? If that’s all the work you do?” She asked, making a point.

“Ha Ha! Yes I can, but ultimately it’s you who must meditate, right?”

“Right,” She said. “Understood. So it’s not very different from cooking then, or playing or even reading; you have to do it for yourself?”

“Brilliant!” said Shiva. “That is what it is.”

They both laughed into the starry sky. In the morning, Sati awoke to see Shiva awake already. “A cup of tea for you?” He smiled.

“Yes, please,” She said. “I should be doing this. From tomorrow, I will.”

“How does it matter, as long as we are together, being able to share a warm cup of tea,” said Shiva gently, “How does it matter, who gets up first and makes it?”

“No, but I would like to,” said Sati. “Just that I had the most awesome dream last night, probably that’s why I didn’t want to wake out of it!” She laughed.

“The mystic would think of it as the height of labelling that dreams are what you see in sleep, and when your eyes are open, that’s waking,” replied Shiva enigmatically.

“I see,” said Sati, indulging the conversation further. “So then, what is waking, in terms of the mystic?”

“Ah, yes,” smiled Shiva. “He alludes to opening the third eye to see dimension four.”

“Dimension four? A fourth dimension? Wow! Tell me more!” said Sati.

“Oh well, we are all made of the same one stuff, and we just take on different vibrations which in turn, make us more dense or then more subtle. And so the ‘differences’ arise. But these are only at the surface; deep within it’s the same stuff, the same tattva in each.”

“Hmm...really, tell me more,” said Sati.

“So it is,” He continued with a smile, “That there are hints that one contains the other.”

“One contains the other? Shiva, you are going to have to help me with an example.”

“Hmm...” Shiva kept smiling. “For example, everyone knows that sea-shells which we call conches, are found near the oceans; but only those with a curiosity, who pick up the shell and experiment with it find out that the shell too, contains the ocean.

Here, put this to your ear,” He said, picking up a beautiful sea-shell from near His bedside.

Sati put the shell to Her ear and heard a subtle sound. “It is actually like the waves on the ocean!” She cried out. “Amazing!”



“The key word here is *experiment*, Sati. Only those who try to seek, find!”

“Why do you ask

to cast

division in elements

of earth and air

water and fire and breeze?

Breathe deep and see: we are all connected; we are the One,

we, are all reflections of we. Lighten up, and see”

He broke into a gentle verse.

“Oh, lovely,” She said, resting Her head on His shoulder. “You are a lovely poet and a lovely person.

“Thank you,” He smiled.

“Always remain the wonderful person I am,” said Sati, and then corrected Herself. “I mean, always remain the wonderful person you are!”

“It’s the same thing,” said Shiva smilingly. “I will, we will...”

“And by the way, I understand the difference between meditation and cooking at least,” said Sati.

“Really, what’s that?” asked Shiva.

“Oh, well, I did note that unlike meditation, someone else *could* cook for you. Or then be kind to make your tea for you,” She smiled. Shiva laughed as He held Her close to Himself.

## A BONDING FAR MORE THAN SKIN DEEP

“Tell me one thing” She said one day.

“Yes my dearest”

“Why, if you are in perfect harmony with the jungle and its creatures, why, if you really love these animals and the elementals, do you wear a tiger skin and use another one for your meditation mat? In fact why do even the attained hermits do this?”

“Why not?” asked Shiva, surprised.

“Why not?” Sati exclaimed. “Because one shouldn’t kill animals for their skins. It’s cruel”.

“I couldn’t agree more!” affirmed Shiva.

“Then?” asked Sati, a little bewildered.

“Then...let me tell you a story of when I first met the tigers..”

“Please do” Said Sati, eagerly.

Shiva began to recount his first meeting with the tigers.

When He reached the part where the tigers handed him the skin of their dead chief with the request that He may use it for a meditation seat,saying “So that our old chief ‘feels’ your presence even though he is not present amongst us now”,

Sati found her own eyes moist with empathy and understanding, in just the same manner as Shiva had, when the tigers had spoken to Him.

Shiva concluded in his typical style “So you see my dear, you and I are one, our feelings, our love, our care and love for others, is all the same.”

Sati couldn’t help but smile, She was always in agreement with Her Nath, even though She wouldn’t always candidly admit it.

On another day, when She spotted Him doing His antics with the ganas, almost like children playing, wild and absolutely full of abandon, She wondered how He could be so versatile.

He had wisdom, knowledge, wit and humour, *and* He was so humane, so gentle, and yet She had also seen His anger.

He would get easily angered at displays of cruelty, and He would come down on it with the heaviest hand. “I don’t like bullies!” He would say. Whenever anyone

approached the council with a complaint of fights, it was always the mightier, who would be censured by Him.

At other times, He would become aloof for days on end, busy in some deep contemplation, and forget even to have His meals properly. Just when She thought She had known that part of Him, He would surprise Her by eating voraciously any meal that She had made with Her hands! Truly, Her beloved husband was a divine collection of *all attributes* rolled into one.

“Or then, this is how the One rolls out many attributes”, Sati thought proudly to Herself.

## MARKETPLACE, OR A PLACE OF WISDOM

“Let's go for a ride on Nandi, to the market,” Sati said to Shiva one day, coaxing Him to go down to the valley.

“Marketplace?” echoed Shiva absent mindedly.

“Yes, I want to go. It will be a change.”

“Okay, dearest,” said Shiva.

And they went to the nearest urban kingdom, to its marketplace.

There were all sorts of people there, as is the trait of all marketplaces. While Sati was busy inspecting the quaint stalls, Shiva was amused to observe the different kinds of people. He stared at one portly man in particular, who seemed to have come along with a virtual harem and a battery of children for a day spend. For anything that any of his family would ask a shopkeeper in any shop, he would say, “How much?” And then, before the shopkeeper could even answer, he would add quickly, “Give us a dozen of those, Hahaha!”

“Wow, what a rich man, and so large-hearted,” said Sati.

“You think so?” asked Shiva, smiling.

“Yes, I think so. Isn't it obvious? What do you think?”

“Poor man, money is all he has,” quipped Shiva.

“Oh, Shiva! How can you say that? And what do you mean exactly?” asked Sati

“Money tests, and mostly, makes you fail the test,” said Shiva. “And that's why I feel that this man too, is failing his prosperity test.”

“Prosperity test? Isn't it adversity that tests a man?” Sati looked up at Shiva.

“You think so?” asked Shiva.

“Of course! The real test of strength surfaces when you are in adverse circumstances. Do you lose your cool? Are you able to think rationally?

Handling each situation is a new challenge! Open your heart, mind and soul to receive! Experience is the great teacher!” said Sati exuberantly.

“You know, Sati,” Shiva said, coming close to Her. “After having observed lots of different people in different positions and varying social orders, of different ages, even of differing temperaments, men and women, both, I have come to understand that the real test is not in adversity, but in prosperity.”

Sati looked at Him quizzically.

“Most people do their best in adversity. People team up, families get together

most people do their best in adversity. People team up, families get together and friends lend a helping hand... Hmmm..." He continued.

"And with the same dogged consistency, in prosperity, one loses the digestive power." Shiva looked thoughtful.

"Digestive power? I don't understand," said Sati.

"The power to digest material success," said Shiva. "Siblings divide, and fight. Those who have served together as teams, point fingers at who gets the credit, the same friends who learnt to play together, become competitive. Think about it."

"Hmm... actually, come to think of it, you do have a point!" said Sati.

Shiva smiled.

"Yes, it is interesting!" continued Sati. "So why should you speak of spiritual things to the challenged elementals alone? I think you should address the top order beasts. Excluding them does point to a selection on your part!"

"Hmm... yes," said Shiva. "Maybe I should, but then, how about you? You are in touch with top societies from your father's kingdom and neighbouring lands. Maybe you need to take a serious class for the already successful people, and re-teach them how to remain in touch with humanity, and themselves!"

"Yes, that would be a great thing. We could teach them to live all over again, without making money our sole purpose. Without allowing money to take over one's entire life as its prime focus.

A comeback to small delights...you know, learning to enjoy little pleasures once again, like books, music, singing,

eating a munchies snack through an evening drama performance..." laughed Sati.

"Yes." laughed Shiva. And then, in His trademark style of highlighting the spiritual lesson, added, "Money is not the sole purpose, nor is it the soul purpose."

"It's a matter of going through a hard patch to see reality. When people are prospering, they don't see that aspect! How true your words really are! But yes! Since I am open to all kinds of experiences, I think I will put this matter on my own agenda to discuss with the successful people I know" said Sati.

"Precisely my point. When people get into prosperity, they forget a fellow being's adverse condition. They don't empathise with a co-wayfarer's sense of loss, and continue to regale instead, in their fast chariots, jewelry, clothes, mansions and so on. The never-ending list of status-defining items. All of which,

at the end, is a trivia! Compared to the essentially good person they themselves were, but were quick to forget. Richness should not be confused with money,” said Shiva.

“Then what is richness?” asked Sati.

“Well, it’s not just money; it’s abundance, rather. Abundance is Mother Nature's way to provide for all things. Money is just a conversion of values. And values essentially cannot be converted!” Shiva started laughing in a hearty manner. “Hmm... so go for it! You can do it. You can re-introduce the prosperous to their own selves,” He continued.

“I don’t want to ‘go for it’, I just want to be with you,” said Sati and leaned against His shoulder, in Her favourite position. “I just want to hear you speak. For now, let me just take the lessons from the master! I love hearing you. I love you,” She smiled, suddenly breaking the heavy conversation.

“Me too, my dearest,” said Shiva softly.

“Are you sure you love me too, as much as I love you?” She asked.

Shiva only smiled. “We are still in the marketplace,” He reminded Her.

“Was there a dignified sham to Him,” She wondered. Was there a volcano of feelings under those well-articulated words, those polished gestures? She thought. Did He sometimes hide His feelings? She knew well that whatever it was that Shiva was passionate about, whatever He revealed, had a deep meaning to it. But more importantly, She smiled at the thought, whatever it was that He chose *not to reveal*, She felt was meant *only and exclusively* for Her to know, for Her to own. And She wanted to own everything about Him; everything that was so dangerously personal.

Yes...She, Sati, was the eternal owner of that.



## SHIVA: DOTING HUSBAND, MYSTIC POET

Sati loved everything about Her Lord. Especially, His prowess in poetry.

“Say something nice,” She would say, as they lay on their rocky beds, staring at the stars in a clear sky. More often than not, He would just laugh and say, “You are very nice,” and then fall into an embrace, giggling like an adolescent, even as She would struggle out of the clasp, saying, “That’s so silly!”

One day, She implored, “No, say something really nice.”

It was then that Shiva said the most enigmatic thing. “Love, there is no such thing as the end of life, but, without you, there is no life.”

“*That* is lovely,” said Sati and hugged Him. And then, a few moments later asked, “What exactly does it mean, though?”

“It means...” said Shiva turning completely towards Her, and locking His eyes in Hers. “That there is a part of us which is eternal, but that part is of no use, if there is not another to share the eternity with.”

Sati hugged Him, in a ‘never to let go’ embrace.

“Ok, tell me something more; something about life, but something that rhymes.”

“Hmm...ok,” said Shiva.

“Ups and downs, and rounds and rounds

Come and go

in life.

To know your Self

Centered, Bang, in the middle of it all

In fact, thrills the ride.”

“Aha! Ups and downs and rounds and rounds! that is so wonderfully rhyming, but what is this about the middle of it all?”

“Somewhere in the middle of our life, Sati,” said Shiva with passion, His tone changing to that of guidance, like a teacher. “We realise that the end and the beginning are indistinguishably intertwined.”

“Oh, you are so profound, Shiva. How can you go from ups and downs and rounds and rounds to Realisation!”

Shiva smiled and looked skywards, to the stars again.

“Oh, I’m not finished yet,” Sati said, tugging at the string of His rudraksha necklace.

“So do you get all these deep wisdoms in your Yoga abhyasa? I’ve been seeing you do all sorts of postures; Asanas as you call them.”

“Yoga asana is only a seat for the great flight to the self. meditation can be as synergized, as natural as my rides on Nandi. Or as tumultuous, with the energy of an untamed beast of the natural order. All of Nature’s things are like that. You need to be completely at oneness with them before you even start to mount the ride. Else you will just be overturned, which too is an important part in the process of learning, Sati,” replied Shiva.

“It’s simple,” He said. “Yoga is not about your body. Yoga is about discovering your soul.”

“What about reading?” She asked. “What about reading the great Shrutis and Smritis, the great secrets and rahasyas by our rishis and gurus and those who have known Godhood?”

“Reading about universality, the interconnectedness of things, is a good beginning, but when you suddenly feel this is a text about *you yourself*; that is when the beauty of the spiritual journey will fill you with its magnificent flavor,” said Shiva, “Ultimately, it is meditation that awakens you to yourself.”

“Shiva, you know even I *do* try meditating. But sometimes, I have a really hard time... often, in the dark, if I light a candle, I can quiet my mind and pray, but it is different from meditation, right? In meditation, am I not supposed to turn off my mind completely?”

“When you are meditating, don't think about what a meditation should be. We have a saying, “You don't find meditation. It finds you. Your job is just to give yourself some quiet repose. And let these waves come and go,” Shiva replied.

“Ups and downs and rounds and rounds?” Sati smiled.

“That is precisely the point,” Shiva smiled back.

“Alright! And a beautiful view like the one outside our window, also helps tremendously. I used to ride into the mountains to reflect when I was young and lived closer to the plains...” Sati said reminiscenctly.

“Beautiful landscapes have immense value in expanding one’s own Self,” said Shiva. “Pristine scenery has this magic: It transports you straight to the realm of primeval manifestation.”



“Yes, looking at this beautiful peak takes me to Heaven,” said Sati. I do feel like there’s Heaven, insideout..”

“Insideout?” Shiva queried

“ like this scenery is divine, I too feel divine within.”replied Sati.

“The peak experience,” laughed Shiva, and then added in a serious tone, “Some gyanis call the transcending stages of Samadhi that—‘the peak experience’. But they somewhat arrogantly add that it is the *only* way to know God. Whereas, the simple being can just let herself dissolve into these mountains in a para bhakti... and aesthetic rapture. So, while it is true that *meditation teaches meditation*, but it’s also true that love for God begets love from God in return. The gyani can raise his love of consciousness to understand the supreme essence in his own soul , but the bhakt can just merge himself into the God in his heart! All the paths lead to the same summit.”

“How beautifully you explain things,” said Sati.

“The real beauty is that although you dissolve into Nature as one, and yet, all the reflection still remains... You are a sum total of all that you have felt and energised in your cosmos. Take a ride again, or get yourself some nice tea, then light up the incense sticks and the godfire in quiet harmony...” said Shiva gently.

## SHIVLINGA, THE CELESTIAL GODFIRE

“I’ve heard of bonfire,” said Sati. “But you have this innate ability to teach me new words. Godfire?”

“Hahaha! It’s all a Godfire, this burning desire to know the Oneness behind all the beauty of the Universe, the play, the purpose, the joy, and the very being here, *all* is a Godfire.”

“Then I shall be God’s firewood and let the fire burn,” said Sati with utmost devotion. “I fell in love with you even before I saw you,” She added. “The wood of this soul started to prepare itself to burn for you from the very time I saw Sristi Iswara Maharaj. I did so love the Shivlinga, and now I love you so much as Shiv Shanker, the handsome mendicant, who is my husband! You are mine! Mine, and only mine! The Shivlinga can belong to all, but *you*, belong to me!” She looked at Him and then added, “Tell me, what is this thing about the Shivlinga being your representation?”

Shiva smiled. “The Shivlinga means many things at many realms, each true for that level of subtlety. It is a symbolic representation of absolute transcendence, Omkaar, the impersonal God leading to esoteric and spiritual understanding.”

“I see.”

“Whereas, in my Yogi roop,” Shiva continued, “Worshippers consider the immanence of God personified; the personal God, you know, the one with all the stories and folklore they sing of.”

“Yes. You are *One* storied person!” said Sati.

“The Shivlinga means to convey that the *transcendent* pervades the manifest world as immanence,” Shiva continued.

“Oh,” said Sati.

“It is how the ancient rishis conceived God in His unborn, invisible form as the Shiva Lingam. It is worshipped equally popularly as the Image of my own self, or as me!” said Shiva. “And in abundance, with some variance, across many lands, from a long time .”

“Hmm...yes,” said Sati.

“Like I said, the Shivlinga means different things to different people. And the paramount understanding is this:

transcendent Godhood, is unfathomable in its pristine realm of infinity. It however, becomes knowable in the finite world it creates and pervades..." Shiva held Sati close to Himself.

"Shivlinga—there is no beginning and there is no end, one cannot find its source, nor can one find where it finishes...crosses all boundaries of time and thought," sighed Sati.

"Yes. That's the transcendent. But how does the transcendent measure itself? Through the immanent, or the manifest world. And no sooner that the manifest world comes into being, there is a mention of maya. Did you know, the word maya actually means, 'to measure'?"

"Really? I thought maya meant illusion"

"Haha! Yes, I know. It's been defined as many things; illusion is one of them. Money of course, is another. But God's omnipervasion includes all things! So, it was then that the great seers understood that maya actually meant to measure up the immeasurable...maya is an attempt to sum the extent of God's infinity. Something, that by definition, is virtually impossible, except to Godhood itself. *It is God's maya alone that can give some measure of Him* - That, is the leela of the Infinite."

"That's fascinating," said Sati. "Tell me more, Swami."

Shiva had noted that She would address Him as Swami when they have a spiritual discussion. "Shaivites do not think of the manifest world as an illusion. They claim that God's creation is as real as God Himself and they honour all things, all creatures, as Shiva and Shakti's creation. This is exactly what sets them apart from other seers." He continued.

"But do they not say that the world is full of your maya, and it is all an illusion? I have often heard *Yeh sansar Shivmayi hai*."

"Ah, I know well the adage of some wise seers who were mayavadis or nihilists in outlook, and in the habit of dismissing the world as a cosmic illusion. But *Shivmayi* does not mean it is an illusion. It means it is immeasurable by ordinary perception. We need a third eye to see dimension four, and meditation, opens the door..." Shiva replied.

"Aha! Poetic, even in your prose," laughed Sati. "So how does the Shivlinga personify this? I mean, the construction and design of the Shivlinga; how does it do that..." Sati asked.

"The Linga, the upper column, is transcendence. The lower receptacle is Yoni, The cosmic womb, the manifest world. Altogether, the Shivlinga means to convey that the transcendent pervades the manifest world as Immanence, as I just told you.

This also gave the rishis some insight into ‘Why does God create the world?’  
“Why indeed?” asked Sati.

“Because finitude serves by contrast, the purpose of the infinite light to focus on itself. Taking a limited form, paradoxically, helps to understand the limitless. The Shivlinga therefore, tells us that God creates this world, and then enters it Himself, in order to know Himself, explore Himself, and this is His great leela,” replied Shiva.

“So then, is the Shivlinga a symbol of God’s creativity?” asked Sati.

