

= Bhikshatana =

Bhikshatana ( Sanskrit : भिक्षु भिक्षुता ; Bhikshuana ; literally , " wandering about for alms , mendicancy " ) or Bhikshatana @-@ murti ( Bhikshuanamurti ) is an aspect of the Hindu god Shiva as the " Supreme mendicant " or the " Supreme Beggar " . Bhikshatana is depicted as a nude four @-@ armed man adorned with ornaments who holds a begging bowl in his hand and is followed by demonic attendants and love @-@ sick women .

Bhikshatana is considered a gentler form of Shiva 's fierce aspect Bhairava and a gentle phase between Bhairava 's two gruesome forms , one of which decapitates the god Brahma and the other of which murders the god Vishnu 's gatekeeper . Bhikshatana is the form of Bhairava that Shiva assumes to atone for his sin of severing Brahma 's fifth head . He wanders the universe in the form of a naked Kapali mendicant , begging for alms with Brahma 's kapala ( skullcap ) as his begging bowl , until his sin is expiated upon reaching the holy city of Varanasi .

Another legend describes Bhikshatana 's visit to the Deodar ( Pine ) Forest to dispense the ignorance of sages and lead them to true knowledge . During his visit , he seduces the wives of the sages who come to give him alms . Horrified by Bhikshatana 's " heretic " appearance and actions , the sages have a long confrontation with him . Ultimately Bhikshatana triumphs , establishing the worship of the Linga , his aniconic symbol . A variant of the legend narrates how Bhikshatana transforms into Nataraja ? Shiva as the Cosmic Dancer .

Bhikshatana is a popular icon in South India , in contrast to North India , where it is of lesser importance . Though Bhikshatana does not have any temples dedicated to him as the primary deity , he is sculpted in stone temple walls , worshipped as a subsidiary deity , and cast in bronze as a temple festival processional icon in almost every major Tamil Shiva temple . Many Tamil language hymns sing of Bhikshatana 's wanderings , often narrating of the pining of the love @-@ smitten who are enamoured of him .

= = Legends = =

= = = Expiatory wandering = = =

The Kurma Purana narrates that during a particular council of rishis ( sages ) , the god Brahma arrogantly declared that he was the Supreme Creator of the Universe . Shiva appeared at the assembly as an infinite pillar of light and challenged Brahma 's statement . After deliberation , the council accepted Shiva as the true Creator , but Brahma remained obstinate . Angered by Brahma 's vanity , Shiva ? as the terrifying Bhairava ? cut off one head of the five @-@ headed Brahma with a mere flick of his fingernail ( an act iconographically depicted as Brahmashirascheda @-@ murti ) . As a consequence Brahma died , but the spiritual credit he had accumulated over a lifetime of devout asceticism pulled him immediately back from death . Upon his resurrection , Brahma accepted Shiva 's superiority . The reason for the decapitation of Brahma remains the same in the narratives of the Shiva Purana and the Matsya Purana . In the Skanda Purana , the trigger is not Brahma 's arrogance but his incest with his daughter , while in the Bengali version of the Shiva Purana , Brahma insults Shiva using his fifth head 's mouth , while the rest of them praise Shiva when he comes to Brahma 's abode as a guest . In another instance in the Shiva Purana , when an argument erupts between Brahma and Vishnu over who is superior , Shiva appears as an infinite fiery pillar ( Linga ) in front of the pair . They decide whoever finds the end of the pillar is superior . Brahma lies about finding the head of the infinite pillar and declares himself as superior . In the Varaha Purana , in which Shiva is born from Brahma 's brow , Brahma calls his son a Kapali and angers him . In all versions , an infuriated Shiva or Bhairava cuts off Brahma 's head as a punishment . However , all Puranas ( Kurma , Varaha , Shiva , Skanda , and Vamana ) agree that the head of Brahma stuck to Bhairava @-@ Shiva 's left palm due to the sin of killing Brahma , the most learned Brahmin ? Brahmahatya or Brahminicide . To expiate the sin of brahmahatya , Shiva had to perform the vow of a Kapali : wandering the world as a naked beggar with the skull of the

slain as his begging bowl . In the Kurma and Vamana Puranas , Shiva 's sin takes corporeal form , becoming a ghoulish woman called Brahmahatya who follows Bhikshatana everywhere he goes .

