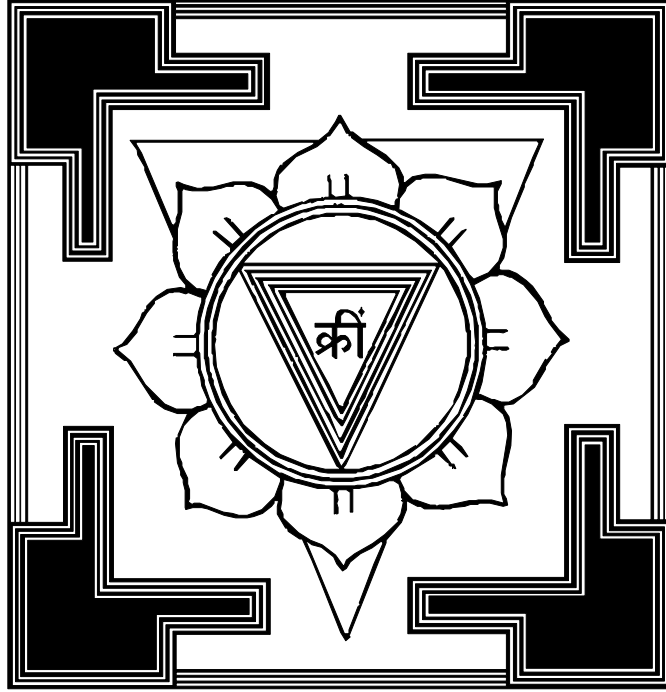


## THE MAGIC OF KALI



Yantra of Dakshinakalika

### DESCRIPTION

In the centre, the bija mantra of Kālī, Kīṃ. Surrounding the bija are the fifteen Eternities or Nityās of Kālī, corresponding to the fifteen days of the Waning Moon. Around these five triangles are the three circles representing the three worlds or Moon, Sun and Fire. The large triangle forming the background of the central figure represents the cremation ground or Śmaśanā. The whole is surrounded by the bhupura, the earth city or the magical fence, populated by the eight guardians of the directions or dikpalas. In the eight petals are the eight Bhairavas and the eight Bhairavis, each couple representing one of the eight cremation grounds sacred to the goddess.

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Contents include the entire text of the Todala Tantra, chapters on sexuality, yantra, mantra, hymns and large sections from Kulacudamani Tantra.

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गुहे स'मार्जन्या परिगलितवर्यि' हि चिर्कर'  
समल' मध्याह्ने वितरति चिताया' कुजदिने ।  
समुच्चार्य प्रम्णापि सकृत्कालि सतत'  
गजारूढो याति क्षितिपरिवृढः सत्कविवरः ॥ १६ ॥

O Kālī, whoever on a Tuesday at midnight, after uttering your mantra, makes an offering even once with devotion to you with a single hair of his Śaktī in the cremation ground, becomes a great poet, a lord of the earth, and ever goes mounted upon an elephant.



# क्री

## INTRODUCTION

If you're a six year old child regularly watching cartoons on TV, you know who Kālī is. She appears in various shows — almost invariably as an evil demoness who the badly animated superhero has to conquer.

Alone amongst all the tāntrik deities, it is Kālī who has captured the imagination of the West. But rather than reviled, she is revered by countless millions of people. Ramakrishna, the famous Indian sage and saint, was one of her devotees; Rabindranath Tagore another. It's no coincidence that both these great men came from Bengal, for it is there that she continues to receive oblations and offerings of flesh. Nevertheless, traces of her worship are found throughout India and former territories of India.

Her bad reputation in the West probably sprang from her association with the cult of the Thuggees, suppressed by the British during the days of empire. The Thuggees — the word gave rise to our word thug — were actually Muslims who took the goddess Kālī as their tutelary deity. They specialised in ensnaring and then robbing and murdering travellers. Originally, they were only supposed to attack male travellers and in their latter days attributed their downfall to the fact they had started to kill woman travellers too.

But Kālī pre-dates the Thuggees, possibly by several thousands of years. Some have associated her with the primordial goddess existing in India before the Aryan invaders imposed their Vedic ways and manners on the native population. No one truly knows her origin.

She does, however, have an uncanny and an ambiguous image. Modern pictures of her show her standing on the dead body of her consort Śiva, with four arms, a necklace of fifty human skulls<sup>1</sup>, a girdle of human arms, holding an axe, a trident, a severed human head and a bowl of blood.

