

= Dhumavati =

Dhumavati ( Sanskrit : धूमवती , Dhūmavati , literally " the smoky one " ) is one of the Mahavidyas , a group of ten Tantric goddesses . Dhumavati represents the fearsome aspect of Devi , the Hindu Divine Mother . She is often portrayed as an old , ugly widow , and is associated with things considered inauspicious and unattractive in Hinduism , such as the crow and the Chaturmas period . The goddess is often depicted on a horseless chariot or riding a crow , usually in a cremation ground .

Dhumavati is said to manifest herself at the time of cosmic dissolution ( pralaya ) and is " the Void " that exists before creation and after dissolution . While Dhumavati is generally associated with only inauspicious qualities , her thousand @-@ name hymn relates her positive aspects as well as her negative ones . She is often called tender @-@ hearted and a bestower of boons . Dhumavati is described as a great teacher , one who reveals ultimate knowledge of the universe , which is beyond the illusory divisions , like auspicious and inauspicious . Her ugly form teaches the devotee to look beyond the superficial , to look inwards and seek the inner truths of life .

Dhumavati is described as a giver of siddhis ( supernatural powers ) , a rescuer from all troubles , and a granter of all desires and rewards , including ultimate knowledge and moksha ( salvation ) . Her worship is also prescribed for those who wish to defeat their foes . Dhumavati 's worship is considered ideal for unpaired members of society , such as bachelors , widows , and world renouncers as well as Tantrikas . In her Varanasi temple , however , she transcends her inauspiciousness and acquires the status of a local protective deity . There , even married couples worship her . Although she has very few dedicated temples , her worship by Tantric ritual continues in private in secluded places like cremation grounds and forests .

= = Origins = =

Dhumavati hardly has an independent existence outside the Mahavidya group . There is no historical mention of her before she is included among the Mahavidyas . As a goddess of poverty , frustration , and despair , Daniélou associates Dhumavati with Nirriti , the goddess of disease and misery , and Alakshmi , the goddess of misfortune and poverty . Kinsley adds another goddess to the list : Jyestha .

The Vedic goddess Nirriti is associated with death , decay , bad luck , anger , and need . Hymns emphasize offerings to keep her away . Like Nirriti , Dhumavati is associated with unpromising things and hardship . Jyestha , also an early Hindu goddess , has similarities in iconography with Dhumavati . Like Dhumavati , she is dark , ugly and is associated with the crow . Jyestha is described as being unable to tolerate any auspiciousness . Also like Dhumavati , Jyestha dwells in quarrels , inauspicious places , and has a bad temper . Lakshmana Desika , the commentator on the Saradatilaka @-@ Tantra , identifies Dhumavati with Jyestha . Both Alakshmi , the sister and antithesis of Lakshmi ( Shri ) , the goddess of wealth , luck and beauty , and Dhumavati are described as old , carrying a broom and having a crow banner . Both symbolize hunger , thirst , need , and poverty .

While there are similarities between Dhumavati and the three goddesses , the latter lack significant characteristics of Dhumavati , like her widowhood and a textual emphasis on her ugliness . The names of the three goddesses also do not figure in Dhumavati 's nama stotras ( hymns invoking her many names ) , where such identifications could have been explicitly mentioned . The three also lack the more fierce warrior aspects of Dhumavati as well as her positive aspects in the context of the Mahavidyas . In scholar David Kinsley 's opinion , though the three may be Dhumavati 's antecedents , they are not " the same " as Dhumavati . According to Kinsley , the concept of ten Mahavidyas may not be earlier than the 12th century .

= = Legends = =

Dhumavati is often named as the seventh Mahavidya . The Guhyatiguhya @-@ Tantra equates

Vishnu 's ten avatars with the ten Mahavidyas . The fish incarnation Matsya is described as arising from Dhumavati . A similar list in the Mundamala equates Dhumavati with Vamana .

In a story from the Shakta Maha @-@ Bhagavata Purana , which narrates the creation of all the Mahavidyas , Sati , the daughter of Daksha and first wife of god Shiva , feels insulted that she and Shiva are not invited to Daksha 's yagna ( " fire sacrifice " ) and insists on going there , despite Shiva 's protests . After futile attempts to convince Shiva , the enraged Sati transforms into the Mahavidyas , who surround Shiva from the ten cardinal directions . Dhumavati stands in the southeast . Another similar legend replaces Sati with Kali ( the chief Mahavidya ) as the wife of Shiva and origin of the other Mahavidyas . The Devi Bhagavata Purana mentions the Mahavidyas as war @-@ companions and forms of goddess Shakambhari .