The Kurma Purana further narrates that Bhikshatana wandered the three worlds ( heaven , earth , and netherworld ) begging from door to door with a host of bhutas ( goblins ) . The women of the houses who came to grant him food became enamoured by his appearance and followed him , singing and dancing . Wandering , Bhikshatana reached the Deodar Forest ( also called Daruka forest , Daruka @-@ vana or Daru @-@ vana ) , where he shocked the sages with his " lewdness and nudity " and tempted their wives . Bhikshatana @-@ Shiva made them realise his greatness after their confrontation . However , in some other Puranas this encounter is placed in a different time period unrelated to Bhikshatana 's expiatory wandering .

The Kurma Purana goes on to state that after the encounter with the sages of the Deodar Forest , Bhikshatana continued to wander , visiting various countries of gods and demons before he finally reached the abode of the god Vishnu . Vishnu 's gatekeeper Vishvaksena did not allow him to enter . Angered , Bhikshatana slew Vishvaksena and impaled the corpse on his trident , which added to his sin . This form of Shiva with a corpse on his trident is called Kankala @-@ murti ( " One with the skeleton " ) . Bhikshatana , now as Kankala @-@ murti , entered Vishnu 's abode and begged for food . Vishnu offered his own blood as food in one version . In another version , Vishnu cut an artery on Bhikshatana 's forehead ; a stream of blood spurts into his begging bowl as his food . Vishnu then directed Bhikshatana to visit the sacred city of Varanasi , where his sin would be expiated . The encounter with Vishnu 's gatekeeper is also retold with some variation in the Vamana Purana and the Matsya Purana .

All Puranas agree that upon reaching Varanasi , Brahma 's skull falls off Bhikshatana 's palm at a place now called Kapala @-@ mochana ( " liberating from the skull " ) and Vishaksena 's corpse disappears . The sin , personified by Brahmahatya , vanishes into hell . Vishaksena is resurrected and the sanctified Bhairava @-@ Shiva , having bathed in the sacred pond in Varanasi , casts off the appearance of Bhikshatana and returns to his abode .

= = = Visit to the Deodar Forest = = =

As told in the Kurma Purana , Bhikshatana @-@ Shiva wanted to reveal the ignorance of the sages , who were engrossed in Dharma ( righteousness ) and extreme austerities but had forgotten the Samkhya ( Supreme Knowledge ) . The naked , handsome , ithyphallic ( with an erect phallus , urdhvalinga ) beggar Shiva entered the forest , begging for alms from the sages ' wives . They were so enamoured of him that while granting alms , they allowed their clothes to fall off and followed him , dancing and singing , love @-@ sick . Bhikshatana was accompanied by Mohini ? Vishnu disguised as Bhikshatana 's enchanting wife , who maddens the sages ' sons in love . The sages , unable to recognise Shiva , abused and cursed him , even assaulting him . They cursed that his Linga ( phallus ) should fall off . Shiva allowed it to be so and the Linga became an infinite fiery pillar of light . Anusuya , the wife of sage Atri , enlightened the sages that the couple was none other than Shiva and Vishnu . The sages thereafter worshipped the Linga . Pleased , Shiva returned to the forest as a beggar in an ugly form with his wife Parvati . Eventually , he revealed his supreme form to the sages and exalted the Pashupata vow ? by which a man restrains his passion , becomes celibate , and roams naked smeared with ash ? declaring that such a lifestyle would lead to moksha ( salvation ) .

Other scriptures describe other visits by Shiva to Deodar Forest in his Bhikshatana form . The Vamana Purana mentions Shiva entering the Deodar Forest twice as a beggar . Maddened by the death of his first wife Sati but chased by the love @-@ god Kamadeva , Shiva escapes to the Deodar Forest and lives as a mendicant . The sages ' wives who come to grant him food become sexually excited at the mere sight of him . The sages curse his Linga to fall off and it becomes the infinite pillar . Brahma and Vishnu propitiate him and Shiva reabsorbs the Linga into his body . In another instance , while passing the Deodar Forest , Parvati notices sages who worship Shiva and have emaciated their bodies with fasts and severe vows . Parvati requests Shiva to save them from further pain , but Shiva declares that the sages are simply foolish and have not restrained their

passion and anger . He enters the forest as a handsome man , wearing only a garland of sylvan flowers . He entices the sages ' wives , who give him alms . As before , the Linga of the cursed Shiva falls off , but eventually the sages realise their folly and worship the Linga . Similar accounts of Bhikshatana @-@ Shiva 's visit to the Deodar Forest to humble and enlighten the false sages , Bhikshatana @-@ Shiva 's emasculation and establishment of Linga worship also appear in the Mahabharata , the Shiva Purana , and the Bhagavata Purana .