“Yes,” said Shiva. “The Shivlinga is the symbol of us both in harmony, God and His power to create. It also represents the perfect balance of yin and yang, potential and kinetic, male and female energy, and so, Shiva and Shakti itself.” He paused, and then added gently, “Us.”

“Tell us more, about us,” laughed Sati.

“Sati, God is formless. How does one express, or paint, or represent the formless?”

“And hence, the shape of the Shivlinga?” Sati prompted.

“Yes! Devoid of any complicated sculpting, it aims to represent God in a simple, straightforward way. Like I said, the transcendent is being held by the manifest. And there you have it: the base, which holds the column tightly in its embrace, is you, Sati. You, as Mother Nature, are the one behind all form; and you it is, who can see the formless. You are the one with a name, yet you, Sati, can see the nameless. You it is who can *behold* Shiva, and through you alone may Shiva be beheld... You, Sati, *are maya*.”

Sati’s eyes widened with happiness.

And then Shiva capped the conversation as usual with a tremendous mysticism.

“It is said of me that I do not incarnate. And yet I can vouchsafe of your love that you are one who can make even Shiva manifest. That makes you an enchanting sorceress! The original Shaman woman, indeed!”

“Me, a sorceress! And what are you?” She asked “You, who have hypnotized the whole universe, especially me.”

“I am Shiva, the yogi, ever immersed in Shiva, the tattva. And yet... and yet, so so in love with tattva as Sati!” He sighed.

“Why do they call you a brahmchari then?” She asked teasingly.

Shiva understood that this was not actually a casual question. He had come to realise Sati’s innate wisdoms, which were often expressed in Her innocent questions; the answers to which could benefit all spiritual-seekers.”

“I told you, asana is only a seat for yoga, not yoga itself, so too the physical

restraint of brahmacharya, is only a seat for Brahmacharya, being established in Godhead." He replied.

"Aha, I see, but then why do I feel so deeply in love with you, even deeper than my admiration of your spiritual Nature?" Sati persisted.

"In the beginning was the One.

And he thought, may I be two, may I be many.

To love and to be loved.

And so the universe came into being."

"Ah, lovely," said Sati.

"Yes. And an electrifying attraction happens in love.

A spiritual preceptor can also bedazzle you with one look."

"Yes, for sure," said Sati.

"Only later, you realise that love and spirituality run on the same current," Shiva replied with mystic precision that was His paradoxical hallmark.

"Life is still the One, playing with itself, discovering itself."

"With many, many layers to its own gifts..." Sati thought dreamily. She remembered Her own childhood quip in one flash, and swooned into His arms.

"We are one, we are one indeed," She whispered softly, and closed her eyes in sweet repose.

The lessons with Shiva were endless. They had to be. His talk was profound, but so was His silence.

"You seem to be talking to me even when you are silent. Is it true or am I just too madly in love with you?" She asked.

"Silence is a language only a few understand," said Shiva. "Those special moments when silence speaks, when stillness gives wings," He whispered.

Even His smile was profound. Everything about Him was the embodiment of wisdom. Sati noticed that there were traces of this wisdom even when He joked.

"Tell me you love me," She said one day. "Prove it with your poems and clever words."

"Oh, but I do love you," He said. "And it's when you specifically ask me to say that I love you, I find myself speechless; such are your charms and magic," Shiva laughed.

"Really?" Sati was pleased. "So go on, tell me more."

"Before I met you, I had no wants. I was okay with everything that already was, but now..."

"Now?"

"Now it's all changed, it's all different"

"How?"

“Now you have spoiled the poor yogi,” He laughed.

“Spoiled the yogi?” Sati looked at Him with a twinkle in Her eye.

“I mean, you have spoilt my timings for yoga.”

“Oh, really? But you are aloof for days on end...and I thought it’s me for whom you don’t have any time...”

“That’s only when some very technical thought comes to me. Then I can’t let go until I see it to its logical culmination,” He looked at Her.

“Yes, I know. I know, and I understand, *Chintan*,” She said.

“But then, when I see you, and I see us together in this world, it all takes on a whole new meaning! The world is such a great place to be, with you by my side. I never thought I would want anything so much as your company.”

“Ah! But isn’t it wrong for yogis to want... to desire? Aren’t yogis supposed to be without desire?” She asked.

“Desirelessness? Hmm... mine is a Shaivite creed:

One full of desire to see Shiva Shakti in limitless manifestation and play...”

Shiva said.

“You can really show the extreme opposite as a reconciliation, can’t you?” Sati smiled.

“It has to be, Sati. Coming from one source, it has to be, that the farthest end of the spectrums come and rest in the one point from where they all began.”

“And that point is Aum,” She said.

“Yes,” said Shiva. “That point is Aum. And that, is the *whole* point.”

Sati and Shiva embraced, and concluded another spiritual lesson for the universe to learn.

## DO YOU BELIEVE

“Do you believe in Reincarnation?” He asked one day.

“Only if I get to be with you,” She replied. She thought He would be pleased with that one, but as She turned to look at Him, She saw that suddenly He had become even more grim than before. His eyes had a mysterious sadness about them and an eerie stillness had enveloped His whole countenance.

“What is the matter, Shiva?” She asked gently.

“Nothing,” He said.

Sati learned to leave Him alone with His own thoughts at times like these, which were not many, but when they happened, they always left Him tense and intense.

# MOTHER ANNAPURNA

She was the perfect wife, the perfect partner that one could ever have had. She loved Shiva with a purity and passion that was unmatched.

But it was not as if they did not have their share of quarrels. As the days passed into months, and months into a few years of living together, rubbing one's persona completely onto the other, the formality that newly weds often maintain, started to fade away.

They would get into animated discussions, and this was actually a sign of the maturing of their fondness for each other. Shiva saw it that way, and He saw it as Sati coming into Her own self-confidence.

Shiva actually loved that She could assert Her own individuality. He understood Her vociferous debates as an assertion of Her womanhood. He was outrightly a lady's man. In fact, He respected all women, often telling Sati, "Though you are Shakti Durga Herself incarnated as a woman, all women are indeed, also in the form of Shakti."

Sati loved the fact that Shiva had great respect for Prasuti, Her mother. He had always liked her, and they shared a special relationship. In His jests, He often told Sati, "You are very beautiful, but not the most beautiful of all." And then, on Sati's indignation, would add, "Your mother, Prasuti, is the mother of pearl," referring to the oysters under the ocean that would birth pearls. Sati had marvelled at His analogies: they always pointed to oceans and underlying mysteries.

At other times, Her own role as that of mother of the community would sparkle clearly in their lives.

"Shiva, we need to talk about something," said Sati one day, as She served Him His breakfast cereal.

"Sure. Is this going to be something really heavy?" He asked.

"No, just a few things that require your attention."

"Oh, I see. But...uh...normally, when you say we need to talk..." 'We'. He emphasised the word. "It's like a storm coming," He said, and winked in an effort to make His response as casual as possible.

"Don't trivialize everything, Shiva. I have tried to talk to you so many times but... you are never there..."

"What are you saying, Love? I am always here for you. Tell me."

"You are not always here. You are never here, even if you are sitting at home,



and you know exactly what I mean. Why is it that you are so busy all the time? What exactly are you busy with, if I may ask? And I am not talking of your meditations. That's your passion, your prerogative, and I never ever want to deprive you of that. But what do you do when you aren't in meditation? Because I know only too well that you aren't always meditating. You absolutely don't have time for some serious issues at home that I need to talk about."

"Of course I'm always in meditation!" He said. "The whole world knows that, Sati."

"Oh, yes? Please don't give me those abstract ones..."

"Haha! Why do you always get upset? I am always in meditation, even if I seem to be doing something else. Like, I'm in meditation even now, as I talk to you, my dearest."

"Please, this is not the time for your spiritual sermons. I need to talk about some real things."

"What is real, and what unreal..." Shiva was about to say, but decided it would be a rather unwise interjection at this time. "Ok. you got me," He said instead.

"Tell me, what is it you want to talk about?"

"I have been thinking...you know all the ganas and the elementals at home, and even the ones nearby are well provided for, when it comes to food, because we personally see to it..." She filled up His glass with a second helping of fresh and unskimmed milk. "But my mind wonders ever so often about the creatures in the valley and jungles and at the lower reaches, you know, basically the ones who are far from our sight. What about them? Do they get their meals always? Are the meals on time? I hope some of them, actually none of them, ever go hungry..."

"Ah, you are Annapurna, my dear! It's natural that you feel concerned. But they all get fed. Providence provides for all its births. That's my understanding of the eco system and the natural equilibrium."

"What about the beasts that grow old and can't hunt, for example?" She asked.

"What about the creatures that survive on vegetation which virtually vanishes in winter?"

"They...migrate," He said. "It's simple, and it's all worked out. Some hibernate, and some migrate! Your own laws are perfect, Annapurna!"

"Will you please take this seriously, Shiva? As Chieftain of these ranges, it is your duty, and as corollary, mine too, to see that all are provided for."

"Sati, Sati," He said, arising from the table and putting His arms around Her shoulders. All beings are provided for, trust me. And not just the denizens of Kailash, but all beings of this planet are provided for," He said.

"You are always so sure about your statements, it's almost ironically vague."

You are always so sure about your statements, it's... almost ironically vague, She said, shrugging His arms off Herself.

"All of them get their meals at the appointed hour, as the case may be," He said, with certain assertiveness. "Sure, some get it a little earlier than the others. For some, a decent meal is an effortless event, others may have to wait, and there are still others who do strive somewhat disproportionately for it. But ultimately, Nature has a system to provide for all that it has birthed. All it births is sustained, else it would fail," He said. "It is actually that simple, and that perfect."

"How can you be so sure always? You sound as if you actually supervise all this personally."

"Now that you mention it, I do. I am, after all, your humble servant."

"What? Now you are telling me that you personally make sure that everyone gets their meal?" Sati exclaimed.

"At Her Majesty's secret service! Look, Sati, I don't eat my own meal till I know every creature, no matter how seemingly insignificant, has been provided for. And that, is that.

You just have to trust me on this."

"Ok," She said. Knowing with His finality of tone that this conversation was over.

"Ok," Shiva replied chirpily. "Will see you soon, Love. At least I don't have a serious agenda today at the council. But we do have to discuss the arrangements for tonight's Bonfire Ball for the winter solstice. Nandi and Bhiringi are over excited about it and I wouldn't want them to think I am not as enthused about their plans. So, it might be a lengthy one, but tell you what ...I'll come straight home after the meeting. You know how hungry they make me. Haha! Pun not intended."

"You are incorrigible," She said. "Bye." And She hugged Him.

But secretly, She thought, "I am going to put you to the test today; Lord Shiva, who knows it all! "

And, no sooner than He was out of sight, and She finished waving to Him, Sati darted out to the backyard garden and fruit fields, which sprang thousands of fragrant, vibrantly colourful flowers. There were Campaka, Kesaras, Punnagas, Ketaks, Mallika, Kurabakas and lots more.

There was also family of the magical Ajoosba trees. The Ajoosba tree had many different fruits on it: nectarine, plums, bananas, apples, delightful red berries, citrus, and almost at its base, even musk-melon. It was said to have been manifested by very ancient yogis by their Imagination, many years ago. Austere as the yogis were, they needed something to eat, even if it was to merely survive, and the Ajoosba fruit was the culmination of mental seeds planted by them long

and the joyous hum was the summation of mental bliss, painted by them long ago.

It perennial magnificence was all year round. Not only did Ajoosba bear a wonderous array of succulent fruit, but such was its magic, that it could change the taste of the same fruit to avoid banality. So the apples were sometimes mangoish in taste, and it was not uncommon for the bananas to have a delicate tinge of orange in them! Sati's own favourite was a fruit called nectarine, which was half plum and the other half peach!

But today, She was resolute as an arrow and in a determined mood, She headed straight to a spot where She had seen a new anthill being constructed.

Peering at the frenetic ants marching briskly in a row, She saw what She was looking for. It was a lonely ant, just a bit out of line from the regimental column that the rest of the ants formed, going about their morning hunt, for food. Gently, Sati picked it up and quickly landed it in Her small ring holding box.

'This one seems to want something out of the daily routine, wandering about this big world on its own; a seeker! Sorry little one, I am going to have to put you away in quarantine for a bit past your lunchtime for no fault of yours, except that you, my little ant, are going to be part of an experiment to challenge almighty Shiva's proclamations. Isn't that lovely?'

She was in absolute glee at the ingenuity of Her own little plot.

Tucking away the little box in the farthest corner of Her wardrobe, a place She knew Shiva never intruded into,

She hurried to proceed with applying some 'pre Shringhar' herbal facepacks to Herself. She had ingeniously invented these by mixing mountain cucumber, bhang leaf, and of course some fleshy fruit from the Ajoosba; It was, after all, the night of the winter solstice, and She must look Her best for Her beloved husband! As She lay down totally relaxed, enjoying the warmth of the winter sun, in the garden, She virtually day-dreamt about the victory she was going to score over Shiva later that day.

By late afternoon, She Herself felt hunger pangs. Shiva had still not returned and She worried about Her precious prisoner. "Ants need to feed almost continuously and they can't wait. It isn't inbuilt, like with us wives," She thought. "But, ah yes, that would mean victory is almost certainly going to be mine!"

The moment She thought of victory, Shiva walked in.

"I am hungry!!" He laughed. "So what are we getting for lunch?"

"Your favourite Rajmas with rice."

"I can't wait," He said, even as She placed a generous helping of the red beans over His rice.

“Would you like your tadka?”

“Of course.”

Tadka was His favourite. A concoction of ghee, red pepper and salt, heated to a very high degree and poured over the rice and beans, creating a sizzling sound and letting out an enchanting aroma.

“Mmm... you know what it is with sizzlers?” He said as He hastily swallowed His rice. It makes for another sense to get involved. See, the sense of smell, and that of sight, are the infantry of good eating. Haha! And then because we eat with our hands, the sense of touch also gets invoked. Ultimately the sense of taste of course, is king when it comes to eating, Sati, but when we do tadka, amazingly, even the sound of food is brought out.”

“You are such a philosopher,” Sati replied. “Why don’t you just enjoy your food?”

“Oh, but I do enjoy it! Of course I enjoy it. And I enjoy even more when I can decipher these things for you. What a meal Sati! You, are simply the best!”

“Thank you, my Lord,” She said. “I don’t suppose you remember our morning conversation between these important council meetings and involving the five senses in eating, or do you?”

“Yes, we spoke of how all creatures are provided for by providence, which is actually you, Sati, as Annapurna.”

“Yes, that’s what you said. And you also said you yourself don’t eat even if one creature goes hungry.”

“Yes. Yes, that’s true.”

“And you have eaten now.”

“Yes. A sumptuous meal fit for a king,” said Shiva. “Prepared by my Queen.” He rubbed His hands over His stomach and feigned a burp. “Ah, Yummy and now, I’m full to the brim,” He laughed.

“I am glad you have eaten to your heart’s delight, my dear Lord,” Sati beamed, bringing Her plot to the fore.

“So, if I can show you an ant I imprisoned in my jewelry closet, and who therefore has absolutely no access to food ... I am wondering if one of your great wisdoms will actually prove *me* right today.”

“Hmm?”

“You always say ‘why the obsession with gold, you cant eat it!’ right?”

“Right”

“And today when I expressed my concern about the food for all creatures and

And today, when I expressed my concern about the food for all creatures, and your role as Chieftain, you proclaimed with conviction, that only after Nature provides for everyone, do you eat your own meal”

“Yes”

“So, the question is, while you have already eaten with the gusto of your own forest wolves, are you sure this poor little ant had already eaten too? could he, by any chance, have munched out of the gold in my jewelry? Probably not, I am hoping you are right that no one can eat gold! But then that would falsify your proclamation” Sati smiled victoriously.

“Come again” Said Shiva, “You did what? You imprisoned an ant? Oh well, let’s check out if he feels like a husband now,” Shiva laughed out loud. Just joking dear, I mean let’s check if he feels as good as me after being given such a lovely meal...”

“You, are one stubborn person,” She said. “But I do admire your courage, holding up even when you are just a moment away from defeat and a little friendly humiliation.”

“Friendly humiliation? Haha! Sati, I love your oxymorons,” He said. “Ok, so where is this prisoner of yours?”

Sati went to Her closet and fetched the box. And then slowly, She opened it... And there was the little ant. He had grown to almost double his size, feeding deliriously on a piece of rice coated with saffron.

“What?” Sati was stunned.

“It is wonderful, isn’t it, how beautifully women dress for their husbands on winter solstice. These lovely marks you make on the forehead with rice and saffron, symbolizing auspicious provision of all things good and pleasant. I love you, Sati Annapurna, as you bring all symbols to life. I suppose you were so busy imprisoning this poor chap, you didn’t notice the magic at your own brow... Hahaha!”

Sati suddenly realized that one of the saffroned rice from her own forehead had fallen into the jewelry box , perhaps when she was hurriedly locking her little prisoner. That it was She Herself , who had inadvertently provided for the ant’s lunch, even in the very act of trying to divest it.

“You, are a cheat,” whined Sati. “As usual...” But was secretly pleased and began to like this magic Shiva talked of.

It was Sati’s great virtue that She was always a willing learner.

“It would be a good winter festival with the Kutumba tonight...” She smiled.





## LOADING THE DICE

And so it was, that their days passed, in love and wisdom, play and divinity. Divinity, and a bit of quarrel. Shiva knew always, that quarrel was also a part of the play; it was also a result of extreme love. In fact, sometimes, when brooding in a corner of their home, with Sati sulking in another corner, He would be surprised to ‘see’ Himself secretly smile. A smile of love at Her wonderfully beautiful face when She was angry.

“You are like the blazing sun when you get angry,” He told Her one day, taking a chance when there wasn’t actually a quarrel on.

It had happened on a happy saturday evening. They loved their saturday evenings, just like anyone else. Sunday meant no council meetings, and no early visitors. So Shiva could actually drink His Soma deep into the night and then they would also play their favourite game of dice. More often than not, the game would end only when Surya deva arose by the window of their bedroom and smiled radiantly to signal a new morning. It was on one of these saturdays, that Sati asked Shiva, “Tell me honestly, do you ever cheat when we are gambling?”

“No, of course not! Why do you ask?” He said.

“No, nothing. I just had a fleeting thought and wanted to check.”

“How can I cheat the one who has cheated me into thinking I have any control over my destiny! And tell me Sati, how can there be free will when whatever I do...*whatever*, it must always lead back to you,” said Shiva, trying to charm Her.

“Place your bets,” She said as She shook the twin dice vigorously in Shiva’s Bhang goblet.

The dice were made of bronze, and sometimes, after the game, Sati would let them remain in the goblet, as She prepared His last drink. Bronze was supposed to have a reaching effect on the quality of the high, as though it was transmuting its element, trying to become a cliché gold.

“I bet you, I will win with the highest count, two sixes,” said Shiva. ‘Tung tung’ rattled the dice against the goblet.

“We shall see,” said Sati. “Would you like me to roll yours first, or mine?”