<sup>1</sup> They represent the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet.

Around her rages a battle — she herself is the colour of a thundercloud. Her protruding tongue drips with the fresh blood of her enemies.

But this image is simply one of many, as we shall see. She is the goddess in her form as Dakṣiṇā Kālikā — one of the most popular Bengali images of the goddess. Her guises are many, and include Bhadrā (auspicious) Kālī, Śmaśanā (cremation ground) Kālī, and a host of others.

It is only in the great tāntrik traditions that we find the real meaning of the gruesome images associated with Kālikā. Although Hinduism was much reviled by early Western investigators for its idolatry and pantheistic practices, this was really a narrow view. Tāntrik texts repeatedly speak of the Devīs or goddesses as being aspects of the one goddess. The same holds true for the male aspects. As individual humans all reflect the macrocosm, it's fair to describe the gods and goddesses of tantra as specialised aspects of ourselves — and, therefore, of life itself.

Yet life has its dark and its light sides. Death and love, in the tāntrik tradition, are two sides of the same coin. As we look to the sky, we can see the Sun and Moon as symbols of male and female, of Śiva and Śakti. In the tantras, the Moon is often taken as a symbol of the Devī — whether in its dark or its bright fortnight. When She wanes, her images and her iconography become progressively more dark and fearsome. But when She waxes, so her images brighten. When She is full, She is Devī Tripurā<sup>2</sup>, a high symbol of sexuality and life.

Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon), writing in the Garland of Letters says Kālī is the deity in her aspect as withdrawing time into itself. “Kālī is so called because She devours Kāla (Time) and then resumes Her own dark formlessness.”<sup>3</sup> Woodroffe says some have speculated that Kālī was originally the Goddess of the Vindhya Hills, conquered by the Aryans. The necklace of skulls which makes up her image, he adds, are those of white people.

Relying on the texts themselves, gives insight into the tāntrik idea of Kālī. In the Kulacūdāmaṇī Tantra (KT), a nigama, Lord Śiva asks questions answered by Devī, the goddess<sup>4</sup>. It is, probably, one of the oldest tantras, according to Woodroffe, who published the Sanskrit text in his Tāntrik Texts series.

2 Tripurā is a name of the goddess meaning three cities. These allude to her own triple nature as a maiden (Bālā) as a fecund woman (Tripurā) and as a post-menstruating woman (Tripurā Bhairavī).

3 Garland of Letters, page 235.

4 An āgama is a tantra in the form of a dialogue where Śakti asks the questions and Śiva gives the answers. A nigama is the other way round, with Śakti doing most of the talking.



In eight short chapters, Devī expounds the essence of her worship, sometimes in the most beautiful of language. But the uncanny side of Kaula and Kālī worship is dwelt on in great detail, with references to siddhis — magical powers — including a mysterious process where the tāntrik adept leaves his body at night, apparently so he can engage in sexual intercourse with Śaktis. Animal sacrifice also has a place in this tantra, including using the bones of a dead black cat to make a magical powder.

The siddhis play a large part in the worship of the uncanny goddess Kālī. The main tāntrik rites are called the six acts (Śatkarma) of pacifying, subjugating, paralysing, obstructing, driving away, and death-dealing. But the KT includes others such as Parapurapraveśana, which is the power of reviving a corpse<sup>5</sup>; Anjana, an ointment which lets a sādḥaka see through solid walls; Khadga which gives invulnerability to swords; Khecari, which gives the power of flying and Pāduka Siddhi, magical sandals which take you great distances, rather like seven league boots.

Certainly, the importance of having a suitable Śakti forms the essence of the instructions Devī gives to Śiva. Devī here takes the form of Mahiṣamardini, more popularly known as Durgā, who destroyed the two arch-demons Śumbha and Niśumbha in an epic battle between the goddess and the throng of demons. It was at this time, according to legend, that Durgā created Kālī, emanating her out of her third eye.

We learn more of Durgā's legends and myths from the Kālikāpurāṇa (KP), an influential source. The Devī, Mahāmāyā, appeared as Bhadrakālī — identical with Mahiṣamardini — in order to slay the demon Mahiṣā. He had fallen into a deep sleep on a mountain and had a terrible dream in which Bhadrakālī cut asunder his head with her sword and drank his blood.

