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Hinduism Assignment

In Hinduism, Pravati is a goddess with many stories and meanings. She is the goddess of love, fertility and devotion. Her love story with Shiva is widely praised among the Hindu believers. However, because of the complicated Hinduism god system, there are debates about Parvati’s identity and the meaning of her in Hinduism.

From the *Linga Purana*, Parvati is the goddess from the snow mountain which is the Himalayas and her preexistence is goddess Sati, who is the first wife of Shiva. All the stories, the origin and love between Shiva and Parvati starts from the tragedy of Sati. Sati is in love with Shiva, however, the relationship between Sati and Shiva is opposed by Sati’s father Daksha who is the son of the Brahma and the top of the prajapatis. In order to insult Shiva, Daksha decides not to invite Shiva to his fire ceremonies. When Sati knows about that, she suicides with burning herself (this action is named Sati later). After Sati’s death, Vishnu separates her body to different places and then Sati reborns as Pravati. When Shiva hears about the death of Shiva, he becomes extremely sad and grief-stricken. He loses interest in worldly affairs, retires and isolates himself in the mountains. However, Parvati still loves Shiva a lot and she does not want see him depressed. As long as Shiva is downhearted, Pravati asks the god of desire, Kama, to help her. Kama reaches Shiva and shoots an arrow of desire. Nevetheless, when Shiva is shot, he realizes what has happened and burns Kama to ashes with the third eye on his forehead. Though, the first attempt fails, Parvati does not lose her hope to win over Shiva. She begins to live in mountains like Shiva, engages in the same activities as Shiva such as yoga and tapas. This draws the attention of Shiva and awakens his interest. He meets her in disguised form, a Brahmin man, tries to discourage her, telling her Shiva's weaknesses and personality problems. Nevertheless, Parvati refuses to listen and insists in her resolve. Therefore, Shiva finally accepts her and they get married (*Linga Purana*).

This story is one of the most beautiful love stories in Hinduism, however, there are a lot of conflicts about Parvati. The first one is about a custom called Sati occurs from the story. Sati becomes the name of a ritual which means when the husband dies, the wife will suicide in the fire to show her loyalty. However, people’s attitudes to Sati is not unified. Some Puranas oppose this custom and encourage widows to remarry again (Atharvaveda, 13.3.1). In addition, there is a story that Tara’s husband died and she wants to finish her life with Sati. Nonetheless, she is stopped by Rama and Hanuman (Kishkindha Kanda, *Ramayana*). Differently, there are more Puranas support Sati. “With Sati, the wives will live with their husbands in the heaven” (1.107.29, Garuda Purana). Furthermore, in *Ramayana*, Sita attempts to practice Sati in order to show her innocence and loyalty to her husband Rama. In Indian history, the government tries to eliminate Sati for many times. In the time period of Mughal empire, the government raises a policy that widows with children are not allowed to practice Sati and the government also gives gifts and money to the widows in order to encourage them to stay alive. After the British invasion, there are a lot of activities protest Sati. The official ban of Sati is established in Bengal Presidency by Lord William Henry Cavendish-Bentinck and other regions in India soon follow the ban.

The second debate is the existence of Parvati. The image of Parvati occurs very late in Hindu literature. In early Vedas, Parvati is not mentioned. In addition, in early Upanishads, some goddess is mentioned and they are defined as alias of Sati. In this case, some scholars believe that this is how goddess Parvati is formed; but others disagree with that. The earliest image of Parvati occurs in some epics in 400 B.C and Parvati is widely believed as Shiva’s wife from *Mahabharata* and *Ramanaya*. In fact, the details of Parvati is not well developed until the age of Puranas which is 4th century to 6th century C.E. This is quite similar to the development of the image of Shiva. Shiva is originated from Rudra (Rigveda) and also combined with the aspect of Agni (Rigveda). Furthermore, the widely accepted image of Shiva is not well developed until the age of Puranas as well.

Another conflict in the understanding of Parvati’s identity is that if Parvati is originated from an Aryan god system. Parvati has two incarnations, Kali and Durga. However, before Aryans’ invading in India, the two incarnations are independent goddess of ancient Indian tribes. Kali is the symbol of time and rebirth and Durga is the goddess of killing. When the Aryans conquered India, they put the aspects of the local gods in to Hinduism. As long as Parvati’s non-Aryan incarnations, some scholars believe that Parvati is also the combination of different goddesses of both Aryans and local Indians recorded by early Veda and Brahmana (239, Wilkins).

The final big conflict is the reason why Pravati’s second son, Ganesha, has a head of an elephant. One motif in these stories is that Ganesha was created by Parvati using clay to protect her and Shiva beheaded him when Shiva comes back home (Ganesha is not born when Shiva leaves home, so Shiva does not know Genesha is his son). Shiva then replaced Ganesha's original head with that of an elephant (Brown, 77). Another story is that Ganesha is created directly by Shiva's laughter. Because Shiva considers Ganesha too alluring, he gave him the head of an elephant and a protruding belly (Brown, 77). Another story is that in Ganesha’s birthday party, Shiva forget to invite Sani, so Sani cut off Ganesha’s head as a revenge. Later, Brahma tells Parvati to go to the forest and the head of the first kind of animal she sees will become the head of Ganesha. Then, Parvati sees an elephant (Brown, 78). However, this story is not widely accepted because Shiva is one of the three top gods and Parvati and Kartikeya are powerful important gods. In this case, in is not reasonable for Sani to behead Ganesha because the revenge equals suicide to Sani.

Though the conflicts and debates of Parvati are always there, the importance of Parvati is extremely obvious. People worship Parvati because they believe that she can help with marriage, parenting, and fertility and they usually worship her together with Shiva. Parvati is worshiped not only on big festival like Maha Shivaratri, but also in weddings and women’s pregnancy. Their way to worship is praying and chanting *Swayamvara Parvati Mantra*, which includes 54 chants created by Krishna. While chanting, people recite this mantra 1008 times for 108 days in a row. *Swayamvara Parvati* Mantra contains the following four parts. The first one is delay in marriage. This part describes the difficulty couples might have before they get married. This part is matched with the difficult but romantic love story of Parvati and Shiva. The second part is happy married life. This part describes the enjoyable life after married. The third part is infertility (problem in conceiving a baby). When couples have babies, they usually face difficulty in taking care of the baby and questions about dealing with the new family relationship. This part of chant can bring a deeper understanding for couples to understand their life after having a baby. The final part is avoiding divorce. In this part, the chants help to maintaining the relationship with husband and wife. For hundreds of years, the *Swayamvara Parvati* benefits so many Indian people and they even believe that there is a positive influence in marriage today.

In conclusion, Parvati is an extremely important goddess in Hindulism. She is the goddess of love, fertility and devotion. In addition, her love story with Shiva is praised for so many years in Hindu history. People love Parvati and worship her a lot with chants from *Swayamvara Parvati*. People believe that worshipping Parvati can bring them better marriage, offspring and family relationship. Though, Parvati is so essential, there are always debates about her origin, identity and family. These conflicts are from different perspectives and they are hard to distinguish right or wrong. In fact, with the conflicts of Parvati, we can view her in a more comprehensive and objective way.

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