“You first,” He said. “I love watching your play.”

“Okay, here we go,” She said, lowering the goblet as though to pour out a drink on their deer skin blanket. “A six, and a four. Not bad! Now let’s see if you can materialise what you say, or are you just an idle boast.”

‘Tung tung tung...’ “And here....”

A six, and the other...a four.

“We’re quits. Now, who’s first in the next throw?” She asked.

“Me,” said Shiva, stretching out His head into the center of the bed and concentrating on the dice.

‘Tung tung tung...’ A five, and another six.

“Aha!” said Shiva. “See, I am the Lord of the game of dice!!!” He reached for the bhang vessel and started to drink directly...

“Excuse me, please wait for my throw,” Sati said as She shook the goblet in the air with great enthusiasm.

“And... a six! Yes!” The other dice was still rolling, nearing the boundary of the bed.

It turned over to display a six. “Yes!!!” cried Sati. “Two sixes!! I win!”

“But it hasn’t yet settled down,” said Shiva. “It’s still turning.” “What do you mean?” asked Sati.

“Look, my dearest.”

Sati looked, to see the dice continuing to roll till it fell off the bed. They both looked over from over the bed to the ground, like someone inspects a newly sprouting flower.

“It’s a four. You lose,” said Shiva triumphantly.

“What? But...”

It was then that they noticed that the bed was shaking.

“You are shaking the bed to cheat, Shiva,” She said.

“No, of course not. Look, no hands!” He said, raising His arms into the air along with the bhang vessel, and with a flourish, He upturned the last remnants of the bhang thandai into His mouth.

“But the bed is rocking,” She said. “Is it an earthquake?”

“Let me see,” He said, scrambling to the window.

Suddenly, He broke out into a laughter.

“What’s so funny?” She asked.

“It’s no earthquake, it’s only Ravana rocking Kailash to please me.”



“Ravana? How many times have I told you, I just don’t like that man! He’s too overbearing, too ambitious...too intrusive. Just what does he mean by rocking our home? And look at you! How can you laugh when He dares to be so impertinent?”

“It’s ok, Sati. I will ask him to stop. He’s a great and overzealous bhakt whose passion knows no boundaries when he is invoking me.”

“He is a perfect demon, I tell you. Just ask him to stop, will you?”

“He is *not* a demon, Sati. He’s just like a child.”

“A child? Shiva, this is what I don’t like. You lose discretion when it comes to your bhakts. He is no child. Someone who is vain enough to rock your Abode, will actually rock the kingdom of Gods. He will shake the foundations of tradition, mark my words! You, wait and watch!” Sati said.

“Ok, so what do you want me to do?” asked Shiva, getting impatient, and then, without waiting for Her reply, He went hastily to the window and shouted,

“Ravana! Ravana! Stop this nonsense will you? Do you have any idea what time it is? And what are you trying to do anyway, you silly man?”

The rocking came to an abrupt end. An incomprehensible whimper came from below the window. It was a mumble of an apology. They both heard Ravana scamper away.

“Happy now?” Shiva asked.

“Yes, I’m happy,” She said.

“You know what, you are like the blazing Sun when you get angry,” Shiva said smilingly, trying to hide His impatience to resume their interrupted play.

But Sati retorted, “Talk about anger! Oh my! You can be quite angry yourself!”

“Me?” Shiva asked innocently.

“Yes, you, Shivji Maharaj. Even your ganas know when they can talk freely to you, and when is not a good time. And there are many such ‘not a good time’ times,” She added wryly.

“Oh, come on,” Shiva pleaded, hoping to get some concession.

“No, tell me one thing,” said Sati in Her trademark style. “The other day, when that emissary came from some king with a proposal of just being able to start trade with us, and after you refused him, and he was being persistent, didn’t you get impatient?”

“Come on, Sati,” said Shiva. “That was different.”

“What makes your anger different from ours?” She asked, visibly angrily.

“Come on,” said Shiva in yet another attempt to calm Her down and resume their play. “Let’s just enjoy our saturday.”

“No, you tell me what makes your anger different from others; how are you

always right, while we may not be?”

“It’s because I can sense somethings that others cannot at times...”

“Oh, really?” Sati cut Him short. “It’s just because, at the end of the day, you are the chief, so you can do anything, and it will be fine.”

“Sati, why are you getting so annoyed?” He asked. “I may be the chief, but you are my chief,” He implored. “Life is one big dance, we all have our role to play.”

“Ah yes, dance!” She said loudly. “Tell me, what makes you such a great dancer? What sets Shaivism and your mountain ways apart from other niyamas, which all ultimately lead to the same ONE summit, as you yourself have declared so many times?”

“The difference is that this mountain way as you call it, has in its breast a lot of yogic nuance. We all have emotions, but yoga transmutes it to bhava. We all have rhythm, but yoga transmutes it into the cosmic dance. We all have prayer, but yoga shows us to look at the altar where it is nearest: Within.

Thus too, I am not the dancer, I am the dance,” He replied.

“Ah yes, you ‘know’ your SELF,” She said. “So that means, you are always right.” “No, I am not always right, that’s not what I am saying.”

And suddenly, Shiva clasped Her hand and raising it, touched it to His forehead.

“You are my chief, my World, my Queen,” He said. “You are always right.”

“No, I am also not always right,” Sati said, visibly happy with Shiva’s impulsive gesture, and with the innocence that children have, wanting to end the fight with their best friend, added, “Sometimes I can be wrong too, but this Ravana, you are wrong about him.”

“Ok, my dearest. You must be right about what you say. Should we resume our game?”

“No. I am too tired now,” said Sati sleepily. “And stupid Ravana’s rocking has actually worked like a sleep inducing cot. And his moustache, it is so stupid! Almost as long as a waist belt, Hahaha!”

They both laughed out loudly, as Sati turned into His arms. In no time at all, She was asleep, in the pristine spirit of a child.

Shiva looked at the stars, smiling at the way Sati could actually evince spiritual nuances from Him even in a quarrel. He smiled again, at the marvel of the interconnectedness of things and especially at the dance of time itself, wondering what future Sati had involuntarily foreseen about Ravana.

## IN LAKSHMI'S POOL OF LUXURY

He didn't have to wait too long. Sati had made friends with Lakshmi, the wife of Vishnu. And She often visited Lakshmi to spend time. Shiva respected those visits. He understood that ladies needed time on their own, and Sati was a princess, after all. "It would be nice for Sati..." He thought, "If She could get a feel of Her own childhood palace on these visits." Indeed, Sati was always relaxed after Her visits to Lakshmi. The relationship developed to one like that of sisters. Lakshmi was always pleasant and enjoyed playing the elder. It was all good, Shiva thought. After all, He didn't have the palatial amenities to offer Her here, in His mountains, forests and personal cave.

And so it worked out well, till that one day, when Sati told Him, "Shiva, it has been quite a while since I went to Lakshmi's... and I was thinking..."

"Yes dearest, you must go," He replied. "But when will you be back?" He quickly added.

"Oh, I will be back before night. You know I don't go for overnight visits!"

"Alright then," Shiva gave Her a hug.

That visit changed everything.

Sati walked in to Lakshmi's palace, expecting to be welcomed warmly, and be treated to all of its luxuries as an equal; like one queen to another, without any superiority complex, or undue airs about owning it.

Lakshmi did welcome Her, but there seemed to be a difference in Her demeanour—She was looking arrogantly aloof.

"Is everything alright?" asked Sati innocently.

"Alright? What do you mean?" Lakshmi retorted.

"I mean, are you okay? You don't seem to be very comfortable."

"I am okay. Huh, things are always okay here in Lakshmi Niwas," said Lakshmi haughtily. And then added, "But you don't worry, you must be needing the rest from those dark caves of yours. Let's go to the pool for a relaxed swim."

Sati followed Lakshmi to the pool, and joined Her for a dip.

"Isn't it relaxing?" asked Lakshmi.

"Yes," said Sati quietly.

"Oh, I do know you have swims yourself, but those are in the forest pools. I guess, you've probably never had the luxury of swimming in an indoor pool

guess, you've probably never had the luxury of swimming in an indoor pool, such as this. Or have you? Oh yes, of course, you must've had a pool in your father's palace. Am I right? But now, it seems Shiva can't afford that for you.” “Yes. Father did have a few pools,” replied Sati. “One for each one of the ladies, actually,” She added. “But I don't really miss them, because the pool in the middle of Nature is quite a different experience. Shiva says that perhaps in future, people will like these more. You know, merging into infinity even as you are relaxing in your own pool. He even has a term for them—‘Infinity Pools’.” “Yes. Of course Shiva would tell you that. But sorry, I don't see a future with pools outside, merging with Nature. Hahaha! What can compensate the warmth of your own indoor pool? But yes, Shiva would tell you that. What else can He tell you, the poor forester!” replied Lakshmi haughtily, and then added, “Oh okay, I am quite done with the swim. And I am famished. Let's have something to eat. Let's proceed to the dining hall, shall we?”

Sati was a bit shocked with the affront, but didn't say anything. She was still confused about Lakshmi's strange and hostile behavior, and thought that it may just pass.

It did not. In fact, it got worse. It seemed to be part of a predetermined plan, and Lakshmi was showing a completely new side of herself, most unlike her earlier affectionate nature. Sati wondered why?

As the royal servers laid out the sumptuous lunch, Sati could not help but note that there were more than two hundred dishes, all piled up under canopies made of gold.

“What are you looking at, my dear?” asked Lakshmi even more sarcastically.

“The food or the gold? You know, we have so much of gold that now we have to use it on plates! I hope you did notice that the whole dining hall is plated with gold even on the walls, as is our retiring room, to where we shall, of course, proceed once we are through with lunch. Here my dear, begin with some fresh fruit,” She said, passing a huge golden bowl to Sati.

Surprised as She was, Sati minded Her manners and didn't retort, but quietly ate Her fruit.

“What's the matter, dear? Why aren't you eating properly? Something I said? Come on, you shouldn't mind, we are sisters, you know! And these fruits are exotic, brought in from the far ends of the world, even from under the sea. But... uh... how would you know all this in those uninhabitable mountains of yours? Poor Shiva, really, He has no idea of what mansions and luxury are...” Lakshmi went off again, in a non-stop verbal diatribe on Shiva's material status. After

lunch they went to the Swarna Kaksha—The Golden Room, to retire for an afternoon siesta. “Of course, this time there is no need to tell you, this entire room, all the furniture, the bed, the tables, even the paintings, are, yes, all in Gold!” Lakshmi turned and said to Sati. “Yes, I know,” said Sati. She could not rest at all, in what was supposed to be siesta time. Within minutes, of lying on the king sized golden bed of Queen Lakshmi, Sati said, “Thank you so much for all your hospitality, I would like to return home now, please.”

“Yes, of course!” said Lakshmi. “Do visit whenever you want, feel free to use this like your home, you know, since you don’t really have one of your own! And much as we would all like for you, Shiva will probably never be able to make a decent palace, He isn’t, after all, a real King.”

‘Ah, that must be it’ thought Sati, ‘Lakshmi just wants for me to have a home of my own, that’s why perhaps she’s egging me on. Or then, is she just a bit jealous of my blissful and content life with Shiva?’ she wondered again.

“Oh you poor dear” said Lakshmi, as if she had read Sati’s mind, “Don’t think too much about it.” She said as a parting shot.

Sati was fuming by the time She reached Kailash. “Shiva!” She shouted, rushing into their chamber, which was actually just a beautiful cave. It was a beautiful cave, but Sati was not able to really see that today. She was blinded by Lakshmi’s words and the images painted derogatively about Her own living conditions in the caves of Kailash.

“Shiva!” She shouted again.

Shiva was just coming out of some intense thinking. Chintan, as it was called.

“Yes, my dear?” He said rather absent-mindedly.

“Tell me one thing,” She said.

“Yes, my dear?” He sensed the anger in Her voice.

“Lakshmi, because of Vishnu, has such a fine palace, servants, gold, luxury... What do I have?”

“You, have me!” He said.

“Oh, come on! This isn’t the time for jokes. Tell me, what do I have for a home?”

“The whole world belongs to you, my dear,” said Shiva.

“I am afraid this will not do, Shiva,” She said sternly. “You cannot absolve yourself from the duty of at least making a home for me. Every woman wants her own home, and it is the duty of every husband to grant her wish. And you of all, Shiva, should be leading from the front in this! You are the Chieftain of your people, you ought to be showing them how Husbands provide that home to their wives.”

“Oh, but all the forests, the jungles, these mountains do belong to us, Sati!” said Shiva. “Who else do they belong to?”

“Shiva, I will not have any more of this .You tell me, are you going to make me a Home, or not?”

“I will, but it is not the right time,” said Shiva.

“Not the right time!! Oh! What is the right time? If you want to make a Home for me, it’s now!” She said.

Shiva realised nothing was going to pacify Her.

He closed His eyes and visualized how Lakshmi must have completely provoked Sati. “Okay,” He announced. “If you must have your way, you must have your way!”

# LANKA KAND

“Nandi, go and get Vishvakarma here!” said Shiva aloud.

Vishvakarma was the divine engineer. Some said he was the architect of the universe itself: What the Gods ordered into manifestation was actually executed by his wizardry. Artisans and craftsmen hailed him as their patron deity. But like multitudes of others, he himself, was totally at Shiva’s command.

“What great fortune that you have called me, Shiva,” said Vishvakarma. “What can I do for my Lord?”

“What you can do for your Lord is to please make a home for His Queen Sati,” said Shiva, pointing His hand at Sati, with a smile.

“Of course! My Queen, what is your command? What kind of house would you like? What features, what amenities? Please let me know the details so that we can get started on it without any delay whatsoever!”

Sati was excited. Shiva was normally slow to react to Her impulsive commands, but this was really quick!

Her mind raced back to Lakshmi’s house and talks. She had boasted so much about one or two golden rooms. “I want the whole palace to be of gold!” said Sati.

“Yes, my Queen. It is done,” said Vishvakarma.

Lakshmi had raved so much about Her swimming pool. “I want the whole palace to be surrounded by water, like it is floating in a swimming pool!” said Sati.

Shiva raised an eyebrow, and said, “A palace on water? Aren’t you being excessive my dear?”

“Either you will give me the Home I want or you will not!” retorted Sati.

“Oh, I will, I will,” said Shiva. “Vishvakarma, please continue to note Her commands.”

“It is done, my Lord!” said Vishvakarma chirpily.

Sati went on describing the features she envisioned, and Vishvakarma kept answering, “It is done.”

The house that Sati made was fantasmic.

No words could describe its beauty. It wasn’t just fantastic, it was more like manifest fantasy.

Sati’s imagination and Vishvakarma’s ability to manifest those designs, brought forth a virtual paradise in architecture; resplendent with so much gold, it shone

like the Sun, and this paradise floated magically on an ocean. Vishvakarma had chosen a beautiful Island deep down south from the mountains to erect this beautiful palace, he thought that way, Sati's purview would map the whole of Bharat.

"Will that be all, my Queen?" He asked.

"Oh God! I can't think of anything else!" said Sati. "Thank you, Vishvakarmaji. How wonderful of you. And please, you are like a member of this household now, and you will be the first to come to our house warming. You will please be present as our guest of honour, when we officially enter our home—Griha pravesh!"

"I will be honoured to do so, my Queen," said Vishvakarma humbly.

"A house warming! Shiva, I want the best house warming party at our Griha pravesh!" said Sati excitedly.

"Alright," said Shiva smiling.

"We will call my parents, the rishis, Brahma Saraswati, the Devas, and Vishnu Lakshmi. Of course, we will call Lakshmi," She said.

"Of course," said Shiva quietly.

Sati had always known what it was to hold royal events and functions.

Articulately, invitation lists were made, cards drafted, individually seen and sent. The whole world, it seemed, was invited.

One by One they arrived: The Maruts, The Aswins, the Devas led by Indra Deva himself, astride his celestial elephant, Airavat. The Munis, led by Narada, the Gods, Brahma and Saraswati, and Vishnu and Lakshmi. Both of Sati's mothers, Virni and Prasuti, were present, along with many of Her sisters and brothers-in-law, like Bhrighu and Chandra. Daksha was absent. "Father had some urgent piece of state work to look at, but he sends you his fondest regards and all good wishes for your home," said Prasuti.

"Oh mother, I will miss him," said Sati. "But there will be so many other times I guess, for this is also your home now," She said excitedly.

"Yes, of course it is," said Prasuti.

The function was a benchmark in hospitality. Immaculate arrangements had been made for the entertainment and comfort of all those who came. Fabulous food, great decoration, amazing scents, gleaming floors and pillars, everything was matchless. Sati looked smugly at Lakshmi.

"Oh Sati, Sati my sister," said Lakshmi, as She embraced Sati in approval.

A house warming Havan was also held, and the pundit at the Havan was reciting the Vedas in such a manner that all the guests were mesmerised.



In his impeccable recitation, it seemed that the Vedas were being spoken by Creation itself for the first time. Everyone was conjoining in to SVAHA...

Finally, he turned around and said,

“The Havan is now over. Shiva and Sati, congratulations on your new home.”

Sati took the guests to inspect all the chambers of the palace.

Without exception, they all congratulated Sati on Her wonderful home. Then came Saraswati. “What a wonderful home you have made, Sati. So tasteful, so immaculate, words fail us in praising your taste and style.”

Sati was overjoyed. “Thank you, Saraswati, you are like a mother to me.”

“Of course, I am! And you know what... I loved everything.

The Domes, the hallways, the bedrooms, the dining hall, your manicured and fabulously undulating gardens, and all the details even till the tapestries. You have such good taste, Sati. But what I loved the most was this Punditji you got to recite your mantras. He was divine. He deserves a great reward,” said Saraswati.

“Of course! Right away!” said Sati, still excited.

“Pundit ji, you have recited the mantras so well that even Saraswati, patron of arts Herself has praised you. Ask for a reward, you deserve one!”

“Thank you Sati, there is no need, really,” said the pundit.

“What do you mean?” said Sati. “I insist. You must be rewarded.”

“Think about it, Sati... you may not be able to give me what I could ask for.” said the pundit. Some of the guests who had already said their good byes, now stopped, sensing that something was going on.

Saraswati had a twinkle in Her eye, a beguiling look on Her face. Sati did not know that there was another aspect of the benign Saraswati, called Brahmi, in direct contrast to her normal virtue of being the Mother of learning. And just as Brahma’s celestial wife Usas could turn into Sandhya, so too Saraswati could delude her listener if She wanted.

“I cannot give what you want? What are you saying, Punditji!

I am Sati, wife of the Great Shiva. Ask, and you shall receive!” said Sati.

“Are you sure?” asked the pundit.

“Of course, I am sure! Ask!”

“Well, in that case, give me this house as a gift,” said the pundit.

The congregation froze in their places. Sati was shell-shocked.

“What?” She stammered.

“Yes, you heard me correctly, wife of Great Shiva,” said the pundit.

“You need to give me this home as Dakshina!”

It was then that Sati noticed: Although he was clean-shaven, he looked so familiar. And then She got it. She remembered where She had seen him earlier. He was Ravana.