The demon started to worship Bhadrakālī and when Mahāmāyā appeared to him again in a later age to slaughter him again, he asked a boon of her. Devī replied that he could have his boon, and he asked her for the favour that he would never leave the service of her feet again. Devī replied that his boon was granted. "When you have been killed by me in the fight, O demon Mahiṣa, you shall never leave my feet, there is no doubt about it. In every place where worship of me takes place, there (will be worship) of you; as regards your body, O Dānava, it is to be worshipped and meditated upon at the same time."<sup>6</sup> For this reason, the image of Mahiṣamardini always has her trampling the buffalo Mahiṣa.

<sup>5</sup> According to some it means the ability to enter another's living body.

<sup>6</sup> Kālikāpurāṇa, ch.62, 107-108.

When She, the goddess, is dark, She is Devī Kālikā, an equally high symbol of death and destruction. Throughout Her different manifestations and phases, She remains the one true goddess, Śakti, energy itself. She is symbolised by the yoni and the female cycle, which also shows waxing and waning throughout the month. Her spouse, Śiva, is symbolised by the Sun, by the phallus, by sperm, and as an emblem of consciousness without attributes. According to the tāntrik phraseology “Only when Śiva is united with Śakti has Śiva power to act. Otherwise he is a corpse (Śava).”

Another black deity of the Indian sub-continent has a close connection with Kālī — Kṛṣṇa. According to the Kālivilāsa Tantra (KaT), he was born from the golden goddess Gaurī, who turned black after she was hit by an arrow from the Indian Cupid, Kāma.

Kālī is Śakti, the great goddess, creating the three gunas: sattvas, rajas and tamas<sup>7</sup>. These principles are the substance of she whose play (lila) is their modification. Kālī is the first and foremost of the ten aspects of the goddess. She is pure sattvas, pure spirit.

A sādḥaka (male) or a sādḥvika (female) can worship Devī in any of ten forms for the fruition of desires. Her ten major forms are Kālī, Tārā, Śodasi, Bhuvaneśvarī, Bhairavī, Chinnamastā, Dhūmāvātī, Bagalā, Mātāṅgī and Kamalā<sup>8</sup>. To a sādḥaka, to know these is to know the universe, as she is both space and time and beyond these categories. Each form has its own dhyāna (meditation), yantra (diagram), mantra (sound form) and sādḥana (actions).

Mahāvidyā Kālī is the primordial Devī who is the root of all the Great Knowledges (mahāvidyā). Worshipped by sādḥakas and sādḥvikas, her outer forms are fearful. She destroys time, is time, and is the night of eternity.

Kālī, certainly in the left hand tāntrik tradition<sup>9</sup>, requires sexual intercourse as part of her worship. According to Sir John Woodroffe, in his introduction to the Karpūrādi Stotra (KS), for paśus — those of a base disposition — sexual sādḥana at night is forbidden. “The Paśu is still bound by the paśa (bonds) of desire, etc., and he is, therefore, not adhikārī<sup>10</sup>, for that which, if undertaken by the unfit, will only make these bonds stronger.”

7 The three gunas in their various permutation create all the fabric of the universe, including the five elements, skin, blood, etc.

8 These aspects are known as the ten mahāvidyās.

9 The term left hand path has been subject to much misunderstanding. According to the texts themselves left hand is that in which Vāmā (woman and left) enters. The right hand path does not include the sexual component.

10 This word here has the meaning of ready.

Verse 10 of the KS spells out the practice. "If by night, Thy devotee unclothed, with dishevelled hair, recites whilst meditating on Thee, thy mantra, when with his Śakti youthful, full-breasted, and heavy-hipped such an one makes all powers subject to him and dwells on the earth ever a seer."

The Kālī sādhana takes place on a Tuesday, at midnight, in the cremation ground. Here, surrounded by jackals, owls and other uncanny creatures of the night, the sādha and his śakti select a newly dead male corpse, which should be, according to the texts, of a young man preferably a king, a hero or a warrior. If he has recently died in battle, so much the better. Placing the corpse face downwards, the two draw the Kālīyantra on his back, offer each other food, wine and other good things, and then commence the act of ritual sex. At the close of intercourse, the man offers his Śakti one of her public hairs smeared with his semen and, if she is menstruating, blood.

Woodroffe says that the worship of Kālī in the paśu mode is totally forbidden by Śiva, quoting the influential Niruttara Tantra (NT) as his source. "By the worship of Kālī without Divyabhāva and Virabhāva the worshipper suffers pain at every step and goes to hell. If a man who is of the Paśubhāva worships Kālī then he goes to the Raurava Hell until the time of final dissolution."