The Linga Purana also mentions the visit of Bhikshatana @-@ Shiva to Deodar Forest to entice the wives of sages , who had taken up austerities " detrimental to the perpetuation of a healthy social order . " The scripture mentions Bhikshatana @-@ Shiva 's deformed but attractive nude black @-@ red form , his seduction of the sages ' wives , and the sages ' resulting curse . However , the curse proves fruitless in this version . The confused sages ask Brahma for guidance , who tells them the truth about the beggar and informs them of the proper way to propitiate Shiva . Returning to the forest , they please Shiva , who had returned to beg for alms . Finally , he enlightens the sages , revealing his true form . In the Padma Purana , the curse of the sages fails . In retribution , Shiva casts a curse on the sages so that they , like Bhikshatana , will become beggars with matted hair and be devoid of knowledge . Those who would still worship him would gain knowledge , wealth , and progeny , and be reborn into good families . In the Skanda Purana , the sages of the Deodar Forest are performing rituals and start to think of themselves as gods . To humble these arrogant sages , Shiva takes the form of Bhikshatana ? an attractive young beggar ? and Vishnu becomes Mohini , his wife . While the sages fall for Mohini , the women wildly chase Shiva . When the sages regain their senses , they perform a black magic sacrifice , which produces a serpent , a lion , an elephant ( or tiger ) , and a dwarf , all of which attack Shiva , who overpowers them . Shiva then dances on the dwarf and takes the form of Nataraja , the Cosmic Dancer . The same legend is retold in the Tamil Kovil Puranam and Kandha Puranam with some differences . This legend is also told in the Sthala Purana related to the Chidambaram Temple dedicated to Shiva @-@ Nataraja . The ceiling of the Shivakamasundari shrine in the Nataraja temple complex illustrates this legend in a series of frescos , where Bhikshatana is depicted as a white naked mendicant accompanied by a scantily @-@ clad Mohini .

= = = Kapaleshvara legend = = =

The Skanda Purana narrates that Bhikshatana @-@ Shiva appears on another occasion as a naked , fierce Kapali beggar . Once , at a sacrifice hosted by Brahma , Bhikshatana appears and begs for food . The Brahmins performing the sacrifice try to drive him away , considering a hungry beggar unfit for sacrificial rites . Bhikshatana throws his skull begging @-@ bowl on the ground and the Brahmins throw it out , but another skull bowl appears in its place . Consequently , hundreds of skulls appear , polluting the sacrifice , which compels Brahma to promise Shiva that no sacrifice will be deemed complete without an invocation to him , Kapaleshvara ? the Lord of the skulls .

= = Iconography = =

The iconography of Bhikshatana is discussed in all Shaiva Agamic texts , including Amshumadbhedagama , Kamikagama , Supredagama , Karanagama and the iconographic work Shilparatna ; the texts are mostly South Indian in origin . The iconography is quite similar to that of the Kankala @-@ murti aspect who , like Bhikshatana , is associated with the legend of Shiva 's atonement for severing Brahma 's head . The chief difference is that Bhikshatana is nude and Kankala @-@ murti is clothed .

Though Shiva is often described as a naked ascetic Yogi , iconographically he is rarely portrayed as nude except in his form as Bhikshatana . Often the seductive nature of the naked Bhikshatana is emphasised in his torso and buttocks . Though his manhood is fully visible , Bhikshatana is never displayed as ithyphallic in South Indian iconography . In contrast to textual descriptions , Orissan images of Bhikshatana depict him clothed with tiger skin and other body ornaments , but displaying an erect phallus . He is two @-@ armed , holding the begging bowl kapala in his left hand and the

trishula ( trident ) in his right hand .