“You Demon!” she exclaimed angrily. “You have cheated me out of my house! You cheated a Lady out of Her home! Never will you be able to keep it either. It will burn in Hell but you won’t be able to retain it you, monster! This I swear, with all the conviction I have in the laws of karma. You will not be able to keep the gold of Lanka, and neither your kingdom!!”

Later that evening, in their old cave, Sati told Shiva, “It is true; in you, I have everything, the whole world. If you weren’t here, I would never have been able to stand this rude shock.”

“I am here, always,” said Shiva softly.

“I told you Ravana is a no-gooder,” lamented Sati.

“Yes, you did,” said Shiva. “And I told you, it is not yet time to build a home.

“What has this got to do with time? Tell me Shiva, I really want to know,” said Sati gently.

It was then that Shiva spoke most mystically, “Time, my dear, is the phenomenon that is most relative. For one it can be endless, for the other it can be a blink of an eye. But actually, in the absolute sense, time does not exist!”

“Time does not exist? I do not follow,” said Sati.

“Time is a phenomenon which happens when God forgets His own nature for a while, which is Timelessness. So, as a corollary, when God reconnects with His nature through meditation, He can travel through time, and see things before they happen or after they are long gone, because in that moment of God, *all* is present.”

“I see,” said Sati. “So what about Ravana?”

“Ravana will go on to abduct Sita, who is Lakshmi, and get killed by Rama, for doing so.”

“What?” said Sati.

“Yes, these are the mystic connections of time,” said Shiva. “See?” He added, pointing at the forest.

Sati looked up to see two men walking in the forest.

“Who are those?” She asked.

“Those are Rama and Lakshmana...” said Shiva. “Walking in the forest in a densive state. because even as we speak. Ravana has already abducted Sita.”

“What!” said Sati. “How can that be?”

“It is,” said Shiva. “Time, as I told you. Right now we are sitting in our cave, centered in God consciousness, but outside, Sita was already born, grown up, married, banished with Her husband from His kingdom, abducted by Ravana and taken to his kingdom, your house.” He paused. “You did say to Him he shall be burned for cheating you, and so he has worked up his Karma to do so.

“Why Lakshmi?” asked Sati.

“Because it was all too close, too related; the house thing, the ‘what do you have’, ‘what do I have’ challenge...Sati, Lakshmi is just the Goddess of Wealth, She tried to show off to you. And She got to you, even when She shouldn’t have, because you are far greater than just being a Goddess of material things. She got to you, because you simply do not know your own power,” said Shiva.

“And you, are you greater than Vishnu?” asked Sati.

“You could say we are equals,” replied Shiva.

“Okay,” said Sati. “Why did you bow to Rama then?”

“Because...” said Shiva a little angrily. “He has nothing to do with Your and Lakshmi’s palace games. But He will undergo suffering for it, needlessly.”

“Doesn’t He have Karma?” asked Sati.

“Yes, He does: He shares Lakshmi’s fate,” said Shiva. “That’s why I respect Him; He is God, yet He suffers.”

“This is all too unbelievable,” said Sati.

“Yes, you don’t really believe me these days; I noted that,” said Shiva.

“Because what you say is so...so mystical, so difficult to connect. How can Rama be Vishnu? How can Vishnu be as powerful as you, so that you bow to Him?”

“I think we’ve had enough for the day, Sati,” said Shiva and turned to rest.

Sati wondered why Shiva was getting annoyed with her, for something that Lakshmi had begun, and realised that Shiva always wanted peace and was just irritated at the fall-out that

He prophesied. And that too, was so strange, how could He talk to Her about Vishnu’s incarnation with such conviction? And then, Sati did an astounding thing: She went to the forest, changed Herself into a Sita look-alike and approached the brothers, Rama and Lakshmana as they were trekking through their sorrow.

“Ah! Mother Sati,” said Rama. “I am sorrowful already. Why do you add to it by dawning the face of my beloved Sita, whom I have lost to Ravana and miss dearly?”

“I am sorry I did that,” said Sati. “I was only checking something for myself; now that I know, all I can say is, you go your way. My blessings are with you that you should find Sita to be reunited once again.”

She came back to Her cave, astonished with Shiva’s tremendous divine knowing. “Shiva, you are amazing. I checked Rama by changing into Sita, but He recognized me right away. Surely, He is a divine being as you had said.”

“Yes, but you did not trust my word for it. You had to check, didn’t you?” said Shiva, offended and annoyed. “I am not talking to you,” He said. “For not believing me.”

It took Sati several days to pacify Shiva but She did it, because She *was* very sorry. She loved Him and She was always willing to learn from Her mistakes. Love and learning made Shiva turn back to Her. And they started living happily together, just like before.



## DAKSHA—THE IGNORANT YAGYA MAKER

But Sati's virtue of always being a willing learner, was a trait which unfortunately Her father did not share with Her. Daksha was unwilling to learn anything new about divinity, other than the opinions that He had formed about the whole cosmic law.

It was simple: Brahma was the father of all, and Daksha was His privileged son, always proud to be the first among celestials. Nevertheless, He was very fond of organising yagyas to appease all the celestial powers. Somewhere in his subconscious mind, he thought this would ensure his supremacy in rank for all time.

Once, he organised a 'Men only' meet in which they would together propitiate the devatas and other Gods. Kings were invited from all neighbouring territories. Shiva too was invited. Although He was not a crowned king, He was a Chieftain of the mountain people, and of course, He was Daksha's son-in-law. Shiva reached the venue of the yagya a little later than the appointed hour since He was coming all the way from the mountains. By that time, most of the devatas and kings were already seated in their allotted places.

Seeing Shiva and Nandi enter the grounds, they all arose to greet Him, without exception. In what seemed like a singular note reverberating with respect, they saluted Him with a chorus of 'Aum Namah Shivaya!'

Shiva bowed in acknowledgment and took His own place, which was one of fair prominence. At this point, Daksha was also to make his own entry: it was deemed as a strategy that he should enter last, so that all collected would salute him. But Daksha had witnessed the way that the entire congregation saluted Shiva. And although he managed to fake a smile at the reception accorded to His

son-in-law just before his own, he was not inwardly too happy—he could never accept another man’s fame.

One by one the devatas arose as Daksha walked past them.

His own seat was placed at the end of the first row, right next to the yagya platform, on a high pedestal. This way, he would walk past the whole congregation, all of whom would salute him in respect. Since he was considered patriarch of the race, indeed the son of Brahma, the celestial patriarch Himself, all the people collected in the gathering showed him respect by bowing to touch his feet. He, in turn, hastily thrust forward his right hand over the head of the prostrating person as a mark of his blessing; and so it went on till half way down the line, when he came to Shiva.

Shiva arose gently from His seat and brought together both His hands in a namaskar. Daksha was shocked that Shiva, like all the others, did not touch his feet. So arrogant had his expectation made him, that he forgot that Shiva was his son-in-law, and that sons-in-law could always be exempted from touching the feet, if they so wanted.

Much more importantly, He also conveniently forgot, that Shiva was the mighty mountain God, to whom all others actually looked up to. And this was the most likely cause, for Daksha being upset: plain jealousy of witnessing everyone prostrating in front of Shiva.

Whatever it was that had upset Daksha, he burned with anger and as soon as the flame of the yagya was lit, he made a welcome speech.

“Good Day, Sirs! I, Daksha, first among Prajapatis, the mind-born son of Brahma Himself, King of Kankhal and keeper of the holy yagyas, welcome you all to this pious venue and occasion where we will be paying respect to all the celestial powers, some of who, are your very direct ancestors. Indeed, we are the offspring of divinity itself, a fact that we ought never to forget!” And then looking at Shiva, he added cryptically, “Or, let anyone forget. We cannot forget respect. It is respect that sets refined beings apart from animals or those with similar tendencies!”

At this point Nandi became a little shifty, as also the other two ganas who had accompanied Shiva. Was Daksha taking a dig at them? Was he talking about them? Why? Seeing Shiva’s familiar hand gesture directing them to remain calm they settled back

came, they sat back.

Daksha continued, “Unfortunately, some people have their ego so inflated that they do not realise the inappropriate manner that they are exhibiting, so we cannot really blame them. Let us pray in this yagya to the celestial powers to bestow some divya and Satvik gunas into such poor souls, so that their being may be uplifted to the same levels of enlightenment that we indeed have been blessed with. Samtaa! A sameness of all beings!” He declared with a flourish, not realising the hypocrisy of his own statement.

“Let the yagya begin!” He ended pompously.

Nandi let out a grunt of disapproval. He was now sure this diatribe was against him and the ganas in some way. He started to arise from his seat, but Shiva again gestured and eased him back.

The yagya began and the flames arose high and fierce, literally snapping at the air around them in a powerful and savage manner, almost characteristically like the beast that Daksha had so sarcastically defined.

The chanting of the Royal Priests invocations rented the sky.

Their orange robes matched well with the colour of the leaping flames and their prayers like a duet with its crackling.

Some of the devatas started to sense an ominous vibration instead of a peaceful invocation.

Shiva was unusually quiet as He watched the fire.

When the Head Priest announced that it was time for the Purna Ahuti—the Final Sacrifice—Daksha got up with pomp to pour ghee into the fire. All the devatas and rishis also arose along with Daksha and readied themselves to pour in the Ahutis—offerings.

All that is, except Shiva.

“Purna Ahuti!” Upon hearing these words of the Priest, Shiva had become quieter. His attention had wavered and, in fact, completely abdicated from the venue, somewhere into another time, another place. It was as if the rising flames had transported him to a future event.

“It seems that some people here have no respect for the Gods, for the traditions, and indeed for the yagya itself!” remarked Daksha wryly. “It seems, some people show their true colors when it comes to matters of spiritual perseverance. They have none at all; they haven’t grown from their schoolboy days of being vacant in the class; that is, if they had any education at all,” he added, taking a dig at Shiva.

It was Nandi’s loud bellow that brought Shiva back to the current scene.

“You do not know a thing about divinity, you ignorant, arrogant king! How dare you insult our Master, the Master of All!!”

Shiva heard Nandi yell at Daksha, as the entire congregation stood shocked at this open confrontation of the great Prajapati, that too in his own yagya, on his own ground.

“You beast! You only display the lack of etiquette, the uncouth qualities of your mountains, which truly affirm all I say about this so-called master!” replied Daksha.

“Etiquette? You ignorant man! You perform yagyas and insult Shiva, who is the very essence of the yagya. You are like a blind man, who, even if he is led to the door, will feel the whole wall for an entrance, and yet bang his head into plaster and stone. Haha!! ” Nandi was getting elemental, as he kicked dirt from Daksha’s grounds with his agitated and ever-agile hooves.

“How dare you, you uncouth vandals, dacoits, treacherous thugs! You, who claim to know about divinity, but practice abhorrent practices in the secret caves of your fringe mountains! You practitioners of the tantras, you vile creatures who cheat all.

And your chief... this chief vandal cheated me off my pretty, innocent daughter, Sati” Daksha finally spilled the venom that was so obviously pent up. Venom that had indeed been building up in his heart ever since His daughter’s marriage, which he had never really accepted. He could not forgive that Sati had rejected his indignation for Shiva, and thus this was Daksha’s own supreme rejection of the past. He forgot that they had all already travelled into the present, and that his venom would affect the future.

Nandi, true to his bullish nature, started to head for Daksha in a bid to engage him in combat. The devatas and the congregation became visibly scared.

But Shiva stopped Nandi again, this time raising His hand in His firm gesture of estoppel.

He then said in a slightly raised but resolute voice, “Nandi! You shall hold your peace. If someone knows not of your way, or that of your Master, if someone knows not of the divinity that resides in all things, if someone rebukes your way of invocation, of adoration, that does not mean he is right. Or, that you will set him right. That you know your own divinity, that you are resolute and loyal about your own devotion—that is the entire path a spiritual warrior requires, and indeed creates situations for. Situations, which I, as your Lord, have always prepared you for. We shall not stay here any longer. May the holy flame grant peace to all.”

Shiva walked calmly out of the Yagna venue, bowing His head just a little to mark respect for Daksha despite his show of being a poor host.



Nandi, Bhiringhi and the ganas marched after Him. Nandi however, was not as chivalrous as Shiva and gave Daksha one of his dirtiest looks as he exited.

## GANA SATSANG-THE REAL YAGYA

“Tell me, Nandi,” asked Bhringi the next morning as he went for his field walk with Nandi. “What kind of God is our Lord?”

“What do you mean, Bhringi?” retorted Nandi.

“I mean, you saw what happened yesterday. That vain Daksha was heaping insults on Shiva, and what did Shiva do in turn? He just turned away...”

“Are you suggesting Shiva was not up to taking on Daksha?” Nandi growled.

“No! Not at all!! I am not that ignorant of our Master! I meant, how does He have so much patience, how can He remain so calm when someone insults Him? Aren’t we mountain warriors? Don’t we have a temper?” asked Bhringi with a childlike innocence.

“Ah, now I see what you mean,” said Nandi in a mellowed tone. “Actually, to be honest, even I lost my temper yesterday. One who loses his temper, often loses control, as our Master has always taught. And yesterday was an example of that: the Master, by remaining composed, showed a mastery, and I, just lost my mind and therefore my control, bull-headed beast that I am!”

“Aw, no you are not,” said Bhringi in literal awe, closing up to Nandi and holding his hand. “You are a loving soul, like an elder brother to all the ganas. It’s okay, even I was losing my temper yesterday, ready to be at your side if a fight ensued, no matter what the consequence.”

“It is not as if Shiva cannot fight,” continued Nandi, pleased at being accorded the status of an elder to all elementals. “Verily, Shiva is the gentlest soul. However, He *can also be* the most dreadful of all. He is the mightiest warrior these mountains... nay, this world has ever known. No onslaught is powerful enough to even budge Him for more than a moment. On the other hand, none can stand His onslaught. You do know the power that propels His mighty Trisula, do you not?”

“Ah yes, it is like the comet of death itself, hurtling at a being whose time is surely over,” shuddered Bhringhi.

“Yes. That is the power of Shiva, the God of Power itself. He is Shakti Maan, the wielder of Shakti!”

“Then... why... why did He remain so calm? How come He didn’t get into the hurtling mood?” asked Bhringi, again with the same childlike innocence.

“For the same reason, my dear Bhringi, for the same reason: Shakti.”

“That is the power of Shiva, the God of Power itself. He is Shakti Maan, the wielder of Shakti!”

"I do not quite follow," said Bhiringhi.

"It is Shakti who Herself is Sati. Daksha the haughty does not know this, because of his very attitude of being 'a know all'.

But Shiva, the Supreme Knower, is, of course, mindful that Sati is His own half, She is Shakti. Daksha thinks that he is the cause for bringing Sati to this world, whereas in reality, it is Sati Herself who has chosen Daksha as a 'venue' to be manifested at. But by so doing, She is bound to honour the Karma of manifestation itself, bound to honour Her earth father. And Shiva it is, who puts His whole Self into Her respect: He will never stray from that, even if it means a heap of insults from an insolent, ignorant man. That man is the father of His beloved, and that is what lets him go free, from the comet of death or any other terrible fate charging at him."

"Aw..." said Bhiringhi again. And smiled as he rested his head on Nandi's powerful arm, the perfect pillar of brotherhood. "But if Shiva is all, and Shakti is His only better half, then, why then does He need another, why any of us at all in the world manifestation?" asked Bhiringhi.

"Oh, because the Lord is not only divine, He has a human heart too," replied Nandi.

"Ah, I see. That is so profound indeed. And when the Lord understands all of us, Our hearts are now a part of His heart, even creatures like us too?"

"Yes. The Lord is a part of all His creation." replied Nandi, "That is why He understands all creatures with a certain empathy."

Both Nandi and Bhiringhi smiled, it was as if their conversation had made their souls touch its own divinity.

Thus walking, the two entered the sitting ground area of the forest where a few other ganas were lazing about on the grass. Seeing Nandi, they hurriedly arose to salute and greet him.

"It's all right, gentlemen," said Nandi. "At ease, at ease." The elementals loved to be called gentlemen; in their hearts they wished always to emulate the savvy demeanour of their Master Shiva. Even to be addressed as His tribe, therefore, was perceived as an honour.

"Suppose that this whole world was Lord Shiva's temple? How would you conduct yourself? Suppose that all beings were a precious part of that temple, how would you treat them?" suddenly Nandi addressed them in answer to their greetings.

"Oh, we are only elementals, not even humans, great Nandi," lamented a gana. "And yet, you pose to us a question that involves morality, responsibility

gana. And yes, you pose to us a question that involves morality, responsibility, and God alone knows what kind of philosophy that we simple beings cannot comprehend. We have a simple philosophy, though. We love Shiva and can do anything for Him.”

“Move aside, you fool,” said a large elemental, Vrikshvirata—the one as vast as a tree trunk. Not all of us elementals are unevolved; we too have a knowing of the Dharma. And in a time when Dharma is receding I would like to share my view. Every time I meditate, I get to see the depth of potential we elementals have. If we go deeper and deeper within our selves, we will see that Shiva has given us all a certain divinity without the scope of expectations. Just surrender to HIM and have complete belief, you will start seeing the expectations gradually vanishing and you will start noticing another interesting phenomenon.”

“What is that?” asked Nandi.

“That we are actually getting into Satyug! With our own transformation!” said Vrikshvirata.

Another gana, even huger than Vrikshvirata, Mahima Giri—the ‘large like a mountain’—came forward and spoke, “I believe the whole world is a creation of God and God is always present in our heart. So I try to be humble always. I believe that whatever happens with you is the outcome of your own Karma. So, I make a conscious effort to control my anger, try to love all and try to help people, animals and trees in any manner possible. I try not to discriminate between creatures. I strongly believe that being non-judgmental like our Lord, Shiva, one can actually be Shiva Tulniye-nearly like Shiva, by one’s good Karma. And that this itself is the best worship of our Master: to act as He would! Aum Namah Shivay!”

Nandi spoke gently. “The deepest meditation shows us that we are not by ourselves. We are all connected; in a manner of speaking, we are consciousness; more than a human or elemental or a tree.

And so, being good to the ‘other’ becomes automatic and easy.

The Master calls it Sahaj Avastha, and have you not noticed He is always in that Himself?”

“Aw...” said Bhiringi, in his usual response.

Nandi smiled. “Ah, yes. I did ask the Master once myself, when I was a younger bull like yourself. I did ask Him how He was so forgiving to all those who tried to harm Him.”

“And...” asked Bhiringi, his eyes widening in anticipation, pleased that he reminded Nandi of His own younger days.

“And He said, ever so quietly, “I forgive, to release myself, Nandi.”

The ganas nodded in affirmation. “Hail Shambhu, the Self-Created One. Hail Shiva, the Creator of Selves. We are all One.”

“And all our little selves are indeed lucky to have Shiva in our midst, as our chief!” said Nandi. “Just being around Him is moksha, hear ye all!” He bellowed. “There is no other place that is Heaven ; Heaven is *here*, to be in the Master’s Playground.”