A legend from the Shaktisamgama @-@ Tantra describes that Sati commits suicide by jumping in Daksha 's yagna and Dhumavati rises with a blackened face from the sad smoke of Sati 's burning body . She is " all that is left of Sati " and is her outraged and insulted avatar . The Pranatosini @-@ Tantra explains the widowhood of Dhumavati . Once , Sati asked Shiva to give her food . When Shiva declines , the goddess eats him to satisfy her extreme hunger . When Shiva requests her to disgorge him , she obliges . Shiva then rejects her and curses her to assume the form of a widow . Another oral legend tells that Dhumavati was created by the warrior goddess Durga in the battle against demons Shumbha and Nishumbha . Dhumavati 's literal name ( " she who abides in smoke " ) comes from her ability to defeat demons by creating stinging smoke .

The Pranatosini @-@ Tantra version stresses Dhumavati 's destructive aspect and hunger , which is satisfied only when she consumes Shiva , who himself contains or creates the universe . It brings out her inauspicious status as a widow and her self @-@ assertion on her husband .

= = Iconography and textual descriptions = =

The Dhumavati Tantra describes her as an old and ugly widow . She is thin , tall , unhealthy , and has a pale complexion . She is described as restless and wicked . Unadorned with jewellery , she wears old , dirty clothes and has dishevelled hair . Her eyes are fearsome , her nose long and crooked , and some of her long fang @-@ like teeth have fallen out , leaving her smile with gaps . Her ears are ugly and rough ; her breasts hang down . In one of her trembling hands , she holds a winnowing basket , while the other makes a boon @-@ conferring gesture ( varada @-@ mudra ) or knowledge @-@ giving gesture ( cinmudra ) . She rides in a horseless chariot bearing an emblem of a crow and a banner . She is astute and crafty , though . Always hungry and thirsty , Dhumavati initiates quarrels and invokes fear .

In the Prapancaśaraśara @-@ samgraha , Dhumavati is described as having a black complexion and wearing ornaments made of snakes . Her dress is made of rags taken from cremation grounds . She holds a spear and a skull @-@ cup ( kapala ) in her two hands . The spear is sometimes replaced by a sword . Another description in the same text says Dhumavati is aged with a wrinkled , angry face and cloud @-@ like complexion . Her nose , eyes , and throat resemble a crow 's . She holds a broom , a winnowing fan , a torch , and a club . She is cruel and frowning . Her hair appears dishevelled and she wears the simple clothes of a beggar . Her breasts are dry . Her hair is grey , her teeth crooked and missing , and her clothes old and worn .

Sometimes , Dhumavati rides a crow and holds a trident . She may be depicted wearing a garland of severed heads , with red @-@ coloured limbs and matted but dishevelled hair . Sometimes , she carries the buffalo @-@ horn of Yama , the god of death , symbolizing her association with death .

Dhumavati has fierce , warlike attributes too . In the Shakta pramoda , she crushes bones in her mouth , creating an awful noise . She also makes the fearful and warlike noises of drums and bells . She wears a garland of skulls , chews the corpses of the demons Chanda and Munda , and drinks a mixture of blood and wine .

Though there are standard descriptions of Dhumavati 's form , some relatively recent paintings deviate from it . For example , an 18th @-@ century painting by Molaram depicts Dhumavati sitting on a chariot pulled by two black scavenger birds with curved beaks . The painting follows the usual attributes like the winnowing basket , boon @-@ giving gesture , but also depicts her young and

beautiful with full breasts and adorned in gold finery , a stark contrast to her usual form . An early 20th @-@ century painting from Varanasi depicts her riding a crow , holding a trident , a sword , a winnowing fan , and a bowl in her four arms , dark @-@ complexioned , with sagging breasts , wearing white clothes and with cremation flames in the background . She is again adorned in gold finery and wears a gold @-@ hewn lower garment , unusual for a widow 's dress . Another 18th century Nepali manuscript depicts a complete deviation from her traditional descriptions . She is completely nude with high breasts , wears a pearl necklace and headband , stands on a peacock with legs apart , and holds a mirror while looking at her reflection . A ring of fire surrounds her , possibly conveying cremation flames .

= = Symbolism and associations = =

Vedic scholar Ganapati Muni described the goddess :

Dhumavati is always considered a widow , and thus , is the only Mahavidya without a consort . Though associated with Shiva , having eaten him , he has since left her . Having destroyed the male element ( Purusha ) in the universe , she is left with nothing , but she is still Shakti , the female element with latent energy . Dhumavati 's insatiable hunger and thirst is highlighted in many texts , and has been interpreted as the manifestation of her unsatisfied desires .

