



PARVATI

Goddess of Love

Mapin Publishing



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Prarambh, As We Begin

*vagarthaviva sampraktau vagarthapratipattaye
jagataha pitarau vande parvati paremeshvarau*

I salute Parvati and Shiva, the parents of the universe
who are together like word and its meaning
to understand speech.

Kalidasa. *Raghuvamsha*

This book is an appreciation not an anthology, a *vandana* not a *shastra*, a portrait of adoration and not an encyclopaedic account of the many manifestations and meanings of Parvati. Painters and potters, poets and playwrights, pundits and philosophers have given us glimpses of her persona. Many are her songs, countless her stories, numerous her names. She is the daughter of the Himalayas and the queen of Madurai. She is the consort of Shiva and the mother of Ganesha. She is the eternal *shakti* and the objectification of all that is beautiful. She is both *tapasvini* and *vimarshini*, *vama* and *ardhanari*. She is the subject of the Puranas and the inspiration for Adishankara and Kalidasa. She is found in Pahadi paintings and is chiselled in Chola bronzes. She is carved in stone in cave sanctuaries and adorns the walls of temples. Devotees in Maharashtra call her Gauri; those in Madurai worship her as Minakshi, poets eulogise her as Girikanya or daughter of the mountain or Saubhagyajanini or mother of prosperity, while the mountain people celebrate her as Nandadevi. Her names may be different but no matter what form she takes she is always the adorable Parvati.

Uma-Maheshvara
10th century, sandstone
Uttar Pradesh
Collection: Los Angeles County
Museum of Art
Gift of Harry & Yvonne Lenart

This elaborate relief of Shiva and Parvati is an inset from the junction-wall between the *rangamandapa* and the sanctum of a temple, a site where such images are commonly placed. The Shiva pantheon is depicted here in an iconic manner. Parvati rests on Shiva's left thigh and amorously embraces him with her left hand while she holds a mirror in her other hand. The four-armed Shiva holds a trident in his upper right hand, a lotus in the lower, and a skull staff entwined with a serpent behind Parvati's head. Below their seat rests Nandi the faithful bull. The emaciated sage Bhringi dances in the centre. Ganesha adorns the right of the panel while Skanda, astride his peacock, rests on the left. Guardian figures make up the borders of the relief. The top of the relief is dominated by Shiva's head with a floral halo and with Brahma and Vishnu with devotees on either side. The mood of the couple is one of serenity and strength in their togetherness.



The Narrative of Parvati

The Indian tradition is rich with goddesses. So varied are her manifestations and names that every village and every scripture, every *Purana* and poet create their own unique image of her. While sometimes she is a consort, at other times she is a fertility goddess; at times she is a benevolent figure yet at others she is horrific and malevolent. The Shaiva tradition is especially replete with a number of goddesses who are associated with Shiva. Of all the consorts of Shiva the one that is artistically and lovingly the most celebrated is Parvati. Unlike Durga and Kali who assume their own independent religious status in the Hindu pantheon and are worshipped and venerated ritually, Parvati engages the greater attention of poets and painters, musicians and dancers. Numerous are her aspects, varied her persona, multiple her attributes and many her names. Of all the mythic beings in the Hindu pantheon she is perhaps the most loved and undoubtedly the most giving of her love. In her we have the true celebration of Hindu womanhood. Of unsurpassed sensual beauty, her endowment is not merely physical but spiritual, not narcissistic but meant as an offering. In her, it can be said that we have the grand personification of the Hindu expression, as well as the concept of beauty.

As a young girl, daughter of the mountain king Parvat and mother Mena, she is demure and charming. As a young woman she grows into unsurpassed grace and elegance and is the

Shiva and Parvati
16th century, Vijayanagara
Collection: Harsha Dehejia

This small Vijayanagara bronze meant for a home shrine inherits the Chola tradition but departs from it in both style and format. Shiva and Parvati are seated in mirror image poses on a double inverted lotus, both holding a trident, a battle axe and a mirror. Absent is the embrace of affectionate togetherness, Nandi and Skanda, but in its place there is a divine presence of the god and goddess ready to receive and bless the devotee. The polished rubbed down forehead of the images suggest that it was worshipped with vermilion.