Bhringi asked, “So, all those who seek our Master, even when they don’t know who exactly they are seeking...feeling homesick for Heaven...not knowing sometimes that they are right there ...I see now...Is it possible to be homesick for a place you've never been?

I guess, no. Because you only miss a place you know, seek a master you feel you have always known ... and it needs only a deeper awareness to realize it once again”

“Yes,” affirmed Nandi .

“Hmm... a good question, Is it possible to be homesick for a place you've never been?” chorused two more elementals in unison.

“And yes, for all the older Shiv ganas like us, it was probably home in a past life!” said an old elemental, Briddhananda, his eyes closing in deep and sweet remembrance.

“Can you...fly

in a plane

that has no wing?

Tantra

is the art of arrival

to a place

where you have always been.”

A deep voice spoke a beautiful verse. Suddenly, all the group looked behind and realised Shiva had been standing there for some time now.

“My Lord, when did you arrive?” fumbled Nandi.

“Oh well, I have been here a while,” said Shiva, smiling widely, waiting for His words to impact Nandi. They did. Shiva had just spoken about the arrival at a place He had always been. “The place you are homesick for is your Mahasamadhi...it will come, brother, all in good time. OM love,” said Briddhananda to Bhringi, now opening his eyes to also witness Shiva.

“Mahasamadhi always *is*. Only the awareness of it goes or arrives,” said Shiva.

“Flockless

O space  
I am  
Shepherd of here  
and now  
what is time?  
**Who** are lost?  
And what,  
is found," He sang again, enigmatically.

The Mahasamadhi I referred to, is in the classical sense, the final dissolution, my Lord," said Briddhananda.

"I prefer to see consciousness as Anant—the true infinite, that which has no end..." smiled Shiva.

"I know what you are pointing at!!" said Urdhva, a young but spritely Minotaur.

"These wisdoms are beyond words in any sense," Bhringi folded his hands in Namaskar to Shiva.

"What a wonderful Satsang," he added.

"At the end of which we all got Darsana of you, my Lord, like a Havan fulfilled," said Nandi. "We never want to leave your side, we always want to live in Kailash with you. That, my Lord, is moksha for us."

Then spoke Briddhananda, "A whole Kailash resides in the heart! dancing at the summit is the One you seek!! The Eternal One, awaits this hour of your finding, that He *never* left your peak...Aum."

Shiva smiled at the in depth knowing of the wise elemental, the old, old tree-man.

"I love you, my Lord," said Briddhananda shyly, like a little child.

"I love you all, too," said Shiva.

"We all love you Shiva," cried the ganas in unison.

"Why?" asked Shiva, surprising them by His monosyllable question.

"Why? My Lord?"

"Yes, why do you love me?" asked Shiva

"Why do I love you so much? Nandi laughed. "I could say an endless number of things, but I will sum it up in one sentence: you are so endearingly human, I feel you can feel my pleasure and pain, and are always a friend. Aum Namah Shivaya!"

"Do I speak on behalf of you all, Shivganas?" bellowed Nandi.

"Yes, yes, Jai Shiv Shanker!" sang the ganas.

## DAKSHA YAGYA-THE BURNING POT OF DIVINITY

But there were still people in the world that did not think of sighting Shiva as having a Darsana—a divine seeing. Perhaps out of human vanity, or even sheer arrogance about their spiritual prowess, some could never think of anyone as more ‘superior’ to them. And this in itself was the greatest spiritual pitfall; to still think in terms of superiority, indicated a basic flaw in their understanding of divinity.

Daksha topped that list. He had repeatedly been told by all the rishis that Shiva was a ‘spiritual beacon’. But even after seeing Shiva’s divinity for himself, far from emulating it, he refused to acknowledge any such thing. Unlike his own daughter, Sati, he was a most unwilling learner. Daksha was not a Minotaur but he was far more bull-headed than any of them, and in a completely wrong way. He was still smarting from the yagya episode, thinking of ways to take revenge. “A revenge for what, my Lord?” Bhrighu pleaded.

“That impudent vagabond, that fake mystic, must be taught a lesson. He is a plain cheat, he took away my daughter with trickery. He tricked Her into loving Him, just as He tricks His own band of hobgoblins into thinking He is a great sage, a God. Humph!” retorted Daksha angrily.

“Your haughtiness is blinding your own great vision, my Lord,” said Bhrighu in defiance, raising his own voice slightly, “You simply do not see.”

“No, I do not!!” thundered Daksha. “I do not see any merit in that mountain man, and I don’t see any logic in your arguments. Why are you arguing for Him, anyway? Have your future-telling skills waned in the admiration of this cheat, this imposter, this penniless cave-dweller?”

“Don’t measure everything with money, King Daksha, you have no idea how much that can cost you!” Bhrighu shouted back. “It will cost you tremendously, far beyond anything you can ever imagine.”

“Ah! You hypnotized sage, what can it cost? What are you talking? I am the richest, most powerful man on earth! I am Prajapati, I am the son of Brahma Himself, you blind man!” hollered Daksha.

“Not I, but it is you, who is blind. Money, power and fame, all this is transient,

all of it will go away in the blink an eye,” replied Bhrighu.

“Go away? Where will it go away? Into the air? By that charlatan’s magic? Hahaha! You need to go away Bhrighu, you are disturbing my peace with your stupid talk, while I am making plans.”

“What plans?”

“Hahaha! Plans for the mother of all yagyas! A grand event where everyone will be invited. All devas, rishis, munis, sages, kingsmen, royal subjects, intergalactic Prajapatis, ministers... all you can think of. All indeed, except that one mountain man you admire so much, who least deserves to be on the list of Sages. Haha!”

Bhrighu noted with great uneasiness the menacing and indeed, demonic tone Daksha’s laughter had taken. The look in his eye, was like that of a brigand who was planning a great plundering.

“You shall rob yourself of everything,” Bhrighu muttered. “You will plunder all the merit of all the sages of all ages!”

“Go away, you weak sage,” Daksha waved his hand in the air in his typical dismissal.

“I will leave,” said Bhrighu. “But not before telling you my future-telling skills are intact, and what they see clearly, is the end of your kingdom, your name, fame, power, the end of you, and most sadly, a plundering of your own spiritual prowess, including being stripped off the merit of being God Brahma’s own son.”

“Go away. I said, leave,” said Daksha.





## CATALYSIS AND CATAclysm

It was a nice spring day. The crisp air of the Himalayas was scented with the newly blooming flowers. Humming bees sang their own songs in harmony with the season. Everything seemed quite happy and good in the mountain kingdom, as indeed, it was.

Shiva was seated atop His stone throne, meditating. Nandi was seated a few feet away, in a lazy but paradoxically alert stance. Suddenly there was a buzz in the air, a flash of light, and a little ‘thump’ sound. Nandi looked up to see that Narada, the Astral Rishi, had manifested on the ground just between himself and Shiva.

“Munivar,” said Nandi respectfully, knowing Narada to be a friend of Shiva, “The Master is meditating.”

“Narayan, Narayan, I had an important message for Him,” said Narada, gesturing with his hand to awaken Shiva from His trance.

“Alright, let me see,” said Nandi. He picked up his large prayer bell, and placing it near Shiva’s right ear, softly rang it just once. Shiva opened His eyes. He was in a pleasant mood.

“Welcome, Munivar,” He said, looking at Narada. “What brings you here?”

“Always thirsty for your Darsana, my Lord,” said Narada. “But yes, I meant to ask if you know of the yagya your father-in-law is planning?”

“No, I do not,” answered Shiva, simply. Nandi gave out an uneasy grunt.

“*You* do not know? How can that be my Lord?” said Narada, rather pleased with his own irritable tone. “The whole world has been invited. And not you? Isn’t that bad?”

“Is it?” asked Shiva, with a gentle indifference.

“Of course, it is! You are not only the Lord of all knowledge, not only a King of all the mountains, you are also his son-in-law.

*You*, should be first on his list of invitees!”

“Hmm... maybe, but it’s alright,” replied Shiva, wanting Narada to go away, so that He may continue with His own meditation.

But Narada was determined to catalyse some action. “Narayan, Narayan,” he said and started walking to the housing area where he knew he would find Sati. “This is for you, this for you, and this here is for you,” Sati was talking to the birds that came into Her gardens daily, to be fed by Her.

“Narayan, Narayan. May I also have some prasada from your benevolent hand, Mother?” Narada chirped in, making a place for his own voice among the chattering of the alms-taking birds.

“Munivar! What an honour to have you here!” replied Sati. “Why alms? Please wait and have a meal with us today. Shiva would be returning for lunch in just an hour.”

“Hahaha! The ever-benevolent Mother! Jagad Ambe, indeed!” said Narada.

“I was just joking, Sati. Just the act of seeing you give feed to the birds and other creatures is enough for this small muni. It is the soul that is hungry, not the stomach, and you fulfill that immediately with your selfless actions.”

“Thank you, Munivar,” said Sati, pleased at the great appreciation.

“You, are like the sighting of the sacred divinity of yagyas themselves,” said Narada, adding slyly, “By the way, have you heard of your father Daksha’s yagya?”

“Father’s yagya? Why no, indeed!” Sati replied, Her voice loaded with surprise.

“That is so strange! Even Shiva did not know. But everyone else is going.”

“Shiva did not know? Everyone else is going? You mean...”

“Yes. It appears that Shiva has not been invited by Raja Daksha,” said Narada, squinting his eyes thoughtfully. “Not that He showed any interest at all when I told Him. Not much of a social person, is our Lord...”

“I don’t know what you are talking of, Munivar,” said Sati sternly, Her voice rising. “We do not have to be invited to our own father’s function; we should be among the Hosts, receiving people like yourself.”

“Oh, I do appreciate what you are saying, Sati. But it was just surprising that you didn’t even know, and while even common people are invited...”

“There is surely a misunderstanding,” said Sati, regaining Her royal composure. “I will sort this out with father. And we will see you there,” She smiled with exuding confidence

smiled with exuding confidence.

“Of course, Mother, of course,” said Narada. “I hope Shiva will attend too. A yagya is not complete without Him!”

“Of course Shiva will attend Munivar,” said Sati, the irritation obvious in Her tone.

“Alright then, I shall be on my way, after all the yagya is early morning tomorrow,” said Narad, sensing that the catalysis was complete.

“Shiva, do you know about Father’s yagya?” asked Sati, as She served a large handful of rice in His food bowl, later at lunch the same day.

“Why, yes, I did hear indeed. Narada, as a matter of fact, mentioned it to me just today,” said Shiva, trying not to look very interested.

“So what time should we be going? It will be beginning in the morning, you know?”

“Going? Going where Sati?” asked Shiva with sternness in the voice like that of a teacher.

“To the yagya of course,” said Sati, with an equal amount of firmness, also like that of a teacher to a student who has missed the obvious answer.

“Oh, but we are not invited,” said Shiva, even as He began eating, still trying not to take the subject head-on.

“What do you mean not invited? I don’t need to be invited to my father’s house, the place I was born. That’s our home, Shiva.”

“That, is not home, Sati,” said Shiva, looking up from His bowl and into Her eyes. “This is.”

“You know what I mean, Shiva. A girl’s father’s home remains her home always, it’s always open to her...”

“Why hasn’t he invited you with open arms then?” asked Shiva angrily.

“Because he doesn’t need to. I am rightly one of the hosts!”

“Oh, I see, and what about me? Did he need to invite me?”

“By corollary? No,” said Sati, firm in Her conviction.

“No? NO??” Shiva got louder. I don’t really give a hoot if he calls me or not. But just getting the etiquette wrong, that’s something that bothers me. This talk is over.”

“No, it is not. You can’t be the Lord and Master and arbitrarily dismiss issues,” said Sati. “We need to discuss this.”

“I said, there is no discussion Sati. If the man hasn’t even invited you, why on earth will you go? Have you no regard for your dignity? Your husband’s dignity?”

“The man? You are referring to my father as ‘the man’. That’s enough Shiva, I

am going and if you like you can come along, else I am going alone. That's final."

For a moment, Shiva looked weak and almost pleaded again, "Sati..."

"I said it's final Shiva. I am going, right after day break tomorrow."

"Ok then, darn it!" Shiva yelled. "Do as you please!" And shoving His half-eaten food bowl away, walked out in a huff.

"Oh yes, I will!" He heard Her shout.

"Oh yes, I will." That was the predominant thought on Shiva's mind. He could not contemplate anything on His stone throne meditation rock. "Oh yes, I will" was all He could hear over and over again.

"Why did She have to be so strong willed? A strong will could almost be a vice," He thought. "Her will, iccha, was overpowering.". Shiva spent the whole evening in a pensive and almost helpless mood.

## WHEN GOD TURNED HIS BACK

At night, things were not better. Sati handed Him His dinner without speaking, and which He ate quickly, without uttering a word. He noted that Sati, who normally ate Her food slowly, too was quick, almost hasty today. She took barely a small handful of rice and almost pushed it down Her gullet without even chewing, as if She was completing a formality. And then She got up to wash the utensils, in silence.

Shiva could not sleep that night, and neither could Sati, but they did not speak with each other. Shiva turned His back, something He would do as the ultimate mark of protest in their tiffs. Normally, this would draw her back to Him, and She would hug Him, saying, “You know I love you so much, I can’t live a day without talking to you. Lets stop this fight.” But tonight, nothing could draw Her back; nothing was normal.

When morning actually began, it still seemed like the uncomfortably dark night. It was a sky overcast with clouds.

Dark clouds, and in the distance the sound of thunder and flashes of lighting signalled the beginning of a storm. Shiva looked at Sati to see that She was also looking at Him. But neither of them spoke for a while.

“Good morning,” He said finally.

“It doesn’t look like one,” She replied honestly.

“Yes. But habit, etiquette and perhaps hope, make us say it anyways.”

“Shiva, will you please come along with me to Father’s?” She asked. Her ears had picked up the word ‘hope’.

“No, Sati. I am afraid that won’t be possible. May I, on the other hand, once again request you to reconsider and please stay back?”

“No, Shiva, that won’t be possible,” She answered curtly, ending the conversation.

Shiva had a habit of watching Her intently when She did Her shringhar.

Today, He looked at Her as if somewhere inside, He knew this scene had to be memorized, etched deep inside His subconscious mind, inside His very soul. And for a moment, He thought Sati smiled, in unmistakable widening of Her lips.

But it was a mistake: She was just applying herbal gloss on Her lips and

But it was a mistake, she was just applying herbal gloss on her lips and moments later, the smile vanished. Sati was still in an angry mood, perhaps a defense mechanism to ensure that Shiva would not stop Her again from leaving for Her father's palace.

But the smile, even if it was for a different purpose, did get into Shiva's mind and all the way to His heart, as 'the look of Sati'.

"Here are the keys to the sandook," said Sati, and Shiva suddenly realised He had drifted off into thought just while looking at Her. "Please remember to eat your lunch on time. And feed the birds and the jungle cats also; the food is lying in the kitchen. I will see you tomorrow afternoon then."

"Sati," Shiva didn't manage to complete His sentence. His pleading eyes did the rest.

"It's okay, I will see you tomorrow," Sati reiterated.

Shiva felt His breath leave the body in a sigh; so symbolic of the outgoing force of life itself, a resignation to the inevitability of exit.

Gently, He got up and gave Her the softest embrace. Sati quivered for a moment, then pulled Herself away and said, "I will see you tomorrow. Unless, you want to see me today..." And let out a smile. It was of no use. Shiva had made up His mind, just as She had. Even in the overwhelming sense of sadness, neither of them let go of their positions.

Nandi pushed aside the turf off the ground in his trademark manner to indicate readiness. Sati alighted on him, and requested to proceed to Kankhal. She looked back to see Shiva standing at the head of their cave with the saddest expression on His face. They waved to each other. Shiva kept watching Nandi and his rider for a long time, till, becoming smaller and smaller, they finally disappeared from His sight as a little dot into the vast horizon of the mountains.

Shiva asked Bhringi to summon His ganas and tell them to collect near the stone throne, where He would commence today's spiritual lesson, even as He thought of Sati's descent from the mountains into the plain.

When Nandi spotted the outer fringes of the Kankhal kingdom, his mind raced backwards, to the time when he had first brought his Master, Shiva here. How full of energy, how eager they had both been to unfold their fate. The tumultuous welcome of the farmer women had signified that it had been an arrival of time itself. But now, Nandi was slow, and the farmer women were also curiously missing. "Perhaps it was not a season for growth," Nandi thought wistfully, slowing his pace further.

"Nandi!" Sati remonstrated. "We haven't all day! Please hurry up or we will be

late in receiving the other guests.”

Nandi became a bit faster, reluctantly, and soon they were at the main gates of the palace. Sati asked Nandi to head straight for the Royal lawns just by the extensions of the palace gates—the same lawns, where, as a child, She used to play Her game of being a vendor, selling peanuts to passersby. She knew that a yagya the size of this could only be held on the lawns; no space inside the walls of the palace would be large enough to accommodate such an event.

She was accurate in Her visualisation, the yagya was, indeed being held in the lawns. What She failed utterly to anticipate, however, was the space in Her father’s heart, for Her.

All the rishis arose from their seats as they saw Sati.

One by one, all the royal courtesans and ministers saluted Her.

The chambermaids rushed to embrace Her. “Sati! How wonderful to see you!”

“It is wonderful to be here,” beamed said Sati. “It is always wonderful for a girl to be back in Her father’s home, a home where she has spent the best years of her childhood, playing happily and learning many beautiful lessons in the growing years.”

Prasuti, Virni and the other royal ladies too approached Sati to embrace Her.

“How have you been, my darling princess?” asked Prasuti.

“I am well, Mother,” replied Sati.

“And how is Shiva? Our beloved son-in-law?” asked Virni.

“He is fine, too. He sends you all His regards.”

The very mention of the name Shiva caught Daksha’s awareness.

Daksha, who had hitherto been blissfully unaware of Sati’s entrance, now suddenly awoke to the whole scene. He looked at Her glaringly and was about to speak something but Sati spoke first. “Dear father! How wonderful to see you again!”

Daksha looked away, not wanting to even acknowledge the affection.

“But, father dear, did you not invite Shiva? I am sure it is an oversight,” said Sati, coming straight to the point.

“It is no oversight!” hollered Daksha. “The only oversight I made was when I agreed to marry you to the trickster!”

“Trickster?” Sati was stunned by Her father’s outburst.

“Trickster?” She found Her voice again. “Father, do not talk about my husband like that.”

“Who wants to talk of your husband? Who wants even the mention of His name

here? 'The vagabond trickster,' he repeated venomously.

"Father! Take your words back! Shiva is not a trickster, certainly not a vagabond. He won me over with love. He is the commander also, of the love and loyalty of hundreds and thousands of mountain people."

"People? Hahaha! Are they called people, those weird hobgoblins? Crooked in their features as their so called Lord, the fraud, He is!"

"You will not call my husband a fraud. He verily is God Himself."