Bhikshatana is depicted with jatabhadra ( dishevelled matted locks ) or with jatamandala ( matted hair arranged in a circle ) . A serpent may be depicted in his matted hair , which is also adorned by the crescent moon . His forehead bears a tripundara , the Shaiva tilaka composed of three horizontal lines of sacred ash with a red dot in the middle representing the third eye . He wears a patta ( ornamental head band ) ? sometimes adorned with a human skull motif ? on his forehead . Snake ornaments adorn his body , and bronze images often depict multiple necklaces , a waist @-@ band , armlets , elbow bands , bracelets , anklets , and rings on all his toes and fingers . A snake is also tied around his waist and a white yagnopavita ( sacred thread ) is worn across the chest .

Bhikshatana is often pictured with four arms in South Indian iconography . The front right arm is stretched out downwards and the hand holds a bit of grass or another plant in the kataka gesture , near the mouth of his pet deer or antelope , who leaps playfully by his side . The back right arm is raised and holds a damaru ( drum ) . The front left hand holds a kapala ( skull @-@ cup ) , used as a begging bowl . The back left hand holds a trishula decorated with peacock feathers . The left leg is firmly rooted in the ground while the right one is slightly bent , suggesting walking . He often wears paduka ( wooden sandals ) but sometimes may be barefoot . The sandals are unique and identifying feature of Bhikshatana 's iconography and distinguish him from other forms of Shiva and all other deities , who are always depicted barefoot . Sometimes Bhikshatana 's iconography is amalgamated with that of Bhairava , in which case he displays Bhairava 's attributes in addition to his own .

One feature that does not appear in the canons but is often found in stone sculptures and bronzes is the presence of a small bell tied by a string just below the right knee . The bell is interpreted by the scholar Mahadev Chakravarti to be symbolic of Bhikshatana 's outcast status , as the bell is symbolic of the Pariah " untouchables " of South India , who traditionally had to ring a bell when entering a Brahmin village . In bronzes , the deer and the trishula were generally cast separately and positioned later in the icon , but since many of these separate pieces have been lost over time , bronzes often appear without them .

Bhikshatana is often accompanied by women and bhuta @-@ gana ( goblin attendants of Shiva ) . One of the attendants placed to the left of Bhikshatana should carry a large bowl used for storing the food alms of Shiva . The women , often seven in number , are variously pictured as enamoured of Shiva , eager to embrace him , blessing him , or serving him food in his begging bowl with a ladle . The clothes of some of these women are slipping from their loins , symbolising their lust . The woman giving Bhikshatana alms is also interpreted as Annapurna , the goddess of grain . Various gods , celestial beings , and sages bow to him with folded hands . In some scenes , the sages are depicted as angry and trying to beat Bhikshatana , alluding to the Deodar Forest legend .

= = Development and adoration = =

The theme of Shiva as a beggar is not unique to the Bhikshatana icon and his legends . Shiva is often described as wandering the universe as a homeless beggar @-@ ascetic with his consort Parvati 's raison d'être being to bring him back to his marital and home life . Shiva is also depicted as asking for alms from the goddess Annapurna , a form of Parvati as the goddess of food . The Satarudriya describes Shiva as gathering food through begging , evocative of his Bhikshatana form . In spite of this he is described as a sustainer of the universe and of life @-@ sustaining food .

Though Shiva is commonly described as a beggar , the specific theme of the expiatory wandering ? which is the core of the Bhikshatana tale ? originates uniquely from the ascetic traditions of the Kapalika sect and its precursor Pashupata sect . Bhikshatana mirrors the role of Kapali ( skull @-@ bearer ) , the wandering ascetic who defends himself with a trident and magical powers , holds a skull @-@ bowl , and worships Shiva ( the term Kapali also being used to designate a member of the Kapalika sect ) . Scriptures like the Kurma Purana explicitly identify Shiva with a Kapali ? " an outsider who scares by his looks , and sometimes charms " ? in this form . To atone for the sin of severing the god Brahma 's fifth head , Shiva is said to have separated the body of Bhairava from his own and sent it to wander with the skull of Brahma in his hand , a vow that parallels the Maha

@-@ vrata ( " great vow " ) that a Kapali must undertake to dispel the sin of accidentally killing a Brahmin . The expiatory wandering punishment of 12 years is also given to a Bhrunaghna sinner ? a learned Brahmin who kills another of great learning and good conduct . The vow is prescribed in the Dharmashastras , a text corpus detailing ethics and conduct . The sinner should live in an isolated place and beg in only seven houses with the skull of the slain . He must use as a staff the bones of the slain and be treated by society as an outcast . Similarly , Bhikshatana is described as using Brahma 's skull as his begging bowl and his bones as a staff . He wandered begging at the seven houses of the Saptarishi ? the seven great sages ? and lived in cremation grounds outside a town .