As a widow in a horseless chariot , Dhumavati is portrayed as a woman going nowhere in life and society . She is " all that is unlucky , unattractive and inauspicious " . She appears in the form of the poor , the beggars , the lepers , and the diseased . She dwells in the " wounds of the world " , deserts , ruined houses , poverty , tatters , hunger , thirst , quarrels , mourning of children , in wild and other uncivilized , dangerous places . Widows in general are considered inauspicious , dangerous , and susceptible to possession by evil spirits . As a divine widow , Dhumavati is to be feared . Dhumavati is described as a hag or witch , crafty and quarrelsome ; she represents all the dreaded miseries of life .

Alternative paintings show her as young and adorned , as a sexually tempting , eroticised , young , attractive yet inauspicious widow . Her thousand @-@ name hymn says that she gives enjoyment , is completely beautiful and adorned with garlands , clothes , and jewellery . She is also associated with sex in the hymn , which calls her " She Whose Form Is Rati " . Rati literally means " sexual intercourse " and also the name of the Hindu love goddess . She is said to enjoy sexual intercourse , to be present where sexual activity is , and to be occupied with sex . She is said to like liquor ( a forbidden drink ) , to be intoxicated , and to be worshiped by intoxicated people . She also indulges in the Tantric ritual of breaking the five taboos ? the Panchamakara , which include consuming wine , meat , fish , parched grain and ritual sex .

Dhumavati is a manifestation of the anti @-@ social and inauspicious elements in women and is an antithesis to the goddess Lakshmi . Like Alakshmi , Dhumavati rules over the four months of the rainy season , when even solar light is obscured by the evil water spirit . This coincides with Chaturmas , a period during the year when the god Vishnu sleeps . At that time , darkness rules and the soul loses its usual luster . This period is considered inauspicious , and as such as no auspicious ceremonies like marriage can take place .

The presence of the crow , a carrier of death , in her iconography as well as her textual description of having crow @-@ like features associate her with death and inauspiciousness . Another motif in her iconography linking her with death is the presence of a cremation ground and cremation pyres in the background . Her thousand name hymn says that she lives in the cremation ground , sits on a corpse , wears ashes , and blesses those who haunt the grounds . The Prapancasarasara @-@ samgraha relates that she wears a dress taken from a corpse . Dhumavati is the embodiment of tamas guna , associated with ignorance and darkness . She likes meat and wine , both tamasic in nature . The Pranatosinitantra associates her with tamas , when classifying the mahavidyas based on guna .

Dhumavati is often said to appear at the time of Maha @-@ pralaya , the great dissolution of the cosmos and is equated with the dark clouds that rise during Pralaya . Her thousand name hymn also calls her by names meaning " She Whose Form is Pralaya " , " Who Is Occupied with Pralaya " , "

Who Creates and Causes Pralaya " and " Who Walks About in Pralaya " . An author says that she stays even after Shiva ( who is Maha @-@ kala ) ( " Great Time " or " Great Death " ) disappears , thus she is " the Power of Time " , and considered to be beyond time and space . Dhumavati represents ultimate destruction , the smoke that rises after the universe is destroyed .

The goddess ' name " Dhumavati " means the " smoky one " . She is said not to like offerings burnt in a fire that is not smoky . She likes smoke from incense , offerings , and cremation pyres , as these symbolize destruction . Dhumavati also exists in the form of smoke and roams everywhere at her will .

While Dhumavati generally is associated with only inauspicious qualities , her thousand @-@ name hymn tells about her positive aspects , too . She is often called as bestower of boons and tender @-@ hearted . Her hymn says that she lives in the midst of women and is worshipped by them . Her hymn sings of her as the giver of children .

As an ancestor or Grandmother spirit , she embodies a great teacher and guide , granting knowledge of the ultimate truth of life and death . Her smoke hides that which is obvious , revealing hidden secrets and truths of " the unknown and the unmanifest " . Frawley says her outer appearance as poverty is deceptive and a mere illusion that hides the inner reality . She is " the good fortune that comes to us in the form of misfortune " . Dhumavati embodies the " power of suffering " . Through the negative aspects that Dhumavati represents rise the virtues of patience , persistence , forgiveness , and detachment . Without the revealing of this negativity of life , it cannot be transcended and the secret truths would remain hidden under the smoky veil of illusion .

Dhumavati 's outer inauspicious , fearful form reveals the dangers of considering sensory pleasures as fulfilment @-@ giving . The winnowing basket , used to separate the husk from the grain , symbolizes the need to separate the outer illusory form from the inner reality . Her ugly form teaches the devotee to go beyond the outer deceptive appearances and seek the inner truths of life .