"Ah! I knew it! I knew you would call Him a God! If He is God..." Daksha came close to Sati and posturing his face right next to Hers, said, "Then why doesn't He behave like one? Why is He such a rule breaker? Why does He do this tantra thing? Why the ashes and the reptiles across His neck? Why does He always prefer crooked people? Why does He like those with deformities? What kind of God is He?"

"He, is a kind God," said Sati. "That's what it is exactly. What kind of God would abandon people just because they are deformed? What kind of God would shun reptiles? Or do they come from a different God who will not own them? What is the problem if Shanker prefers smearing ash instead of pompous decorations with ornaments of gold?

Ash is all that remains, not gold or any other thing for that matter, including name and fame; and ah, yes! Pride. Pride is the first to go when the end comes," said Sati.

"Don't you be sermonizing me, girl!" hollered Daksha. "Don't you be giving me your lame, hypnotized arguments in defense of the fake godman, the charlatan who prefers cremation grounds."

"He is lofty, like the mountains He lives in," said Sati. "He visits cremation grounds to receive those who have departed. He is lofty, again."

"Receive those who have departed? Hahaha! See, this tantra thing has gotten into your mind, you little innocent woman! Anyways, I have no time for this. Let's proceed with the yagya." He looked to the rishis and waved his hand as indication to begin.

"Wait a moment!" said Sati. "I am not done yet. You will have to apologise for all you said, father. Else I am going to be very sorry that I came here despite Shiva telling me not to."

"Shiva told you not to come! Of course! The wicked Shaman that He is, He *would* tell you that. But you know what? For once, He was right. You should not



have come, you wretched girl! For you are as unwanted here as He, whose likeness you have become. Am I talking to Sati or am I talking to Shiva? You are a hypnotized girl, totally in awe of the charlatan. You should have paid heed and not come. You *should* have been on those wicked mountain fringes along with your husband, enjoying the rites of tantra with your pet hobgoblins. Hahahaha!!”

Hearing Her father’s venomous counsel, it suddenly started sinking into Sati that She had made a great mistake: in the emotional battle where a girl’s love is torn between the father and the husband, Sati, had made a wrong choice.

And She was going to correct that biggest mistake in Her life with an indelible vote in favour of the husband. A vote of death.

She decided it was not worth living any more since She could not live up to the fact that Her own father had denounced Her beloved.

“Woe is on me to have been born as your daughter. Woe that I have the same blood as you, woe that I spent my life right up to my marriage, those many years of growing up in your wretched palace, that has no space for kindness. Woe indeed on me to have not listened to Shiva, who is *always* right. And I can’t correct the mistake, as I can’t expunge your hideous remarks about Him. Woe is on me, to have lived to the day when I heard such derogatory things with these ears, saw such hatred for my beloved with these eyes and felt the deepest sadness from my heart to have wronged Shiva. I should have listened to Him. Now, I do not wish to prolong this terrible birth even for a moment. I shall end this all NOW!!”

“You do what you want!” yelled Daksha. “You are just a fake like your husband. These threats have no effect on me. I am used to the bluffs of charlatans. End your life, indeed. You think it is child’s play with your dolls?” He smirked.

“He is not a charlatan!” Sati shouted. “You hear me, Shiva is not a charlatan. He is the most beautiful being that there ever can be, for He is God. And I have wronged God. I, who was the closest to Him, have wronged Him by not taking His word as the Truth.

I doubted.

I thought my father cannot be so shallow; he may be somewhat over possessive about his daughter, but surely not a wicked man. I thought not inviting Shiva was actually an act of omission. But after hearing your vituperative and venomous talk, I know beyond any doubt, that this was not a simple error or

forgetfulness on your part. You were acting out of a vengeful will.

Now, that I know how disrespectful your feelings for my husband are, for my Lord to whom I am devoted, and for whom I live, I must end my own relationship with you, without the slightest delay. I will have to sever all binds that connect me to you, as your daughter. I am unable to bear this shame for even one more moment. It is a fact that you may have given me birth and brought me to this world, but it is Shiva for whom I was born. Your role as a medium has ended forever in my life, and I wish to make it clear to you.”

Daksha grimaced.

“I want to *end this life itself*, for having *ever* been associated with you. I want to erase you from my existence, and to do that I will erase my own. *That* will be the most effective way to end this relationship for ever.” So saying, Sati seated Herself in Padmasana near the spot where the yagya was supposed to take place and closed Her eyes in self-repose.

She started humming her mantra, “So Hung, So Hung, So Hung.”

Loudly at first, getting louder and then at a peak, She went quiet.

All eyes were on Her. Bhrighu, who was the nearest, noticed that there were some reddish marks appearing on Her flawless, white dress, and also on Her fair, luminous skin. He felt a sudden rise in the temperature, and before he could fully realise what was going on, Sati burst into a spontaneous combustion:

She, had become the burning pot of Divinity in place of Her father’s Yagya.

Loud screams rented the air. “Sati! Sateee!!” Virni shouted, charging towards Her.

“Sati!! My darling daughter!” Prasuti screamed.

“Sati!Sati!!” cried the courtesans and the chamber maids. “Sateee!!” yelled the Royal guards as they rushed towards Her.

But the flames were high, outreaching almost the tallest trees in the lawn. And no one could get near Her.

Daksha was aghast. He truly could not believe what had happened in just an instant. Twenty years of raising his daughter, twenty years of tending to Her protectively from a baby to a girl, looking at Her watchfully as She grew into a beautiful woman. Holding Her hand only to give it in the hand of another, as His Bride, the hardest act of a Father. All the scenes flashed in Daksha’s mind, as if it was just today that She was being born. He looked at the flames again, to realize, that She, in fact, was gone. What a terrible mistake he had made by insulting and denouncing Shiva in front of Her. Daksha slunk to the ground, and finally, Her name escaped in a whimper from his lips, “Sati...”





## THE DARKEST CLOUD

It was most ironical what Shiva was doing even as Sati went up in flames as the ultimate yagya offering for Him:

He was giving a spiritual lesson on immortality to His ganas and sadhus, who were listening with rapt attention.

Suddenly, Narada arrived with the most despairing look on his face. “Prabhu,” he began, instead of the usual ‘Narayan Narayan’. Shiva looked at him, as did the all the ganas. “Prabhu, we have been ruined!”

Shiva felt His heart sink. He asked, “What is it, Narada?” But somewhere deep inside His soul, He knew something had gone terribly wrong.

And yet, when Narada spoke the next word, “Sati...” Shiva did not let him finish. “What happened to Sati?” He thundered, arising from His meditation seat.

“We lost Her, my Lord. We are finished. Motherless. Ah, woe be on us all!”

“Lost Her?” Shiva’s facial contours were assuming a very stern look.

She turned into fire, my Lord, right in front of us at King Daksha’s yagya... We could not do anything to save Her.”

“What do you mean turned into Fire? Did She fall into the yagya fire? Is that what you are saying?”

“No, She turned *into the yagya fire Herself*, Lord help us!” said Narada, weeping loudly now.

“Daksha!!” yelled Shiva.

“Yes, my Lord. It was Daksha who began to insult you in front of the whole assembly. He used the choicest invectives, and Sati fought with him vociferously over this. And then, when he refused to back off, despite Her repeated protests, She just seated Herself in an yoga position, and within moments, combusted into

a pillar of fire and light, right before these miserable eyes...and we realised it was Ati Yoga, the excessive extreme at its highest." Narada mumbled almost incomprehensibly.

The ganas went into a huge hue and cry. "Mother! Our Ma is gone? No!! This cannot be! We want revenge. Where was Nandi, our chief, O Narada? Why didn't he stop all this?"

"He was there, but like all of us, he was taken by surprise at Sati's action. He is still there, and he is going wild, alternating between weeping and wreaking havoc to Daksha's palace, breaking columns and pillars."

Narada suddenly looked up to see that Shiva was not listening to him anymore. His eyes had drifted away towards the valley of Kankhal, as if looking for Sati. Eyes that were distant and yet held the anguish of an inexpressible agony. Shiva could feel an excruciating pain grip His chest. As if life itself was trying to leave His body. He could feel the tightening grasp on His throat, and was unable to utter even a cry.

Finally, "Sati," He spoke. "Are these false tidings, mistaken news that these messengers carry? You must return home my dearest...You must not ever leave me. You are my entire life. "

He continued to rant in little more than a whisper, as if His words repeated over and over again, would ease some of the anguish of spirit that He could feel, shattering His heart into a million pieces. He was no longer even aware that He was saying those words. Channeling all His strength, Shiva started walking absent-mindedly towards the valley. His Kamandalu fell to the ground and rolled downwards, eerily, like a dead body. The ganas in their grief and despair started wailing, "Mother... do not leave us, come home!"

Even through his own tears Narada saw something he had never seen before: he saw tears rolling down uncontrollably on Shiva's cheeks in an unrelenting manner.

This was the worst kind of gloom the merry inhabitants of Kailash had ever witnessed.

Like with Daksha, Sati's whole life played itself out in Shiva's mind; *their* whole life together. The magnitude of the rapture of the love they had shared and the catastrophe of losing Her, hit Him like a thunderbolt.

Even as he helplessly kept hoping this was all a horrible nightmare, He let Himself drift to their union. The meetings in the forests of Sristi Iswara Maharaj, their marriage, the endless days of laughter and play, the rolling together of dice to test their luck, the lying together and watching the stars, and having endless

discussions on spirituality and life. *She was His whole life.* And now She was gone. Shiva felt helpless like a small child, his vulnerability and heart-rending sorrow was uninhibitedly visible. He turned heavenwards with a soul-stirring and defenseless unspoken plea, like one who had to look to His parents for rectifying His little world. But there was nobody in this entire universe who could rectify Shiva's only world. He wept inconsolably and loudly, not hiding His sorrow. "Sateee!! Sateee!!! Come back to me, Sati... We made an eternal promise to be together. Humesha, Sati.

He found the darkness enveloping His soul, turn into an explosion of an indescribable emotion. A great flash of desolation went through His entire being. The ganas found themselves wailing loudly with their Lord. The mountains of Kailash reverberated in a concert of gloom cleaving at the breast of every creature that lived in them.

Then a strange transformation started to happen: the extreme sorrow gave way to extreme rage, and Narada noticed that Shiva was going into a different mood. He had darkened, His face resembled the darkest cloud in the sky, and His eyes became bloodshot, His hair started rising in arousal of extreme excitement, like the mixed thrill of a warrior, when He is about to embark into an immediate and deadly battle.

He started stomping His feet on the ground, causing the earth below Him to quake and the mountains in the horizons actually seemed to shake. "Daksha, you will not be spared! Sati, I am coming! Sateee!!"

The ganas repeated the call, "Daksha, you will not be spared! Ma, we are coming!!"

Shiva started a war dance, tugging violently at His own hair and whirling in the air, with His torso doing the most unusual twists, like a man in severe pain. His right hand pulled out His Trishula from the ground where it had been restfully parked for months, as if to jerk it out of its dormancy. "BABHAM!!" He yelled a war cry and lunged forwards.

"Babham Bhayankar, Jai Shiv Shanker!" cried the ganas, their collective voices sending shudders down the entire jungle and valley.

Creatures started running helter skelter in utter confusion. That Shiva would never harm them was clear, but just the level of His anger was sending waves across that were a hitherto unknown vibration.

It was scary, it was deadly, and it was grim.

Shiva started charging down the valley towards Kankhal.

The ganas charged as he did, screaming in a deathly howl as if a thousand

One ganas charged asordes; very menacing, deadly ordes, as if a thousand Gods of Death had collected to unleash the great havoc upon all beings in the kingdom of Kankhal.

Then, Shiva commanded, "Get to Daksha! Kill all who come in your way of killing the vile Daksha. I want his head on my Trishula today. Even if a rishi or even if Vishnu or Brahma comes to His rescue, spare them not. Daksha's end is here. It is going to be done. NOW!!"

"Jai Shiv Shanker Babham Bhayanker!" cried the ganas, and then added, "Jai Ho Veerbhadra!!" Narada noted that Shiva, in His darkest mood, had turned into a terrifying and almost sinister appearance, and yet he was the paradoxical hero. He moved like a one-man army getting ready to wreak havoc on all those who came in its way, and Narada was reminded of a cloud of locusts on rampage.

At Daksha's kingdom, Nandi heard the charge of his brothers, from the ground itself. Raising his horns, lifting another of the royal furniture, he said, "The seats of you proud, arrogant men have been destroyed by me single-handedly, you dastardly rogues! And now, the destruction of your bodies will follow. Can you hear the sound of the mountains? Dastardly men, that is the call of your deaths!" "Oh no, Lord Nandi! Surely Shiva will not condone such an act!" said the wives of the ministers.

"He will surely be death for all these arrogant men," said Nandi. "Look how they run, the cowards."

"Keep quiet, you impudent bull!" Nandi saw that Daksha was back to his original self after the briefest lamentation for Sati.

"I could kill you now, you fool, Daksha!" said Nandi. "I should have tossed you over on the previous yagya itself, but because of the intervention of my master Shiva, you were saved. And today, much as I really want to end your loathsome life, I will not kill you."

Daksha looked relieved and Nandi continued "I will not kill you, but die you will, because I know Shiva will do this Himself: He will not allow someone else to finish His task for Him". Shiva will destroy you Himself, you wretched man"

"You impudent Bull, you have no idea about my prowess. A thousand devatas serve me, my army is more than five million, I myself have the power to subdue any man. I am Brahma's son. You hear, bull? Brahma's son Himself! He who has booned immortality and invincibility to scores, I am His son!"

"It is Shiva, who has booned Brahma's life itself. Shiva it is that can end all life, including that of your God Brahma. Or, have you forgotten Daksha, how Shiva spared Him with just cutting one head. that too when you didn't speak a word in

your father's defense at the time of the Usas accusation? I may have a bull's head, but you are totally bull-headed yourself, you stubborn fool!!"

"Oh, keep quiet, bull!" said Daksha, and speaking a few mantras, manifested a surreal army from thin air; an army of a thousand fierce warriors. He then turned to the Rishis Bhrighu, Pushan, Atri and others. "It is time you showed loyalty to your King; it is time to finish these evil mountain hobgoblins forever. Arm yourselves quickly from the royal armoury, and teach the vagabond Shiva a lesson for taking my daughter away from me, and now taking Her life."

Just as the reluctant rishis were looking helplessly at each other, wondering what to do, Shiva Veerbhadra arrived at the point where Sati had died. He had struck down the guards, gatemen, army and police in a matter of moments, like a celestial tsunami unleashed, which would terrify even Yama, the God of Death Himself. In comparison to the wrath of Veerbhadra, Yama would have been like a child that day.

Daksha shouted at the rishis. "Challenge Him! Challenge the fake ascetic! Show Him some real ascetic prowess! Take Him to task, this vagabond warrior, and teach Him a lesson in valour and action. Thrash Him, so that He never dares to raise His voice, much less His sword against your king, the great Daksha Prajapati!"

What followed was mayhem. Veerbhadra beat all the rishis mercilessly, clubbing some, breaking their teeth, dragging others by their hair; still, others were kicked with sheer indifference to their stature. It did not matter who anyone was.

*Nobody was anybody for Shiva Veerbhadra in His dark mood.* He headed towards Daksha in swift strides, like a tiger hastening his pace on spotting his prey.

As a last measure, Daksha summoned his mantric army of warriors and asked them to club Shiva collectively.

They did.

Shiva felt a hundred staffs on the back of His head. His eyes almost blackening out, He fell to the ground. And the warriors kept hitting Him, kicking Him.

Daksha cheered on. "Finish the rascal, He has murdered my daughter. Kill him!"

Amidst hundreds of blows, the great Hero got up again. "Sateee!!" He cried in agony, and with the strangest laughter like that of a man gone mad, one who could not tell pain from pleasure: it was indeed a bizarre state of non-duality.

In this state, a certain energy arose from within. He went back to swirling His



Trishula and attacking dozens of the expert warriors single-handedly. They doubled and trebled themselves in defence and beat Him mercilessly, but Shiva would not fall anymore. Instead, He beckoned them to come and beat Him more if they could. Nandi tried to reach his Lord but was surrounded by hordes of rishis and royal guards.

And then, they spotted Her: from the fumes of Sati's pyre, arose a dark form. It was Kali, in Her most terrifying form. "My Lord! I am here to finish this creation, alongwith you!" She said and blew out fire from Her mouth, raising also a deathly scythe in Her hand. She beheaded dozens of men, clearing Veerbhadra's access to Daksha.

Daksha began to run. The moment of reckoning had come and he chose flight rather than fight. This was the truth of His valour: it was non-existent.

Veerbhadra ran after him, following him into the palace, and to the Royal Throne Hall. Nandi, now having tossed off those trying to stop him from his master now also charged behind him, and behind Nandi, Daksha's wives and daughters ran. Daksha stumbled and fell at the pedestal of his own throne, at least two steps below his own seat.

"Stop it!" he said. "You cannot harm me, I am Shiva's father-in-law and He will not allow this. He is your Master and you will listen to Him!"

"I *am* Shiva!" replied Veerbhadra, and I will not harm you. I will kill you, you vile wretch. The only Master I had was the one you turned into fire with your insensitive, selfish outbursts. My wife Sati, She alone was my Master!"

"Now the link with Her is disconnected. You are not my father-in-law anymore and I shall behead you right NOW! Babhaaam!!!!"

Daksha crawled for his life just like a worm in its last moments. It was true, Nandi was right. Shiva *was* Veerbhadra and He *was* going to kill him. And it was his arrogance, which had made the most merciful into the Master mercenary. "Have mercy, Shiva!" cried Daksha.

"NO!!" Veerbhadra raised His horrendously jagged sword and with one single stroke, decapitated Daksha, amidst screams from his wives. He then took His Trishula and pegged the head that was rolling on the ground as one might peg a ball of wool.

He then raised the Trishula high into the air and, with a savage expression, shouted, "Babhaaam Bhayankar!!"

The congregation was stunned.

Never had they seen such an act of mercenary action; swift, emotionless and yet, charged with the animation of a completely wild beast. Veerbhadra stood like that for some time like a statue, immobilized by its own havoc. And then, the job

having been done, the sword dropped from His hand, as did the Trishula slip onto the ground. The dark Veerbhadra slowly changed back into the luminous Shiva.

The mercenary had gone, and the lover returned.

Slowly Shiva walked outside to the lawns and approached the Havan. He was overwhelmed with remorse for Sati.

He fell on His knees, near what was once His beloved Sati but now a smouldering heap, a pyre that was forever to remain Shiva's sorrow. Nandi came and stood next to Him. He was also weeping inconsolably. "Ambe!" Shiva yelled Her name, which He often referred to Her, as Mother of His tribes.

On hearing this, the ganas started to cry in chorus, "Jai Shiv Shanker Jai Shiv Shanker Babham Bhayankar Jai Shiv Shanker Jai Ambe Jai Jagad Ambe!"

Bhola or Bhooth, He was their Nath forever.

They had witnessed how, God was *all*, and at the end of each spectrum, from the most benign to the most terrible, it was their Nath who was the Supreme, and they knew their place was always by His side.

