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# Matangi

This article is about the Hindu goddess. For other uses, see [Matangi \(disambiguation\)](#).

**Matangi** is one of the **Mahavidyas**, ten Tantric goddesses and a ferocious aspect of **Devi**, the Hindu Divine Mother. She is considered to be the Tantric form of **Sarasvati**, the goddess of music and learning. Like Sarasvati, Matangi governs speech, music, knowledge and the arts. Her worship is prescribed to acquire supernatural powers, especially gaining control over enemies, attracting people to oneself, acquiring mastery over the arts and gaining supreme knowledge.

Matangi is often associated with pollution, inauspiciousness and the periphery of Hindu society, which is embodied in her most popular form, known as **Ucchishta-Chandalini** or **Ucchishta-Matangini**.<sup>[1]</sup> She is described as an outcaste (Chandalini) and offered left-over or partially eaten food (*Ucchishta*) with unwashed hands or food after eating, both of which are considered to be impure in classical Hinduism.

Matangi is often represented as emerald green in colour. While Ucchishta-Matangini carries a noose, sword, goad, and club, her other well-known form, **Raja-Matangi**, plays the *veena* and is often pictured with a parrot.

## 1 Iconography and textual descriptions

The *Dhyana mantra* (a mantra that details the form of the deity on which a devotee should meditate) of the *Brhat Tantrasara* describes Ucchishta-Matangini, one of the most popular forms of the goddess. Matangi is seated on a corpse and wears red garments, red jewellery and a garland of *gunja* (c. *sativa*) seeds. The goddess is described as a young, sixteen-year-old maiden with fully developed breasts. She carries a skull and a sword in her two hands, and is offered leftovers.<sup>[2]</sup>

The *Dhyana mantras* in the *Purashcharyarnava* and the *Tantrasara* describe Matangi as blue in colour. The crescent moon adorns her forehead. She has three eyes and a smiling face. She wears jewellery and is seated on a jewelled throne. In her four arms, she carries a noose, a sword, a goad, and a club. Her waist is slim and her breasts well-developed.<sup>[2]</sup>

The *Dhyana Mantra* of Raja-matangi from the *Purashcharyarnava* describes Matangi as green in

colour with the crescent moon upon her forehead. She has long hair, a smiling expression and intoxicated eyes, and wears a garland of *kadamba* flowers and various ornaments. She perspires a little around the face, which renders her even more beautiful. Below her navel are three horizontal folds of skin and a thin vertical line of fine hair. Seated on an altar and flanked by two parrots, she represents the 64 arts.<sup>[2]</sup> The *Saradatilaka*, adds to this description that Raja-Matangi plays the *veena*, wears conch-shell earrings and flower garlands, and has flower paintings adorning her forehead.<sup>[3]</sup>

According to the *Shyamaladandakam*, Matangi plays a ruby-studded *veena* and speaks sweetly. The *Dhyana Mantra* describes her to be four-armed, with a dark emerald complexion, full breasts anointed with red *kumkum* powder, and a crescent moon on her forehead. She carries a noose, a goad, a sugarcane bow and flower arrows, which the goddess *Tripura Sundari* is often described to hold.<sup>[4]</sup> She is also described to love the parrot and is embodied in the nectar of song.<sup>[5]</sup>

The green complexion is associated with deep knowledge and is also the colour of *Budha*, the presiding deity of the planet Mercury who governs intelligence.<sup>[4]</sup> Matangi is often depicted with a parrot in her hands, representing speech.<sup>[4]</sup> The *veena* symbolizes her association with music.<sup>[4]</sup>

## 2 Legends



The Goddess Matangi

Matangi is often named as the ninth Mahavidya. A list contained within the prose of the *Mundamala* equates Vishnu's ten avatars with the ten Mahavidyas. The

Buddha is equated to Matangi. A similar list in the *Guhyatiguhya-Tantra* omits Matangi altogether, however the scholar Sircar interprets the goddess **Durga** – equated to the avatar **Kalki** in the list – as an allusion to Matangi.<sup>[6]</sup>

In a story from the Shakta Maha-Bhagavata Purana, which narrates the creation of all the Mahavidyas, Sati, the daughter of Daksha and first wife of god Shiva, feels insulted that she and Shiva are not invited to Daksha's yagna ("fire sacrifice") and insists on going there, despite Shiva's protests. After futile attempts to convince Shiva, the enraged Sati transforms into the Mahavidyas, including Matangi. The Mahavidyas then surround Shiva from the ten cardinal directions; Matangi stands in the northwest.<sup>[7][8][9]</sup> Another similar legend replaces Sati with Kali (the chief Mahavidya) as the wife of Shiva and the origin of Matangi and the other Mahavidyas.<sup>[10]</sup> The *Devi Bhagavata Purana* describes Matangi and her fellow Mahavidyas as war-companions and forms of the goddess Shakambhari.<sup>[11]</sup>

