

# A Goddess Complains

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**P**ratyankara is said to belong to the Atharvana Veda, which deals with tantric practices. She is described as an angry goddess – vengeful, merciless and a wrecker of infidels. Owing to her vindictive and implacable nature, she is hailed as the goddess specially suited for this kali yug or the era of perfidiousness. She is canonized with goddesses like Ma Santoshi, Kali, Kamakshi, Durga. This article has arisen out of my concern that forever new gods and goddesses are being salvaged from our Vedas and Upanishads. Yantras, talismans and chants are sold promising quick money, easy solutions to problems and worldly pleasures. Somehow the quintessential philosophy and allegorical meaning behind the form and nature of a god or goddess is hidden and forgotten owing to the general paraphernalia that surrounds these newly-created cults, temples and establishments. This article is my interpretation of what goddess Pratyankara stands for. It doesn't conform to the mythology that is being propagated, nor does it intend to hurt any religious sentiments.

My name is Pratyankara. It doesn't matter where I was born, when or how. But I can tell you about myself. I am ugly. My nose is askew, my nostrils flare, my teeth are uneven, mouth too wide, facial hair aside. Eyes mere two slits, bushy eyebrows, ears too large. Beauty at large. I even have an epithet describing my looks. I am called Yali mugam or the dragon-faced.

Does it matter that I am ugly? Yes, it does. When I look around me, I see a glamour world filled with leggy, fair, dolls. I begin to wonder how can I be a goddess among such wannabe Barbies? Then, I take a closer look and see the other side—the slavery of it all. I see the agony and the pain that goes into creating this world of glamour—the pressure to appear fair and lovely, slim 'n trim. These beauties have to tow along hefty dowries, and act out the role of a homely yet a super-duper wife/mom/career woman - all three rolled into one. I witness the physical and mental violence inflicted on them—rape, molestation, tubectomy, female infanticide, emotional and psychological abuse and countless other forms of slavery.

I see it all. I internalize all I see and step aside. Then slowly, but unsparingly, I, with my *dhamstra*, that canine tooth of mine, rip apart words insensitive, deeds restraining, rules orthodox, horizons circumscribed. Suddenly, I stop being ugly. I have

also sprouted two wings, which I have named Abhilasha and Prerna. I flex, stretch, flap my wings and try to fly.

And I fly! In the infinite sky, I see vast spans of unexplored opportunities and envision endless space for self-realisation. All doubts vanish. I have found the key. From now on I will never be locked in or locked out. No more *Lakshman Rekhas* (they are for roaches, not women).

I have married a man— strong-willed, brave, proud. He walks like a king. While heads bow before him, I see him eye to eye. While people touch his feet, I meet him on equal footing. I also ride on him while making love. People murmur that I have tamed a lion of a man.

I am not a mere woman behind a successful man. We walk together. We have begotten many sons and daughters whom we rear. With our four arms we nourish, nurture, provide and protect. I am my family's strength and energy. I am their *shakti* and Ma.

But I do not stay confined to the boundaries of my home. My two arms continue to fend for my family. I acquire two more to extend succour





to the community as a whole. I use one of my right arms for varied social activities. I am the kinetic energy that initiates worldly activities. I can see the wind beneath my wings uplifting fellow mortals. With my third arm I guide, command, nurse, play, care for and share. When I see lethargy, inertia and superstitions among people, a fourth arm bursts forth angrily to exorcise all this with a stern cane. I strike terror in many hearts. As if to placate me, these lazy sycophants call me Devi, the mighty one, and address me in reverential tones, as a creature apart from them.

Then one day I die. When I die, it is rumoured that I have merely shed my mortal coil but that my spirit is alive. My contemporaries narrate many a story about me to their children, and they to their children and grandchildren and so on. However, there are many discrepancies in their descriptions of my looks and it is largely left to the listener's imagination until, a sculptor went to work with his chisel and hammer. So here I am frozen in stone forever as the dragon-faced, four-armed, huge-breasted, quasi-woman, quasi-beast, canine-toothed goddess, riding a bloodthirsty lion.

Word flies around that by worshipping my idol, one can exorcise ghosts, quell enemies with talismans, charms and chants, get rich in a jiffy, attract and control natural elements. They say my left arm provides gold and my right arm blesses. The third arm slays enemies and the fourth holds the dismembered bleeding heads of foes. Gradually a cult has grown around me and so has a temple circumscribing me within four walls. I have become a goddess - just like that!

I am offered fruits and flowers everyday. Hymns are chanted; lamps are lit. Thousands throng to my temple beseeching me for riches, for freedom from man-made problems, for power to do away with adversaries.

"O Pratyankara Devi! Give us this and that," they cry.

But do they know what Pratyankara means; do they know

what I stand for?

I wish to tell them - "See my wings, Abhilasha and Prerna - do you know what they stand for?"

"Look at my face. Learn that appearance doesn't matter but the spirit does."

"I have two arms to look after myself. I took pains to grow two more to help others and contribute to society. Do you understand that?"

"I have fangs and sharp teeth to protect my interests and prevent exploitation."

"If I am riding a lion - so can you!"

Sadly my words get drowned in the clanging of bells, loud chants and the general euphoria these rituals create. I was deified after I died. But I think I actually died after they deified me. I want to roar at the top of my voice - "For God's sake! I am a woman like you. Pray! why am I enshrined?" □

## *Birthing*

*my body gave clues, rearranging cells*

*for your growing to flower*

*with the small changes, I knew you travelled far*

*I felt your starlight fill my being*

*naked holiness swimming, a salt-water lotus*

*rooted placental cord, touching my rib bones*

*your wings fluttering, taking my breath away*

*swelling and stretching space, elastic, fluid*

*your hands and feet eager to fly*

*sharp, incessant, demanding power*

*surges rising like in-coming tide*

*one becomes two*

**Rosemary J. Wentworth, U.K.**