Kali also followed them to the pyre. She had donned an effervescent form, in great contrast to Her raging one earlier. Everyone saw that She had started glowing. With a beautiful, albeit poignant smile, She looked at Sati's smouldering body with a strange expression, as if not liking something of one's own image in the mirror. Coming nearer to Shiva, She let out a sigh, and gracefully slipped into their favourite embrace, resting her head softly on His shoulder. Then, touching His tear soaked lips, whispered "My most beloved Lord, I must go now, but I shall reside in your heart, always." Bowing reverently to Shiva, she moved away and started wafting through the chamber door into the open air of the garden, leaving an extraordinarily pleasant aroma behind Her. Then the whole congregation, saw a sight never before witnessed, the tenderness of Shiva with Sati as if they were in their own private world, just by themselves: Shiva picked up Sati's body, placed it on His lap and said softly, "Sati!! Sati!! Sati!!" He had often done that when she used to lie asleep in their cave, waking her up with his whispers. This time, the call did not awaken Her. She *seemed* so awake, even through death, such was the beauty of life that She had virtually embodied till now.

Till now She had had a body, and now She was dead, and gone. The impact shook Shiva and as it shook Him, the world shook. How could this be possible? Something had gone terribly, terribly wrong: Gods were not supposed to die. Sati, wake up, wake up Sati, talk to me. Why don't you talk to me? Sati, we are

Humesha, remember? You said you wanted to be with me forever.

Here I am, with you! But...where are you? Sati!! Sateee!!!”

He buckled down further, rocking her despondently even as He looked skywards and screamed Her name again and again inconsolably. He ranted His torment, burying His head in Her face as if to escape the stark reality of this abandoned love.

The terrifying pain of having to face the future without His precious Shakti. His reason . His Cause. Sati, oh Sateee!

The Lord of the Universe was crying like the simplest, most fragile mortal.

He *felt* like a mortal: fragile and helpless.

All the rishis, the ladies, courtesans, and everyone present, without exception found tears rolling down their own cheeks in an overwhelming empathy. The ganas, who had by now stopped fighting also wailed loudly. “We are motherless! Ma, where have you gone? Ma, what are we to do without you? Ma, who will look after us in this cruel world without you? Who will feed us, love us as beings who have a right to live, too? Ma? Ma!!”

“Shiva, do you understand the feeling of helplessness on the departure of a spouse?”

Shiva looked up to see Prasuti standing with folded hands, quivering and silently crying.

“Yes, mother,” He replied, a little calmer by now. “She has gone. The most beautiful one in this universe, has gone. My universe is gone,” He wept again.

“Shiva, I have lost both a daughter and a spouse. Will you help return one to me, as we know it is in your power to do so?”

“Yes, mother.” Shiva was returning to His serene self.

He could not bring Sati back to life.

The reason was simple: Durga’s will was as great as His. This was the eternal covenant, and if She chose to end Her bodily form, even He, Shiva, could not bring Her back. But the bull-headed Daksha was another matter; he could easily be given a new lease of life by Shiva’s mysterious life-giving powers.

“Yes, mother,” repeated Shiva, and closed His eyes in mantra. It was Mrityunjaya: the sacred boon of winning even over death.

“Mein mein...” A bleating sound was heard. A goat head had appeared on Daksha’s body, and he was looking at Shiva, folding his hands in salute.

“I am sorry for whatever I have done: uncreated a divine era; that too, as father of the bride,” said Daksha. “I have caused great sorrow by disrespecting and

of the bride, said Daksha. I have caused great sorrow by disrespecting and abusing the mighty and great Lord Shiva, who has always given boons of happiness to everyone all His life. I am sorry, my Lord, for this terrible waste of life I have been, wasting also the golden opportunity of having been a father to the Goddess Herself, and a father that I should have been to you, as your father-in-law. It is good that you have given me a Goat's head. It will help me to always remember, that even while being bestowed with the privilege of being made a human, and supposedly the most intelligent of all species by Brahma Himself,

I behaved like a bull-headed creature. Arrogant about the elementals in your refuge, who were only deformed in body, whilst I was deformed in mind. Now, as a goat, I shall remember, that God and Nature create all. All are worthy. Please forgive me.”

Shiva nodded. He raised His hand in blessing. He could not help reverting back to His most innate nature of always wishing others well.

Then He arose, and lifted the body of Sati from the smouldering remains, and readied Himself to take her back to Kailash, where she belonged eternally by His side. He started to walk away from the palace lawns towards his own mountains. The fumes of the Havan offerings, of ghee and samagri were, strangely irritating Him, having being associated with the departure of Sati, rather than any auspicious foreboding or invocation.



## TIME STOOD STILL

As He climbed the first mountain, He turned around to see in the distance, the city of Daksha. The city of Daksha, which, at one time used to get Him all excited by mere sight, just because of knowing Kankhal as Sati's address. But on today's sighting, extreme fury overcame Shiva; a volcanic anger arose, with the thought: why should He not destroy this whole world?

This wicked, conniving, ungrateful, selfish, indifferent, insensitive world did not deserve to live. If He could not have Sati, His beloved, why spare the rest of the ungrateful wretches?

All of a sudden He realised He could do without them all.

A moment ago, He had been the 'all merciful, all loving God', ever bestowing boons and favours, joys and happiness on all, and in the next moment He wanted to finish them all, without exception.

The cause was in His arms. She, Sati was the cause, Hetu, of the universe.

With Her gone, there was no cause left for it, He reasoned, with a temper that was ascending like mercury.

Like Daksha's life had no importance in His own after Sati, Shiva realised that life itself had no meaning anymore.

It was a simple revelation of Death. Sati gave up Her own life because of Her own father Daksha, dishonouring Her beloved husband.

He, the great God Shiva, could not bring Her back to life, after She chose to self-destruct, but what He *could* do, was to destroy the entire Universe. He saw the smouldering Havan smoke even from the distance and knew at that moment, that His own internal smouldering would be forever.

That was the moment of decision. When Shiva stood atop His hill with Sati in His arms, wondering if anyone deserved to live when She was dead. Time stood still.

The world shivered. Devas shivered, Brahma shivered, Vishnu shivered. *Shivering in Shiva's wrath* had become the new extension of the presence of Shiva.

Something they had not seen before, but a vague and very uncomfortable feeling told them that the end of the Universe was near.

"Pralaya," spoke Indra. "Pralaya," chorused the Devas. They feared their own death which seemed inevitable.

"O Mahadeva, save us from Pralaya, save us from your own wrath!"

But the ganas spoke a different language. "Dissolute it all, O Mahadeva," bellowed Nandi. "We don't wish to live without our Mother."

Always teams, always, different prayers for different reasons, always, a duality, Shiva noted even in His grim cognition.

A million thoughts went through His mind, a million scenes; landscapes, memories, histories of the entire universe, how just for the sake of love, He had created it all, along with His beloved Shakti. How, right in the beginning, He had told Her that He did not need any Universe, that She *was* His Universe, and they could spend an eternity like this. "*Unnata*—NO," He had said.

And how She had sweetly told Him of *Unmesa*—the springing forth, the manifestation of children, and how their love would multiply.

"Imagine so many children born of your love, imagine being the father of them all," She had said. 'Imagine being the father of them all'. The memory of Sati's beseeching touched His heart like an arrow that found its mark at the dot center.

He took the decision, to spare them, in *Her* love. Even though they had amply shown their disregard for the divine message and purpose of love itself, it would not be right to end them in Her love; She, who had wanted love to multiply. She, who had understood Him so well, who had painted His verses unto the canvas of the Universe. She, who had understood the only thing that God Himself desired: love.

And had created alongside Him, for Him to 'simply love and to be loved'. And so it was, that in the moment of decision, love won over anger.

"Bhole Nath..." He heard Her sweet voice again and tears fell freely from His eyes. Love, over anger. Indeed.

And Shiva walked away.

There was a sigh of relief from the devas; their lives and kingdoms had been spared. But the ganas who truly loved God, not for their own motives, but for the love of God Himself, cried.

They realised, God, had turned His back.



## EPILOGUE

“Oh, My God! That is so sad, Gurudeva!” said Shaunaka, tears rolling down his cheeks. “Why must this wonderful story end like this? Why couldn’t Shiva and Shakti write out a happy ending in the world play?”

“Because, contrary to what is popularly believed, they *do not* direct everything in the divine play that they begin. They do not will each being to follow a particular action. They do not divest the other players from a free will to act out their roles. Because, the play of life is not one that is fixed, it is one that is fixed to go on.”

“So...we have a choice in how the play of life evolves?” asked Shaunaka.

“Absolutely, that is the central message of Shaivism.”

“And Shiva, isn’t He Supreme? Isn’t His will final?”

“It is,” said Suta gravely. “But here’s the point you must always understand about Shiva. Here is the distilled essence of Shiva that I have learnt...” Shaunaka came closer to Suta, to receive what he knew would be a great learning.

Tandav toh Param Ishwar Ki kriya hai

so, hokar rahega.

Sristi ke bhakton par yeh nirbhar hai ki

Shiv Raudra Tandav karte hain, Ya Phir Ananda Tandav.

“Tandava is the very motion of the Supreme God,  
so it is inevitable.

What is, however, determined in the acts of the devotees,  
is whether Shiva will dance in anger,  
or then, in joy,” said Suta, enigmatically.

“I wrote all this many years ago, dear Shaunaka, upon the realisation that



extreme situations can give rise to the movement of the cosmos itself.

That, which bhakts call the Dance of Shiva.

We must, each one of us, be careful of what our own little steps are capable of leading to. They are indeed capable of the Mighty God making up His mind on what to do with His own creation.

At the time of Sati's death, the picture of Shiva was the terribly angry Shiva.

What is called Raudra Roop, or Bhairava. But Shiva's inner most and preferred nature, is Bhola, the Nath who is simple, and wants happiness for all. It is up to us to share this preferred dream and dance of His, Aum Namah Shivaye."

"Yes, I do understand, Gurudeva. But, the story did not end here, right? She did come back as Parvati, right?" asked Shaunaka.

"Yes," said Suta. "She did, and we all know that, but it took a very long, long time.

"Time stood still?" asked Shaunaka quietly.

"Yes," said Suta and then added quietly himself,

"She turned into fire

He froze into silence."

And Time stood still.

## Cast of Characters

**Shiva:** (Honorific *Shivji*) The third God in the Hindu Trinity. Known as the Destroyer.

**Sati:** The first wife of Shiva, daughter of Daksha.

**Brahma:** The creator God, first in the Hindu Trinity but not to be confused with Brahman, which is the term for the supreme consciousness.

**Rudra:** An earlier incarnation of Shiva, when he was born as Brahma's son.

**Daksha:** Brahma's mind-born son. Prajapati, chief of all beings, King of Kankhal.

**Parvati:** Daughter of King Himavat, King of the Himalayas. Reincarnation of Sati. Wife of Shiva.

**Vishnu:** Second in the Trinity of Hindu Gods. As the Sustainer of the world, Vishnu incarnates from time to time. Popularly, eight such incarnations have been known in this life cycle.

**Shaunaka:** An Ancient rishi (seer).

**Suta:** (Honorific *Sutji*) An Ancient rishi (seer ).

**Sanatkumara:** An Ancient rishi (seer). Said to be the same as Kartikeya, son of Shiva.

**Vyasa:** An ancient compiler of Hindu scriptures.

**Nataraja:** The dancing form of Shiva.

**Pasupati:** Shiva as Lord of Creatures.

**Rama:** The seventh incarnation of Vishnu, scion of the Ikshvaku clan, son of King Dasratha of Ayodhya.

**Krishna:** The eighth incarnation of Vishnu.

**Yashoda:** The foster mother of Krishna

**Nand:** The foster father of Krishna.

**Gita Mahakaleshwar:** Dramatic interplay character, symbolising a Tantrika.

**Arjuna:** A Pandava prince. Expert archer and brave warrior.

**Siddhartha:** Prince of the Sakyas, who later became Buddha, the Enlightened One.

**Yashodhara:** The wife of Prince Siddhartha Gautama.

**Antarikraksasa:** Dramatic interplay character, symbolising an evil demon.

**Jesus:** The prophet of Nazareth. Born in Bethlehem, the most compassionate son of God.

**Shakti:** *Lit* power. Shakti is the primal name of the Divine Mother Goddess.

Shiva's inseparable half, connoting His power to manifest all things.

**Laila:** A beautiful Persian girl, female protagonist of a great love story.

**Majnu:** A lover, male protagonist of the same Persian love story.

**Romeo:** Male protagonist in a great love story by Shakespeare.

**Nandi:** Shiva's chief devotee. A bull who guards Shiva's temple precinct. Nandi also serves as Shiva's vehicle.

**Lakshmi:** The Goddess of Abundance. Consort of Vishnu.

**Agni:** One of the most important of the Vedic gods. A devata, He is the God of Fire and the acceptor of sacrifices.

**Vayu:** A primary Hindu deity, a devata, the Lord of the Winds.

**Indra:** The Chief of all devatas, Lord of Svargaloka or Heaven. He is the God of Rain and Thunderstorms.

**Asvins:** Divine twin horsemen deities.

**Maruts:** Storm deities. Attendants of Indra.

**Shamshan Nath:** *Lit* Lord of the cremation Ground. Dramatic interplay character, symbolizing the unknown Shaman.

**Gorakh Nath:** A 10<sup>th</sup> century mystic reputed to have immense magical powers. He was the founder of Nath Yogism, a sect of Shaivism.

**Balak Nath:** A great Shaivite Siddha (mystic), who is reported to be booned miraculous powers by Shiva Himself.

**Abhik:** Dramatic interplay character, symbolizing a seeker who goes on to become an attained master.

**Saraswati:** The Goddess of Learning. Consort of Brahma.

**'The Rider':** Dramatic Interplay Character. Symbolising a Shaman tribesman.

**Matrika:** The Kashmir Shaivism school uses this term for Shakti as 'The Unknown Mother'.

**Lobhkumar:** Dramatic interplay character, symbolizing greed.

**Usas:** Literally, 'The Dawn'. The very first creation of Brahma, to usher in day, she was supposedly a feminine deity.

**Brahmi:** One of Saraswati's alternate names.

**Shatrupa:** One with hundred forms.

**Sandhya:** Dusk. One who ushers the end of day.

**Sarva:** Shiva, as the archer.

**Virni:** The first wife Of Daksha.

**Haryashvas:** Sons of Daksha and Virini.

**Prasuti:** The second Wife of Daksha.

**Manu:** The first human to appear in the world. He was a lawgiver.

**Narada:** One of the greatest rishis. Narada is primarily a messenger and travels

astrally from the skies to the earth, but ironically prefers to keep his title of 'Muni' the quiet seer.

**Brihaspati:** The guru (Teacher) of all the devatas. Also the ruler of planet Jupiter.

**Dakshayani:** Sati. Addressed as the Daughter of Daksha.

**Bhrighu:** A great Rishi who could foretell events with his astrological and mystic calculations.

**Khyati:** One of Daksha's daughters.

**Durga:** The foremost name of Mother Goddess, wife of Shiva.

**Vashishta:** A great rishi. Teacher to God Vishnu in His incarnation as Rama. That Vashishta familiarised Himself with the Tantra, is recorded in chapter eight of the Rudrayamala Tantra.

**Sristi Iswara Maharaj:** Dramatic interplay character, symbolising the timeless representation of Shiva as God.

**Chitragupta:** The Celestial Record keeper. He can count all merits and demerits at the time of any being's death.

**Durga Bhavani:** Another name of the Mother Goddess as one who creates the world.

**Rahu:** Is a demon that is only a severed head. And this head swallows the sun to cause a solar eclipse.

**Urvashi:** A very beautiful celestial nymph.

**Menaka:** An even more beautiful celestial nymph.

**Mahadev:** *Alt* Mahadeva. The Greatest God of all.

**Chandra Kumar:** The Moon

**Annapurna:** Mother Goddess as the one who feeds all.

**Bhringi:** One of Shiva's Ganas. A shadow to Nandi.

**Surya Dev:** The Sun. Proptiated by ancient Indian Seers as God.

**Shiv Shanker:** Shiva is referred to, as Shanker especially after He is married to Sati or Parvati.

**Ravana:** The King of Lanka, who abducted Sita, and then fought a war with Rama. Nevertheless, he was a great Shaivite and wrote a famous Prayer 'Shiv Tandav Stotram' in praise of Shiva.

**Vishvakarma:** A celestial being, who was an expert engineer, believed to be the architect of the Gods. He is worshipped In India as chief patron of the working class.

**Sita:** The wife of Rama, incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi.

**Vrikshvirata:** Dramatic interplay character, symbolising a Large Tree.

**Mahima Giri:** Dramatic interplay character, symbolising a mountain.

**Briddhananda:** Dramatic interplay character, symbolising an ancient soul.

**Urdhva:** Dramatic interplay character, symbolising a young neophyte.

**Veerbhadra:** A terrifying warrior form emanated from Shiva.

**Pushan:** Vedic Solar Deity and one of the Adityas.

**Yama:** The God of Death.

**Kali:** The terrifying and dark form Of Goddess Shakti. She is Shiva's equivalent in destruction.

**Bhole Nath:** Innocent Lord. A great epithet for Shiva.

**Bhooth Nath :** Lord Of Ghosts and Hobgoblins.

**Bhairava:** A terrifying form Of Shiva. But paradoxically,also the epitome of spiritual knowledge.

## Bhasya (Glossary)

**Abhik:** Fearless.

**Abhyasa:** Practice, Especially pertaining to Yoga.

**Adhunik:** Modern, present day, contemporary.

**Advaita:** Non-dual. *Lit* Not two.

**Aghora:** *Alt* Aghoram, Aghori.

**Agni:** Fire. The God of Fire is also called Agni Deva.

**Airavat:** The celestial elephant of Indra

**Ajoosba:** Dramatic interplay term, a magical tree.

**Akashik:** From akasa, pertaining to the sky, etheric records.

**Akash Vani:** Celestial announcement from the sky.

**Akhada:** An open-air gym where wrestlers practice.

**Alamgrasa:** A complete absorption in original transcendence.

**Alps:** The highest mountain range across Europe

**Amar:** Immortal. Amar Nath is also a mountain pilgrimage in Kashmir, India., Where every year in June–July, an Ice Shivlinga is formed.

**Amba:** *Alt* Ambe. The Mother Goddess.

**Anant:** Unending.

**Annapurna:** The name of Mother Goddess as the nourisher of the world.

**Asanas:** Postures of Yoga. Also meaning seat.

**Asuras:** Also called Danavas. Warrior demons who oppressed others.

**Atri:** A son of Brahma, a bard and scholar. He was also a prajapati.

**Aum:** *Alt* Om. ? The Primal sound of all creation. The word of God.

**Aum Namah Shivaya:** The Basic Mantra for worshipping Shiva, meaning ‘I salute Shiva’.

**Baba:** An honorific term for a saint or an elder.

**Baindavi Kala:** A Kashmir Shaivism term.

**Baraat:** Wedding procession.

**Bhagwad Gita:** A spiritual sermon delivered by Krishna unto the warrior prince Arjuna on a battlefield, to reconnect Him to His Divinity.