The *Shaktisamgama-tantra* narrates the birth of Uchhishta-matangi. Once, the god Vishnu and his wife Lakshmi visited Shiva and his second wife Parvati (a reincarnation of Sati) and gave them a banquet of fine foods. While eating, the deities dropped some food on the ground, from which arose a beautiful maiden who asked their left-overs. The four deities granted her their left-overs as prasad, food made sacred by having been first consumed by the deity. This can be interpreted as the Uchhishta of the deity, although due to its negative connotation the word *Uchhishta* is never explicitly used in connection to prasad. Shiva decreed that those who repeat her mantra and worship her will have their material desires satisfied and gain control over foes, declaring her the giver of boons. From that day, the maiden was known as Uchhishta-matangi.<sup>[12]</sup>

The *Pranotasani Tantra* narrates that once Parvati longed to go back to her maternal house for some days and asked Shiva's permission to do so. The reluctant Shiva agreed on the condition that if she did not return in a few days, he would come to fetch her. Parvati agreed and went to her father Himalaya's place, where she stayed for many days. The lovesick Shiva went to Himalaya's abode disguised as an ornament seller and sold shell ornaments to Parvati. In order to test her fidelity, the disguised Shiva asked for sex in return. The disgusted Parvati was about to curse the ornament-seller, when she realizes by her yogic powers that it was none other than Shiva. She agrees to grant sexual favours but at the appropriate time. In the evening, Parvati returns to Shiva's abode disguised as a Chandala huntress. She is dressed in red and had a lean figure and large breasts and performs a seductive dance to lure him. She told Shiva that she had come to do penance. Shiva replied that he is the one gives fruit to all penance and took her hand and kissed her. Further, they made love when Shiva himself changed into a Chandala and recognized the Chandala woman as his wife. After the love-making, Parvati asked Shiva to grant her wish



As in this early 19th century South Indian painting, Raja-Matangi is usually depicted playing a veena and with a parrot in her company.

that her form as a Chandalini (the Chandala female form in which Shiva made love to her) might last forever as Uchhishta-Chandalini and that her worship in this form precede his for his worship to be considered fruitful.<sup>[13]</sup> This tale is also found in many Bengali *Mangalkavyas*. In these texts, however, Parvati is not explicitly identified with Matangi.<sup>[3]</sup>

The *Svatantra-tantra* mentions that Matanga practised austerities for thousands of years to gain the power to subdue all beings. Finally, goddess Tripura Sundari appeared and from eyes emitted rays that produced goddess Kali, who had greenish complexion and was known as Raja-matangi. With her help, Matanga fulfilled his desire.<sup>[14]</sup> Many texts including the *Shyamaladandakam* describe Matangi as the daughter of the sage Matanga.<sup>[5]</sup>

Another tale is associated with the temple dedicated to Kauri-bai—an aspect of Matangi—who appeared in low caste area of Varanasi. Kauri-bai was a goddess who was obsessed with the Brahmin ways and purity and abhorred Shiva's heterodox practices like dwelling in cremation grounds, partaking of intoxicants and being in the company of ghosts and goblins. While Shiva simply ignored Kauri-bai's words at first, after his marriage his wife Parvati could not bear Kauri-bai's abusive words toward her husband and cursed Kauri-bai to be reborn in and spend her entire lifetime within an "untouchable" area of Varanasi which Kauri-bai considered polluted. Consequently, Kauri-bai was indeed reborn in the low-caste area of Varanasi and felt very unhappy. She pleaded Shiva—the Lord of Varanasi—who granted her the boon that no pilgrimage to Varanasi would be deemed com-

plete without her worship.<sup>[14]</sup>

### 3 Associations



A Kalighat painting of Matangi

Matangi is often associated with pollution, especially left-over or partially eaten food (*Uchishta* or *Ucchishṭa*, उच्छिष्ट) considered impure in Hinduism. She is often offered such polluted left-over food and is in one legend described to be born from it.<sup>[15][16]</sup> Matangi is herself described as the leftover or residue, symbolizing the Divine Self that is left over after all things perish.<sup>[17]</sup> As the patron of left-over food offerings, she embodies inauspiciousness and the forbidden transgression of social norms.<sup>[15]</sup>

Matangi is often described as an outcaste and impure. Her association with pollution mainly stems from her relation to outcaste communities, considered to be polluted in Hindu society. These social groups deal in occupations deemed inauspicious and polluted like collection of waste, meat-processing and working in cremation grounds.<sup>[15]</sup> In a Nepali context, such groups are collectively called Matangi, who collect waste—including human waste—and other inauspicious things, and often live outside villages.<sup>[18]</sup> Thus she is associated with death, pollution, inauspiciousness and the periphery of Hindu society.<sup>[15][18]</sup>