Images of Bhikshatana are found throughout Shaiva temples of South India , but are almost unknown in Northern India . Sculpted in stone adorning the temple walls of every other South Indian temple , images of Bhikshatana are also cast in bronze as processional icons . In South Indian temples , Bhikshatana is prescribed to be enshrined as an avarana @-@ devata ( a deity depicted on the circumambulatory path encircling the central shrine ) . Similarly in Orissan temples , Bhikshatana may be worshipped and depicted as parshva @-@ devata ( an attendant deity ) or avarana @-@ devata .

The iconography and mythology of Bhikshatana developed mostly in South India , as did that of another form of Shiva , Nataraja , who is related to Bhikshatana through his legends . However , unlike Nataraja , Bhikshatana is not related to specific temples , but has become " part of the mythological and festival @-@ related traditions of all the major Tamil shrines " . For instance , in Chidambaram ( where a famous Nataraja temple stands ) , Bhikshatana is paraded in a golden chariot during the annual temple festival . In the Mylapore temple festival , the Bhikshatana icon is paraded in the streets along with four dogs signifying the Vedas and gana attendants . Shiva is described as sent by his consort Parvati ( Karpagambal ) to beg as he has lost her ring . Repentant for her harsh treatment of Bhikshatana and jealous of the glances of the women in the streets , who attracted are by his appearance , Parvati 's icon rushes behind Bhikshatana and " dances " to win him back . Shiva relents and they travel together to the temple .

Tamil works transform the terrible Kapali form of Shiva to a more lovable form . South Indian devotional literature portrays Bhikshatana in the Deodar Forest of the sages , but the Tevaram by the Nayanar poet @-@ saints also describes rural women following him and calling out to him . Several poet @-@ saints describe the sensuous nature of Bhikshatana and the love @-@ sick emotions of the women who came to give him alms . However , the references to Shiva seeking alms had reduced to only three or four by the time of Manikkavachakar ( 9th century AD ) . The poems of Campantar , Appar , and Cuntarar focus on two forms of Shiva : Nataraja and Bhikshatana . The 7th @-@ century Nayanar saint Campantar mentions that Bhikshatana wanders from door to door asking for alms with the beggar 's call " Ladies , give me alms " and places his verses on the lips of women , who become enamoured of Bhikshatana . In a verse , Campantar rhetorically asks why the giver of all things and one who ends all troubles of devotees ? Shiva ? is wandering begging for food with a disgusting white skull . In another verse a woman comments on his strange appearance and describes how she is frightened by the serpent that wraps around his body when she approaches to give him alms . Another 7th @-@ century Nayanar saint , Appar , talks about the handsome beggar Shiva , seducer of married women . He speaks of women allured by Bhikshatana 's speech and his glance . The women tell that the handsome beggar wearing tiger @-@ skin and smeared with ash had come riding a white bull and holding an axe , and used a skull as his begging bowl . Although he begged for alms , he would not accept any from the woman , deeming them " petty " . He did however warn the women of deceptions and cunning . Appar adds a strong erotic element in most of his verses , where the women directly desire physical contact with Bhikshatana . A woman in Appar 's poetry sings :

The 8th @-@ century saint Cuntarar described Bhikshatana as having matted hair and skin smeared with ash , and wearing bark clothes and a tiger skin around his waist . He added that Bhikshatana would roam begging for food by day and dance at night in front of a fire , in company of his wife and several jackals .

In more recent times the poet Papanasam Sivan ( 1890 ? 1973 ) composed four songs which describe Bhikshatana . In " Picchaikku Vandiro " , Sivan wonders why Shiva roams as beggar and

muses that it may be because Parvati is asking for jewels or his son Ganesha is asking for modak ( sweets ) , or perhaps just to show the world that he looks fabulous , even as a mendicant . The " Saundarya Vellantanil " tells of a love @-@ struck maiden describing Bhikshatana 's beauty from head to toe and her longing for him .