

## THE V GODDESS

There, once, lived a princess. Her name was Sati. She was the daughter of *Prajapati* (King) Daksha. Like many women of her age, Princess Sati was fascinated with the idea of a strange God called Shiva. She had heard he was the God of male fertility. She had also heard that he smoked weed, meditated in the Great Mount Kailash and dwelled in crematoriums.

The more she thought about it, the more fascinated she became. Her fascination led to a desperate desire to meet the Demon God. So she put her heart and soul into meditation.

Impressed by her relentless efforts, Shiva visits Sati. When the dainty princess sees the barbarian God with those ripped muscles and angular face, she goes weak in the knees! The powerful aura about him is simply irresistible. He is the finest specimen of manhood she had ever seen. And the wise righteousness of Gods, what more could a girl desire?!

King Daksha was not in favour of the match as he despised Shiva. However, after much controversy, Sati wed Shiva. She accompanied her husband to Mt. Kailash (present day, Tibet), where they lived like hermits and ate only fruits. Meanwhile, Daksha was fuming with rage. That barbarian stole his daughter! A princess, who had never known anything beyond luxury, was compelled to live like a hermit! That demon was brainwashing his daughter!

So, Daksha organizes a *yagna* (a fire ritual), to which he invites all Gods and Goddesses, except Shiva and Sati. Despite Shiva's reluctance to go uninvited, he succumbs to the pleas of his innocent wife. At the *yagna*, the couple were subject to very hostile treatment. Sati could not tolerate such disgrace and humiliation to her husband. Holding herself responsible, she immolates herself in the purifying flames of *Agni* (Fire God) as a form of penance.

Shiva is tremendously infuriated by the traumatic death of his beloved wife. In a surge of rage, he beheads Daksha and replaces it with a goat's head. Shiva's legendary anger could not be called to reason. He carried Sati on his shoulders and performed the dance of destruction - *Tandav Nritya*. Everything in his path met destruction.

The other Gods, horrified by such widespread destruction, called in the divine intervention of Lord Vishnu. Vishnu used his divine wheel, the *Sudarshan Chakra*, that cut through Sati's body and parts of her body fell across the Indian subcontinent, the holy land.

A *Shakti Peeth* (sacred spot) was formed at each of those places where Sati's body parts had fallen. There are 51 such *Shakti Peeth-s* (49 in India and 2 in Tibet and Pakistan )

The Kamaksha Temple, in Assam (North-East India), is one of the Shakti-peeth.

Legend has it that Sati, often, met Shiva here, secretly. The name Kamaksha comes from the word *Kama*, meaning sexual bond (also associated with the female genital). The Goddess Kamaksha is symbolically represented as a stone *Yoni* (the female genital). The stone *Yoni* is kept in the inner sanctum of the shrine.

With the oncoming monsoon, the *Yoni* - which is fed by an underground natural spring, gets partially submerged and the spring water begins to flow above the stone. Since it was the lower cervix of Sati that had fallen at the shrine, it is believed that this upsurge of underground water is Goddess Kamaksha's menses. This geological upsurge of water happens only once, annually, and is celebrated as *Ambubuchi*. It is the celebration of the Goddess's annual menstrual period. During these five days, the stone *Yoni* is wrapped with a red cloth and adorned with flowers and vermilion. The entire shrine seems to be overwhelmed by the colour red and the chant “*Prithvi Rajashala Hoi*” (Mother Earth is menstruating) is heard everywhere. Pilgrims are not allowed for the first three days. On the third day, the stone *Yoni* is bathed and buffalo and goat sacrifices are done.

On the last day of the festival, pilgrims are given access to enter and touch the stone *Yoni*. Each pilgrim is offered the *Holy Water* of the spring and a piece of the red cloth from the previous year as blessings.

Although *Ambubuchi* is celebrated for 5 days annually, the Kamaksha shrine is open for visitors throughout the year. The story behind this celebration is liberating and enlightening – one of those rare tales wherein womanhood is celebrated and cherished. The world today needs to learn from the past and understand femininity in its truest sense.

Zinnia Saha  
IMTH-4