Matangi is also associated with forests and tribal peoples, who lie outside conventional Hindu society. Her thousand-name hymn from the *Nanayavarta-tantra* mentions epithets that describe her as dwelling in, walking in, knowing and relishing the forest.<sup>[19]</sup>

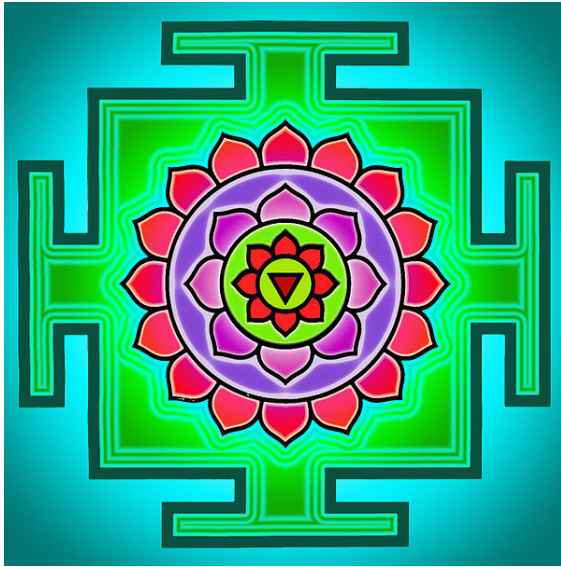
Matangi represents the power of the spoken word

(*Vaikhari*) as an expression of thoughts and the mind. She also relates to the power of listening and grasping speech and converting it back to knowledge and thought. Besides spoken word, she also governs all other expressions of inner thought and knowledge, like art, music and dance. Matangi presides over the middle part of speech (*Madhyama*), where ideas are translated into the spoken word and in her highest role, represents *Para-Vaikhari*—the Supreme Word manifested through speech and that encompasses knowledge of the scriptures. She is described as the goddess of learning and speech, and the bestower of knowledge and talent.<sup>[5]</sup> She is also called *Matrini*, the mistress of the sacred mantras.<sup>[20]</sup> She also represents the word of a guru, who serves as a spiritual guide.<sup>[21]</sup> Matangi is described as dwelling in the Throat chakra—the origin of speech—and on the tip of the tongue. She is also associated with a channel called Sarasvati from the third eye to the tip of the tongue.<sup>[4]</sup> According to David Frawley, her description as impure refers to the nature of the spoken word, which labels things and stereotypes them, thereby hindering actual contact with the soul of things. The goddess is described as one who helps a person to use words in the right way and to go beyond it to seek the soul and inner knowledge, which lie outside the demarcated boundaries of tradition.<sup>[22]</sup>

Matangi is regarded as a Tantric form of Sarasvati, the goddess of knowledge and the arts of mainstream Hinduism, with whom she shares many traits. Both embody music and are depicted playing the veena. They are also both said to be the *Nada* (sound or energy) that flows through the *Nadi* channels in the body through which life force flows. Both are related to rain clouds, thunder and rivers. Though both govern learning and speech, Sarasvati represents the orthodox knowledge of the Brahmins while Matangi—the wild and ecstatic outcast—embodies the “extraordinary” beyond the boundaries of mainstream society, especially inner knowledge.<sup>[23]</sup> Matangi is also associated with Ganesha, the elephant-headed god of knowledge and obstacle removal. Both are related to the elephant and learning. Matangi is also sometimes regarded as his consort.<sup>[21]</sup> Matangi is also described as a minister of the Mahavidya goddess Tripura Sundari or Rajarajeshvari, the Queen of Queens.<sup>[20]</sup>

### 4 Worship

Besides the Mahavidya *Bagalamukhi*, Matangi is the other Mahavidya, whose worship is primarily prescribed to acquire supernatural powers. A hymn in the *Mahabhagavata Purana* asks her grace to control one’s foes, while the *Tantrasara* says that recitation of her mantra, meditation on her form and her ritual worship gives one to the power to control people and make them attracted to oneself.<sup>[24]</sup> Her devotees, especially *Tantric sadhakas*, are regarded to have transcend the pollution by offering her left-over or partially eaten food (*Uchishta*) and thus



*The yantra of Matangi, which is used in her worship*

overcome their ego. Worship of Matangi is described to allow her devotee to face the forbidden and transcend pollution, leading him to salvation or allowing him to gain supernatural powers for worldly goals.<sup>[15]</sup> The *Purashcharyarnava* describes pleasing the goddess would result in her answering all the devotee's queries by whispering in her ear.<sup>[24]</sup>

Matangi is often worshipped with the mantra syllable *Aim*, which is associated with Sarasvati and is the seed-syllable of knowledge, learning and teaching. A longer mantra of twenty syllables is also used:<sup>[17]</sup>