**Bhagwate:** A name of the Mother Goddess.

**Bhakt:** Devotee.

**Bhakti:** Devotion.

**Bhang:** An intoxicating drink made from the Cannabis leaf.

**Bharat:** Older name for India. Eastern bay, alluding to Bengal

**Bhava:** A state, Bhakti Bhava is used to describe feelings of faith and devotion.

**Bhole Nath:** One of the most beautiful epithets of Shiva, meaning the Innocent Lord.

**Bhujendrahaaram:** An epithet for Shiva, literally one who wears a snake around his neck as a garland.

**Boddha:** *Alt* Baudha, Buddha. Spiritually awake; enlightened state of gnosis.

**Brahmachari:** Taken to mean a celibate, but the original word meant 'one who knows Brahman and consciousness'.

**Brahmmalok:** Brahma's Heaven.

**Brahmanicide:** A celestial offence, the Slayer of Brahma.

**Brahmi:** Another name for Saraswati.

**Brahmin:** One from the caste of priests. Also, teachers and scholars.

**Bhasma:** A sort of ash Shiva besmears Himself with, a residue after incineration and calcined preparation.

**Champakas:** Beautiful yellow and white flowers.

**Chhand:** A poetic jingle.

**Chintan:** To reflect.

**Dakshina:** The fee of a teacher. But can also denote alms.

**Dakshayani:** Another name for Sati. As the daughter of Daksha.

**Damaru:** A small hourglass shaped drum that can be held in one hand.

**Damrudhaaram:** Dhaaram is to possess. Therefore, One who holds the Damaru.

**Darbar:** Royal assembly.

**Darsana:** *Alt* Darshan. The word Darsana , means essentially, 'revelation', or 'seeing'. Impliedly, it also comes to mean philosophy , or spiritual school of thought, when this sacred philosophy is expounded by the rsi to successive disciples.

**Deva:** *Alt* Devata, Devam: demigod, celestial being.

**Devanagri:** An alphabet style of ancient India.

**Devi:** The primary title of the Mother Goddess.

**Devputra:** Son Of A demigod.

**Devrishi:** A seer of high attainment, like a demigod.

**Dhaam:** Sacred place of visit, normally a temple or a meditation site. *Shiv Dhaam*, sacred to Shiva.

**Dhyana:** *Alt* Dhyaanam: Meditation, meditative.

**Divya:** Divine.

**Diya:** A small oil lamp used for religious and sacred ceremonies.

**Ganas:** *Alt* Shivgan: The select followers of Shiva who reside mostly with Him in His mountain abode. Ganas are often different in appearance from normal

beings.

**Ganatantra:** Republic.

**Garbha:** Womb.

**Generatrix:** Mother who generates all things.

**Ghee:** Clarified butter.

**Ghora:** Dark. Connoting evil.

**Griha Pravesh:** Housewarming. *Lit* entering the home.

**Guha:** *Alt* Gufa. Cave.

**Guha Vashishta:** The cave where Rishi Vashishta meditated.

**Guru:** The teacher. Spiritual preceptor. *Honorific* Gurudeva.

**Gyani:** *Alt* Jnani. Knowledable.

**Har Har Mahadev:** A call to Hail Shiva, it may be taken to mean each one (of us) is Shiva. But the real import is that Shiva, being Hara, the taker away of things, is being implored to take away all negatives from His followers and return them to a pristine awareness.

**Havan:** The culminating and ritual part of a yagya, the actual offering.

**Hemp:** An intoxicating derivative of Cannabis plant, usually smoked, as contrasted to Bhang, another derivate that is had with liquid.

**Hetu:** Purpose or reason; cause.

**Himachala:** The Himalayan mountain range spanning the modern day state of Himachal Pradesh, India.

**Himalayas:** The lofty mountain ranges of the Eastern Hemisphere, known for many ascetics practicing or residing there, some of whom are supposedly hundreds of years old.

**Humesha:** Strictly speaking, Humesha is not a Hindi word, but it is the proud heritage of India to assimilate all words in its own fold, and most Hindi speaking people would understand it to mean “forever”.

**Ichha:** Desire.

**Isha:** God. Similar to the term Ishta. The Ishta devata is ‘personal God’ or the particular manifestation of the Supreme divine in which a bhakt loves their God.

**Iswara:** *Alt.* Ishwar. God. Same as Ishta. It can also be understood as Icchavar- One who wills the whole world into being.

**Jagdambe:** *Lit* World Mother. Another name for the Mother Goddess Shakti.

**Jaimala:** A garland of flowers which the bride and the groom put on each other as a first sign of togetherness and bonding.

**Jal Tori:** *Lit* Water vegetable.

**Jugalbandi:** Duet.

**Jyotirlingas:** Luminous Shivlinga. 12 very special Shivlingas that were manifested by Shiva Himself from time to time.



**Kailash:** The abode of Shiva, Parvati and the ganas in the Himalayas.

**Kama:** God of Love. Cupid. Pierces hearts with a love arrow from his bow.

**Kamadhenu:** A divine bovine. The mother of all cows.

She is a miraculous ‘cow of plenty’ who provides her owner whatever he desires.

**Kamandalu:** An oblong water pot of clay used for storing drinking water.

**Kamarband:** A broad waist sash worn by warriors to keep their tunic tight.

**Kankhal:** The Kingdom Of Daksha. Near modern day Haridwar, India.

**Kesaras:** Violet flowers that turn saffron.

**Ketaks:** White flowers.

**Kshatriya:** A warrior caste.

**Kurabakas:** Mountain flowers.

**Kurukshetra:** The battleground of the war between Kauravas and Pandavs, who were both siblings from the Yadav dynasty. The very term has become synonymous with a battlefield.

**Kusa:** Salt reed-grass.

**Kutumba:** Family.

**Lakshmana:** Younger brother of Rama.

**Lanka:** Modern day Sri Lanka.

**Langot:** Undergarment worn by men as a loincloth.

**Leela:** *Alt* Lila. The play of God.

**Magi:** The earliest magicians or mystics.

**Mahacina:** Modern day ‘Greater China’

**Mahakaal:** *Lit* ‘Cosmic time’. Shiva as the Timeless God.

**Mahapurana:** The great old legends (of God). There are eighteen major Mahapuranas in Hinduism.

**Maharaj:** *Alt* Maharaja. King.

**Mahasamadhi:** Although Death is sometimes referred to as Mahasamadhi in modern usage, it actually means ‘to merge with the transcendent consciousness’.

**Mahima Giri:** Dramatic interplay character. Large as a mountain.

**Mallika:** Jasmine flower.

**Manan:** Mindfulness.

**Mantra:** A sacred syllable or a string of syllables that raise the consciousness when repeated several times, making a sacred chant.

**Maya:** Maya is often described as illusion and magic, but actually it is the power of Shakti to emanate all things and also to veil them.

**Mohur:** A gold piece of currency.

**Moksha:** *Alt* Mukti. Generally regarded as liberation from the bondage of birth and death. In Shaivism, living in the proximity of Shiva, or, esoterically,

enlightenment while in the body.

**Mrignayani:** Doe-eyed.

**Muni:** Also Munivar. Ancient seer.

**Nadis:** Tube, pipe, blood vessel, nerve flow in a human body.

**Namaste:** *Alt* Namaskar, Naman, Namaskaram. To Salute another person with both hands folded. It means 'the God in me honours the God in you'.

**Nath:** Lord.

**Niwas:** Residence; to reside.

**Niyamas:** Ways of teaching. Methodology.

**Niyati:** *Alt* Neeti. The way of destiny and world order.

**Omkaar:** The sound of Om or Aum.

**Padmasana:** Lotus pose. A cross-legged yoga posture.

**Pandaal:** A fabricated structure, either temporary (Marquee) or permanent, in a religious ceremony.

**Para Bhakti:** Highest devotion.

**Pasupati:** Lord of creatures.

**Pasupati Nath:** A more intimate honorific for the Lord Of all.

**Pasus:** Animals.

**Pauranic:** Old legend.

**Pervasa:** To pervade.

**Peshgi:** Offering. Customary Gift.

**Prabhu:** God.

**Praja:** Subjects of a kingdom.

**Prakriti:** Nature.

**Pralaya:** Destruction or final dissolution of the manifest world.

**Prana:** Breath. Vital life-giving force.

**Prasad:** Holy offering of food to God, which is then returned to the devotee to consume as a sacrament.

**Prithviloka:** Earth. Prithvi means Ground, lok means world, so Prithvilok is the planet earth.

**Pundit:** Priest. One who performs religious worship on behalf of another.

**Punnagas:** Dainty flowers.

**Puranas:** Old religious texts and records.

**Purna Ahuti:** Final sacrifice or offering.

**Purusa:** Male.

**Puspakghora:** Dramatic interplay, A winged horse.

**Rahasya:** Secret. The innermost understanding about any particular phenomenon , thing or even being.

**Rahood:** A howling sound.

**Raja:** King.

**Raj Darbar:** King's court.

**Rajmas:** Red kidney beans.

**Raudra:** Pertaining to Rudra.

**Raudra Roop:** Shiva's fierce Rudra form.

**Rishi:** *Alt* Rsis, rishivar. Seer. Attained meditator.

**Rta:** *Alt* Reeti. In accordance with social norm as contrasted to Neeti which is natural order.

**Rudraksha:** Rudraksha is a large evergreen broad-leaved tree, which grows in the area from the Gangetic Plain to the foothills of great Himalaya. The botanical name of it is *Elaeocarpus Ganitrus*.

**Rudra Nanti:** Tapered men's earrings of the Shaivites and Nath Yogis.

**Rudra Veena:** An ancient stringed instrument, attributed to Shiva as its foremost exponent.

**Sadashiva:** Shiva is eternally Shiva, the absolute Godhead, always.

**Sadhus:** Spiritual Godmen. Hermits.

**Sahaj Avastha:** To be centered in a natural state of being.

**Sakyas:** Ancient warrior tribe of India and Nepal.

**Samadhi:** The culmination of all meditation. A state where the individual meditator finally merges with the universal divinity in a oneness.

**Samagri:** Collection of holy offerings in a yagya or Havan. Like Incense sticks, betel, eatables, camphor, scents *etc.*

**Samhara:** *Alt* Samharam. Dissolution.

**Sandook:** A small box/chest to keep precious belongings.

**Satsang:** *Lit* In the company of truth. Spiritual Congregation.

**Satyug :** The first world cycle, which is the Era of Truth.

**Satvik Guna:** Attribute of purity and virtue.

**Shaivite:** One who follows Shiva's precepts.

**Shakti:** The power of Shiva. The name of the Mother Goddess.

**Shaktiman:** He who wields Shakti, an epithet for Shiva.

**Shaman:** A practitioner of tribal magic.

**Shamanags:** Dramatic interplay character. A mix between a Shaman and a Cobra.

**Shambala:** Shambhala or Shangrila is a mythical kingdom in Tibetan Buddhism.

**Shambhu:** *Alt* Svayambhu. Self Created. Shiva.

**Shamshan:** *Alt* Smanan Cremation Ground.

**Shava:** Corpse.

**Shivlinga:** *Alt* Shivlingam. The symbolic representation of Shiva and Shakti in

the shape of a vertical column and horizontal receptacle.

**Shiva Tattva:** The primal essence of all things. Supreme consciousness.

**Shiva Tulniye:** Comparable to Shiva.

**Shringar:** *Alt* Sringaar. The act of a lady dressing up and doing make-up to enhance her beauty.

**Shrutis:** The spoken word of rishis, heard by the devotees.

**Shubha:** Auspicious.

**Sindoor:** A red powder that is put on the forehead of married women distinguishing them from the Unmarried Ones.

**Siva Mukhi:** From the mouth of Shiva.

**S.O.S ;** Save our soul. A cry for help.

**Smasanis:** Those who congregate at the cremation ground for some ritual. Or those who are intimately connected with the cremation ground.

**Smriti:** The written word by the devotee of their rishis. Considered less important than Shruti.

**So Hung:** *Alt* So Ham, So Hum. A Mantra meaning ‘ You and I, are one’

**Soma:** A fabled intoxicating drink of the Gods.

**Surabhi:** Another name for Kamadhenu the Miracle Cow.

**Sva Ha:** A denouement indicating the end of a mantra. Literally, it *means* ‘well said’.

**Swami:** Lord of the soul. A term used for the guru or a loving husband.

**Swarna Kaksha:** Gold chamber.

**Swayambhu:** Self created. Swayam is self, bhu is element, meaning to manifest oneself materially.

**Tabula Rasa:** Blank state of mind.

**Tadka:** A spicy condiment made by heating cumin seeds, salt, red chilly powder and spices in clarified butter.

**Tandav:** Shiva’s robust dance.

**Tantra:** *Lit* ‘Expand to swim across’. Tantra is the esoteric system that Shiva originated to connect the individual to the universal. Also to understand the interconnectedness of all things to each other. Tantra in this context means ‘to weave’.

**Tantrika:** A practioner of Tantra.

**Tapas:** Deep meditation, effort to achieve self-realization, an intense spiritual practice involving solitude, and asceticism; it is derived from the word root ‘tap’ meaning ‘heat’. Connoting the fire of effort.

**Tat Astu :** “So Be It!”

**Tattva:** Element. Shiv Tattva, God element, the primal consciousness.

**Thandai:** *Lit* ‘Cooler’, a code name for Bhang in milk.

**Trinetra:** Three eyes, third eye, the eye of instinct and intuition. Trinetri—One who has three eyes.

**Trisula:** *Alt* Trishula. The trident, weapon of Shiva.

**Trishuldharam:** One who wields the Trisula.

**Unmesh:** A Kashmir Shaivism term, meaning ‘to arise, or to go ahead with’ . To manifest.

**Unnata:** The opposite of Unmesh. To say No. To resist.

**Urdhva:** Upwards. Ascending.

**Utsava Bhavan:** *Lit* Hall of celebration.

**Upanishad:** The last part of the Vedas.

**Vach:** *Alt* Vak, vac. Speech.

**Vahan:** A vehicle.

**Varuna:** A Devata. In charge of water and the ocean.

**Vedas:** The ancient scriptures of Hinduism. Principally four. The Vedas play a central spiritual authority. All ceremonies are done with homage to them. From vidhi, or vidya, knowledge.

**Veena:** A stringed instrument.

**Vinasham:** *Alt* Vinasam, vinasa. Doom. Destruction.

**Vrindavan:** A town where Krishna lived in his adolescent years.

**Vyom:** Of the skies. Vyoma denotes the state of ‘nothingness’ and Godhead resting in its own unmanifest form.

**Yama:** The God of Death.

**Yagya:** A worship conducted by priests in which offerings are made to celestial powers and Gods. Yagyas can be of various types, but the fire yagya is most well known.

**Yin Yang:** Chinese philosophical understanding of how apparently contrary forces are actually complementary, and interdependent in the natural world.

**Yoga:** Often thought of as a series of complex stretching exercises, yoga actually means ‘to Yoke’; to conjoin the individual self with the universal divinity.

**Yogic:** Pertaining to yoga.

**Yogi:** One who practises conjunction with God.

**Yogi Roop:** The form of Shiva as a manifest man.

## **Credits for conversations with friends:**

A very special thanks to my family. My wife, Simmi, whose patience, support, and contributions have been invaluable. And my two daughters, Swati and Sumati, for listening to my innumerable stories of Shiva. And with their childlike innocent admiration, encouraging me to express and share my imagination and love for Shiva and Shakti with all of you ...and to Nandan Kuthiala who consistently urged me to 'write a book on Shiva, as you see Him'

Many of the chapters in this book have been inspired by conversations with friends, including some on facebook.

Thank you Dr Ajay Kotwal, Baljinath ji Pandit, Samvit Prakash Dhar, Dr Karan Singh ji, Anju Sethi, Dr Jaipal Singh, Dr Sanjay Kaul, Harsh V Shringla, Mahesh Sharma, Kanval Tikku, Masoom Hamza, Kawal Bir Singh, Randhir Bhan, Mark Dyczkowski, Manisha Koirala, Hemal Radia, Triveni Chauhan, Varun Sahni, Mona Vijayakar, Tonia Macmillan, Anoopama Mukerjee, Alice Tucker, Tara Sutphen, Janki Nathji Kaul, Toshi Dogra, Haresh Daswani, Ruth Fisher, Pradeep Gandotra, Meena Vaidya, Bhawna Kak, Keshav Fullbrook, Sumit Sharma, Sarla Razdan, Sangeeta Bahl and many more, the list, being endless!

Visit Shailendra's blog:

<http://shaivismtoday.blogspot.com>

Visit Shiva, The Ultimate Time Traveller's Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/SHIVATIMETRAVELLER>

Visit Shailendra Gulhati's facebook page at :

<https://www.facebook.com/shailgulhatishivapage>

or Email him at [shailgulhati@hotmail.com](mailto:shailgulhati@hotmail.com)





**COLLECTION OF VARIOUS**  
**-> HINDUISM SCRIPTURES**  
**-> HINDU COMICS**  
**-> AYURVEDA**  
**-> MAGZINES**

**FIND ALL AT [HTTPS://DSC.GG/DHARMA](https://dsc.gg/dharma)**

**Made with**



**By**

**Avinash/Shashi**

**Icreator of  
hinduism  
server!**

**KAPWING**



**S**hailendra Gulhati is a Jammu based Spiritual Author. He has written three books, The Yogi and the Snake, NaamRoop - A Tribute to the Divine, and Shiva Poetry.

SHIVA, THE ULTIMATE TIME TRAVELLER, is a brilliant narrative, which combines mystery, mythology, and meditation to reveal a profound spiritual journey. Shailendra presents Shiva, The Supreme Lord of Yoga, as the protagonist who rises through time and space to establish His sublime presence in the most endearing way, transforming and delighting the reader.

In a timeless love story, the perfect Yogi meets the perfect Yogini. Will they be able to embrace the perfect destiny... or will the world create obstacles, not having understood perfect love?

Shiva, who sports the title of 'The God beyond mortal understanding', is portrayed with an enchanting, almost human quality as we travel in Time with Him. Through myriads of mystically visualised renderings, we are transported to a magical world of divine, intriguing experiences, where the search for 'Self' unfolds as the quest of every soul as it seeks its way home.

In the second book, the travails of Shiva are taken further in talks with Parvati, who by Her very appearance, kindles the subject of reincarnation and past association. Shiva comes out clearly as the greatest chieftain, as also the perfect love.

And in the forthcoming sequels, we will see Shiva embracing the future. He is present here with us, in our own time, connecting with old friends like Jesus, Buddha and the Sufi Rumi. Identifying and then galvanizing the council of mystics on His travels, while biking His way through the Himalayan Hills, or embarking on jet planes for adventurous journeys across the seven seas...



The author at  
Maamelshwar Shiva  
Temple, Pahalgam, J&K,  
India