As to the matter of a suitable śakti for the sexual rites of Kālī, the NT suggests that when a sādha has already achieved success with his own śakti, he may then worship another woman. But Woodroffe claims this other woman is the supreme Śakti in the sādha's own body.

The cremation ground is often interpreted as the place where all desires are burnt away. Before realising kaivalya (liberation), the sādha must burn away all the taboos and conditionings which prevent this liberation.

The cremation ground (śmaśāna) is also the supreme nādi or channel within the human organism — the suṣumnā<sup>11</sup>, the royal road of Kundalini<sup>12</sup>. On the sādha within the śmaśāna yantra is Śakti, both entwined in close sexual embrace. She is the human form of Kālī, as he is the human form of Śiva<sup>13</sup>. Both are forever united. The NT says (2, 27) "The cremation ground is of two kinds, O Devī, the pyre and the renowned yoni. Śiva is the phallus, Kuleśāni! So Mahākāla said."

11 The central channel of bio-energy within the spine of a human being.

12 The Devī or goddess coiled up three and a half times at the base of the spine. When she unfolds and enters the suṣumnā, the bliss of this cosmic orgasm causes the universe to disappear.

13 The witness or observer. He is symbolised by an erect phallus.

Questioned later by Śrī Devī in the same tantra, Śīva says that the vagina is Dakṣiṇā herself, in the form of the three gunas, the essence of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śīva<sup>14</sup>. “When she has the semen of Śīva, she is Śīva-Śakti.”

The KS comments on animal sacrifice. Verse 19 says that worshippers of Kālī who sacrifice the flesh of cats, camels, sheep, buffaloes, goats and men to her become accomplished. A commentary by a Kaula, Vimalānanda Svāmī, claims these animals represent the six enemies with the goat representing lust, the buffalo anger, the cat greed, the sheep delusion, the camel envy. Man represents pride. However, according to other sources, only a king may perform sacrifice of a man. At the great temple of the Devī at Kamākhyā in Assam<sup>15</sup>, archaeological evidence indicates that in the past kings did perform such sacrifices.

Who, then, is Kālī? Devī gives her own description in the KC.

“I am Great Nature, consciousness, bliss, the quintessence, devotedly praised. Where I am, there are no Brahmā, Hara, Śambhu or other devas, nor is there creation, maintenance or dissolution. Where I am, there is no attachment, happiness, sadness, liberation, goodness, faith, atheism, guru or disciple.

“When I, desiring creation, cover myself with my Māyā<sup>16</sup> and become triple and ecstatic in my wanton love play, I am Vikarini, giving rise to the various things.

“The five elements and the 108 liṅgams<sup>17</sup> arise, while Brahma and the other devas, the three worlds, Bhur-Bhuvah-Svah<sup>18</sup> spontaneously come into manifestation.

“By mutual differences of Śīva and Śakti, the (three) gunas originate. All things, such as Brahmā and so forth, are my parts, born from my being. Dividing and blending, the various tantras, mantras and kulas manifest. After withdrawing the five fold universe, I, Lalitā, become of the nature of nirvana. Once more, men, great nature, egoism, the five elements, sattvas, rajās and tamās become manifested. This universe of parts appears and is then dissolved.

14 These three forms represent the powers of creation, maintenance and destruction. They have their Śakt counterparts.

15 The site is renowned for Śakti worship because of a legend that Viṣṇu once cut the body of Śakti into 50 pieces with his discus. These parts represent the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet and are the sites of sacred sites of Devī. The yoni of Śakti fell at this spot, making it the most sacred of all.

16 The great power of Śakti to delude all created things through Her play.

17 The liṅgam is the phallus or emblem of Śīva. The allusion to the number 108 is to a cosmology in which breath is time. See my book Tantrik Astrology.

18 The three worlds.

“O All-Knowing One, if I am known, what need is there for revealed scriptures and sādhana? If I am unknown, what use for pūja and revealed text? I am the essence of creation, manifested as woman, intoxicated with sexual desire, in order to know you as guru, you with whom I am one. Even given this, Mahādeva, my true nature still remains secret.”

Although of immense importance to the Kaula tradition, few of the texts relating to this aspect of the goddess have made their way into print in the West. Although conscious of shortcomings in this work, I hope that its publication will help others to uncover more in the future.