Dhumavati is the primordial darkness and ignorance , from which rises the world of illusion . She represents the darkness / ignorance before creation and after decay . This ignorance , which obscures the ultimate reality , is necessary because without the realization of this ignorance , true knowledge can not be achieved . Dhumavati also represents yogic sleep ( Yoganidra ) , the pre @-@ creation state of consciousness , as well as the primal sleep ( the Void ) in which all creation would dissolve and reach ultimate reality of Brahman . This void is pure consciousness , the cessation of movements of the mind , and silence . Even Dhumavati 's ability to spread disease is also considered positive , as disease punishes the wicked and restores cosmic order . Dhumavati is also associated with the heart or middle region of the body .

Dhumavati is sometimes regarded as an older form of Kali , in which she represents timelessness and unmanifest life @-@ force . Another tradition identifies Dhumavati with Smashana @-@ kali , " Kali who lives in the cremation ground . " She is considered a terrible aspect of the Goddess and included among the Kalikula ( " family of Kali " ) goddesses . Dhumavati 's nama stotras ( hymn with names of the deities ) identify her with Parvati , Sati , and glorify her as a slayer of demons .

= = Worship = =

Though Dhumavati may seem to be a goddess to be avoided due to her inauspiciousness , she is described as tender @-@ hearted and one who gives her devotees whatever they want . In several places , Dhumavati is described as a giver of siddhis ( supernatural powers ) , a rescuer from all troubles and granter of all desires and rewards , including ultimate knowledge and moksha ( salvation ) . Dhumavati 's worship is prescribed to ward off all the negativity that she stands for and to transcend the smoke screen to acquire true knowledge . By worshipping and confronting her , the embodiment of the impure , the inauspicious and outside the fringes of society , one can look beyond the arbitrary dichotomies of society and acquire ultimate knowledge to become spiritually enlightened .

Married people , however , are advised not to worship Dhumavati . It is said that her worship creates a feeling of wanting solitude and distaste of worldly things , which is considered as highest characteristics of a spiritual quest . Thus , Dhumavati 's worship is appropriate for world renouncers

who roam as lone wanderers and widows who parallel the life of world renouncers . Dhumavati is also described as being partial to single persons and especially partial to widows . Widows are considered the only beings who can withstand her power .

The mantra of Dhumavati is " Dhum Dhum Dhumavati Svaha " , containing a repetition of her seed syllable Dhum . This mantra is used in the worship of Dhumavati , sometimes with her yantra , is believed to create a protective smoke shielding the devotee from negativity and death . Her worship involves clearing one 's mind of all thoughts and leaving back the known , meditating on the unknown silence beyond , and the Void that Dhumavati represents .

The Shaktisamgama Tantra says that Dhumavati can be worshipped for the Uchhatana ( eradication ) of a person . A worshipper should imagine the world as well as the goddess 's mantra as grey . He should blacken his teeth and wear black clothes and observe regulations , such as eating little , sleeping on the ground , and subduing his senses . In this worship procedure called kakakarma ( crow @-@ procedure ) , he should " transform his mind into a crow " by which one can cause harm to a person . Another Tantric text mentions the worshipper should burn a crow in a cremation flame and , while repeating the goddesses ' mantra , spread the ashes in the enemy 's house , which will lead to his destruction . The text further says Dhumavati should be worshipped only by Dakshinamarga ( " right @-@ handed path " ) . While the Kalarudra @-@ tantra says Dhumavati can be worshipped for destructive purposes , Shakta @-@ pramoda relates that her worship is useful to acquire siddhi to destroy one 's foes .

Dhumavati 's worship is performed in the night in a cremation ground , bare @-@ bodied with the exception of a loincloth . The fourth lunar day of the dark fortnight ( Krishna Paksha ) is considered the special day to perform her puja ( worship ) . The worshipper should observe a fast and remain silent for a whole day and night . They should also perform a homa ( " fire sacrifice " ) , wearing wet clothes and a turban , repeating the goddess ' mantra in a cremation ground , forest , or any lonely place .

Dhumavati temples are extremely rare . At a temple in Varanasi , Dhumavati is the main deity . Smaller Dhumavati temples exist in Rajrappa in Bihar and near the Kamakhya Temple near Guwahati . At the Varanasi temple , which claims to be a Shakti Peetha , Dhumavati 's idol rides a chariot and holds a winnowing fan , a broom , and a pot , while the fourth hand makes the fear @-@ not gesture ( abhaya @-@ mudra ) . The goddess is offered usual offerings like flowers and fruit , but also liquor , bhang , cigarettes , meat , and sometimes even blood sacrifices . Though traditional devotees of Dhumavati ( world renouncers and Tantrikas ) worship at the Varanasi temple , here the goddess transcends her traditional role as " the inauspicious , dangerous goddess who can be approached only by heroic tantric adepts " . Dhumavati acquires the role of a local guardian deity , or village deity , who protects the locals and even married couples worship her . There is also a temple dedicated to the goddess in Pitambara Peeth temple complex , Datia .