

Siva

Lord of Contrasts

Siva's roles highlight traditionally opposed and mutually exclusive customs.

Numerous are the roles Siva has played and multifarious are the forms he has taken to help his devotees, or to reward them for their intense devotion.

Static in some forms and dynamic in some others, humble in some and ferocious in others, he lies prone at the feet of Goddess Kali and his inert primal energy expresses itself through his consort, Sakti (another name for Kali) in dynamic colours and forms.

Dakshinamurti is young while the disciples are old. Sitting in meditation, he is teaching in silence. On the other hand, as Nataraja, he is totally dynamic and energises the rhythms of plant, animal and human life.

Siva's stupendous *tanḍava* is set in motion by the sound of his

auspicious drum (*mrdanga*), which reverberates with *dhimid-dhimidh* sounds. Thus, he is symbol of sound and silence.

Yogi and Householder

Siva is a *yogi* as well as a *grhastha* (householder). As *Grhastha*, he has two sons, Ganesa and Kartikeya. Ganesa is the product of Sakti, Siva's consort. Kartikeya was born from a spark of Siva's third eye.

While in meditation, Siva wears garlands of *rudraksha* on his arms, wrists, neck and hair. In the waist, he wears elephant skin to show his control over ego. Elephant is symbolic of pride. Hence Siva is called *Kari-charma-ambara*. However, as Kalyana Sundara, consort of queen Meenakshi, he wears silks and jewels.

Rudra and Ashutosh

As *Raudra* who presides over destruction of the Cosmos, his movements are dynamic and fierce.

At the same time, as *Ashu-tosha*, he is easily pleased, quickly responding to calls of distress, generous to a fault. Perhaps, too generous, as when he gave the demon, Bhasmasura, the capacity to burn up anybody on whose head he placed his hand.

Detached and Attached

Even amidst opulence, Siva is totally detached. Kubera, the God of Wealth, built the golden city of Lanka for Siva and Parvati. Ravana and other pundits were invited to the inaugural ceremony. Ravana asked for the newly built city of Lanka as his *dakshina*. Without demur, Siva granted his wish.

On the other hand, Siva's attachment to his devotees is beyond description. He rushed to help Markandeya, who was caught in the clutches of Yama, and cried out for help. During the churning of the Ocean of Milk, Siva swallowed the *halahala* poison to save all living and inert beings from annihilation.

Pleasing and Horrific

Siva's form can be horrific as well as pleasing. To destroy evil, he assumes terrifying forms (*bhayankara ghora rupa*). As Bhairava, he frightens those who transgress *dharma*.

On the other hand, he is *Aghora*, literally meaning 'not terrifying' and sports this as one of his five faces, as *Pancha vaktra*. As Kalyanasundara, the handsome bridegroom to take the hands of Parvati, Siva is adorable.



As representing Agni, but residing on the snowy Himalayas, he again exhibits the contrast. Sitting on ice-clad mountain peaks, he holds the cool river, Ganga, on his head. At the same time, he holds fire in his left palm, symbolising the *Agni tattva*.

Palace, Cremation Ground too

Mount Kailasa is an abode of bliss of Siva and Parvati. He also presides over cremation grounds shunned by people, taking care of grief-stricken mourners. He is invoked during the last rites of a dead person, while he is the master of Yama who administers

death precisely according each person's *karma*.

As *Bhooth-nath*, Siva takes care of ghosts and goblins. When a person dies after leading a life of passion and conflicts, he gets the form of a ghost (*bhooth*), in which form he cannot act or speak, but can hear what is spoken around him and about him. When people are scared of ghosts and other supernatural forces, they worship Siva since he has power over them.

Defining Features

Snake Vasuki around his neck, crescent moon on his forehead, sacred river Ganga flowing from his matted hair, three-pointed lance (Trisula) in his hand. He is *Vrsha dhwaja and Vrshabha –arudha*. He has the bull emblem on his flag; also rides on a bull.

Vaisvanara lochana. Agni, his third eye, is on his forehead between his two eyes that represent the Sun and the Moon.

Nataraja –Lord of Rhythm: The small hand-held drum (*damaru*) keeps time as he dances.

Siva is Lord of Grammar: *Damaru* is *Sabda Brahman*. All vowels and syllables came out of this original vibration of sound.

Siva holds a deer in his left hand when he dances as *Nataraja*. Deer is symbol of a wavering mind constantly flitting from one object to another. The term, *mrga-trishna*, means “the avidity of a deer that runs after the mirage of water in a desert.”

Chandra-sekhara (crescent moon) adorning his head indicates respect for sublimated qualities of the mind. (Moon is the deity of Mind).

Kari-charma ambara: Siva wears the skin of the elephant, *Gaja-asura*. Elephant denotes pride. Siva shows that we should control it.

Vyaghra-ajina. Tiger is symbol of violence. Siva uses tiger-skin also as his raiment—thus revealing that violence should be used so that it adds to the 'dignity' of human beings.

Jata dhara: Siva ties his hair in a rough knot as he is an ascetic. His name, *Kapardin*, means “he whose hair is rough and knotted like shells (*kaparda*).”

Instead of sandal paste, Siva has *bhasma* smeared on body. Instead of flower garlands, he wears poisonous snakes on his neck and arms.

Pinaka-pani since Pinaka is the name of his *trisula*.

Weapons - Trisula, Khatvanga (skull top club), Fire, Bow named *Ajagava*. The three points of *Trisula* denote sovereignty over the three *gunas*—*sattva rajas tamas* constituting the world of *Prakrti*.

Nagendra-haara: Serpent around his neck and body denotes wisdom and eternity.

"The Pure One who is not affected by the three *gunas* of *Prakriti* (*sattva, rajas* and *tamas*)."
The root 'Si' means "auspicious."
(Adi Sankara)

The word "Siva" is from the Sri Rudram Chamakam of the Krishna Yajurveda.

Lingam is smooth and oval in shape without features. This is an 'aniconic' form of Siva. As *Lingam* he has no gender or form and all forms in *Prakriti* are his forms.

Gold *lingam* was worshipped by Ravana. He played *Sama Veda* and classical music on his *veena* as his offering to Siva.

A stone and mud *lingam* was worshipped by Sri Ram at Ramesvaram before he embarked on his war with Ravana.

Sphatika lingam represents *Nirguna Brahman*. It is transparent crystal (*sphatika*) and takes on the colour of anything that comes near it.

A Voyage of Discovery

With this article, we conclude our series on Many Facets of Siva published over several months.

This offering at the Lord's feet has been a fulfilling voyage of discovery for the author. It will hopefully spark the interest of readers to delve deeper into this profound subject.

The idea of Siva has evoked the curiosity of foreigners who ask, "Why do you have a God who dances?" They are intrigued by classical dances depicting Nataraja.

However, scientists in the Cern Laboratory at Geneva perceive Siva's dance as a reflection of the rhythms of the Universe. They relate the Divine Dance of Siva to the vibration and patterns within each atom that moves elegantly in its special gait according to a cosmic plan.

gvramakrishna@yahoo.com

Lalita Ramakrishna