*Om hrim aim srim namo bhagavati ucchishtacandali*

*sri matangeshvari sarvajanavashankari svaha*

“Reverence to adorable Matangi, the outcast and residue, who gives control over all creatures”

Her mantra may be repeated ten thousand times, repeated one thousand times while offering flowers and ghee in a fire sacrifice, or repeated one hundred times while offering water (*Arghya*) or while offering food to Brahmin priests.<sup>[24]</sup> Her yantra (sacred geometric diagram), whether physically constructed or mentally envisioned,<sup>[24]</sup> is used in worship along with the mantra.<sup>[17]</sup> Offering certain items to a fire sacrifice—particularly those performed at cremation grounds, river banks, forests, or crossroads—while repeating the mantra is said to fulfil specific goals. An offering of Bael leaves is said to result in kingship; salt gives the power to control; turmeric gives the power to paralyse; neem twigs bring wealth; and an offering of sandalwood, camphor

and saffron together or a salt and honey mixture grants the power to attract people.<sup>[24]</sup> A rice-flour bread prepared while repeating her mantra is said to give the power to attract women. It is likewise said that it is possible to make a person one's slave by feeding him or her the ashes of a crow whose stomach was stuffed with a conch and burnt in a cremation ground while repeating the goddess' mantra.<sup>[24]</sup>



*Matangi worshipped with other Mahavidyas at a Kali Puja pandal in Kolkata.*

Leftover or partially eaten food (*Ucchishta*) is recommended to be offered to Matangi with the devotee in the polluted *Ucchishta* state, that is, having eaten but not washed, with the remains of food in the mouth and hands. Offering of leftovers to Hindu deities or being in the polluted *Ucchishta* state is a taboo in mainstream Hinduism.<sup>[16]</sup> Another taboo that is broken in Matangi worship is the offering to the goddess of a cloth stained with menstrual blood to gain the ability to attract a mate. Menstrual blood is considered polluted in almost all Hindu scriptures and menstruating women are kept away from Hindu worship and temples.<sup>[16]</sup> The outcaste Matangi community of Nepal collect polluted substances and items related to death and bad luck such as sacrificial animal heads and clothes of the deceased, and offers them at special stones kept at crossroads called *chwasas*, where the “dangerous” Matangi “consumes” them as an

offering, thereby getting rid of the pollution.<sup>[18]</sup> The *Tantrasara* also advises offerings to Matangi of meat, fish, cooked rice, milk and incense at crossroads or cremations grounds in the dead of the night to overpower enemies and gain poetic talent. Oblations of *Ucchishta*, cat meat and goat meat to the goddess are said to help achieve Supreme knowledge.<sup>[24]</sup> A text proclaims Matangi's worship becomes fruitful only if the devotee reveres women as goddesses and refrains from criticizing them.<sup>[24]</sup>

No fasts or rituals to purify oneself before worship—typical of Hindu worship—are prescribed for Matangi worship. Anyone can use any mantra for worship, even though he is not initiated or considered unfit for worshipping any other deity.<sup>[16]</sup> A thousand-name hymn from the *Nanayavarta-tantra* and a hundred-name hymn from the *Rudradamala* are dedicated to the goddess.<sup>[19]</sup> The reciting of the Sanskrit alphabet, the chanting of mantras, the reading aloud of the scriptures, and performance of music and dance are also described as constituting acts of her worship.<sup>[17]</sup>

## 5 Notes

- [1] Kinsley (1997) p. 217
- [2] Kinsley (1997) p. 209
- [3] Kinsley (1997) *NOTES TO PAGES 209–216*
- [4] Frawley p. 142
- [5] Frawley p. 138
- [6] Bernard p. 5
- [7] Kinsley (1988) p. 162
- [8] Kinsley (1997) p. 23
- [9] Bernard pp. 1–3
- [10] Kinsley (1997) p. 29
- [11] Kinsley (1997) p. 31
- [12] Kinsley (1997) p. 213
- [13] Kinsley (1997) pp. 213–4
- [14] Kinsley (1997) p. 214
- [15] Foulston, Lynn; Abbott, Stuart (2009). *Hindu goddesses: beliefs and practices*. Sussex Academic Press. p. 123. ISBN 978-1-902210-43-8.
- [16] Kinsley (1997) pp. 214–6
- [17] Frawley pp. 142–3
- [18] Kinsley (1997) p. 218
- [19] Kinsley (1997) pp. 219–20
- [20] Frawley pp. 141–2

[21] Frawley p. 140

[22] Frawley pp. 140–1

[23] Frawley pp. 138–140

[24] Kinsley (1997) pp. 220–22

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- Kinsley, David R. (1988). “Tara, Chinnamasta and the Mahavidyas”. *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (1 ed.). University of California Press. pp. 161–177. ISBN 978-0-520-06339-6.
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