



Incarnating Female Desire: A South Asian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Rati, the Goddess, is the Hindu embodiment of the sentiment of erotic, *Rati*. She is often represented as the female counterpart of *Kāmadeva*, the God of Desires, later often also translated as the God of Erotics/ Love. The name of the God and the sensuality and sexuality they represent are familiar to most people (Benton, 2006) Who is this deity? If *Kāmadeva* represents the impulse or the "arrow" of desire, *Rati* represents the "receptivity" and the enduring emotional state that allows such desire to flourish. Why do they exist? Why do we worship them? In the South Asian tradition, the pursuit of *Kāma* (desire/pleasure) is recognized as one of the four *Puruṣārthas*, or goals of human life. Why is she important to us, textually and classically? How do we read them and how does tradition inform of them? The tradition informs us that without *Rati*, the "sentiment" of love remains incomplete; she provides the depth.

Rati, textually, is treated as the *Sthāyi bhāva* of *Śṛṅgāra rasa*, one of the eight primary *rasa* (*Nāṭyaśāstra*). She is represented in a feminine form throughout textual and artistic traditions in India, and beyond (Mani, 1975) (Dallapiccola, 2010). Why? The paper aims to delve into an unapologetic view in the South Asian perspectives and perception of desire (*Kāma*) in its artistic and general sense. In Hindu philosophy, a male deity is often latent or inactive without his feminine counterpart; *Kāma* may hold the bow, but *Rati* is the target, the motivation, and the pleasure itself. Without *Rati*, the impulse of *Kāma* has no destination and no fruition. The paper will also further question the feminine image constructed around desire and establish that *Rati* is a deity equivalent to *Kāmadeva*, and not a sensuous subsidiary.



INTRODUCTION

Rati is seen as a *Yoginī* and a manifestation of *Śakti*, as both categories denote autonomous, dynamic feminine energies governing specific cosmic functions. In *Kaula* traditions, *Yoginīs* are embodied forms of *Śakti* who operate as specialized powers rather than mythological consorts. *Rati* belongs to this class because she embodies *kriyā-śakti* within the domain of desire, representing the sustaining, experiential, and generative force of delight. Her identification as a *Yoginī* is supported by iconographic evidence, such as the figure named *Rati* (or *Śrī Uṣā*) at the Chausath *Yoginī* Temple, Bherāghāt, whose sugarcane bow and floral arrows signify erotic cosmic power rather than narrative symbolism.

Rati's Śakti status is further affirmed through ritual and textual placement. In the *Bālātripurāpañcāṅgam*, *Bālāpaṭala* (v. 27), *Rati* is installed in the *Vahni Koṇa* (southeast/fire corner) of the yantra, the locus of *tejas* and activation, while *Manobhava* (*Kāma*) occupies a secondary position. This spatial hierarchy identifies *Rati* as the active, igniting force of desire, corresponding to *Vimarśa*, whereas *Kāma* represents dependent or latent potential.

RATI AS NURTURER AND CONSORT

In *Paurāṇic* sources *Rati* is introduced as the daughter of *Dakṣa* and the consort of *Kāma* (God of desire). In the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* (10.55), *Rati* reappears under the name *Māyāvātī*. The verses highlight her patient devotion as she awaits *Kāma's* resurrection. Here, the dual role of *Rati* is as the nurturer of *Kāma* and as his companion and wife is clearly established. Upon recognizing *Pradyumna* as *Kāma* reborn, she exhibits motherly affection toward him and nurtures him (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 10.55.8). As the child matures and grows, he attains his innate erotic potency (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 10.55.9).

A narrative tension emerges in *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* (10.55.11), when *Pradyumna* addresses *Rati* as she approaches him as a conjugal partner seeking erotic union. He questions why she approaches him like a lover. This statement acknowledges the prior maternal role necessitated by circumstance and marks the transition back to their original conjugal identities. The passage thus completes the cycle from destruction to rebirth, concealment, maturation, and reunion. Accordingly, *Rati* sustains *Kāma's* existence and enables his growth, and, as wife, restores his function as the deity of desire. The episode affirms that *Rati*, as the stable and constant principle, dynamically adapts her roles to preserve, mature, and activate *Kāma*, whose identity remains dependent on embodiment and readiness.



RATI AS AN ARCHETYPE OF FEMININE BEAUTY

n *Naiṣadhacaritam* (Canto 21.133–135), Nala repeatedly compares Damayantī to Rati, grounding the comparison specifically in physical beauty and attractiveness. Verse 133 establishes that Damayantī is perceived as Rati by all who behold her, emphasizing that her form embodies the same ideal of beauty traditionally associated with Rati, the archetype of feminine perfection in *kāvya*. The reference to Kāma's destruction serves only to heighten this contrast, shifting attention away from desire as an active force and toward Rati as the enduring standard of loveliness.

Verses 134 and 135 elaborate this identification through detailed descriptions of Damayantī's bodily features, like her moon-like face, radiant ornaments, slender waist, and delicately proportioned body. These physical attributes align closely with conventional poetic representations of Rati, whose beauty is defined by harmony, luminosity, and sensuous grace. Damayantī is presented as Rati not because she generates love abstractly, but because her physical beauty conforms to the poetic ideal embodied by Rati. Thus, Nala presents Damayantī not merely as comparable to Rati but as a visible embodiment of the feminine ideal itself, affirming Rati's role as the aesthetic model of female beauty and physical perfection.

RATI IN CLASSICAL LITERATURE – AS INDEPENDENT FEMININE PRINCIPLE⁵⁹

Kālidāsa's kāvya Kumārasambhava (Canto IV) vividly dramatizes Rati's grief. After *Śiva* annihilates *Kāma* with his third-eye fire, Rati laments the loss of her husband. In one passage, her anguished resolve is expressed (in Griffith's translation) as:

“Or how couldst thou have died, nor Rati perish too? ... Yes, I will fly to thee, of thee bereft, / And leave this world which thou, my life, hast left -”.

In *Kumārasambhava*, Canto 4, *Kālidāsa* presents Rati not merely as a mythological figure but as the feminine principle of love, incarnating the enduring emotional substratum of *śṛṅgāra rasa*. As a *sthāyibhāva*, Rati represents stability, continuity, and receptivity, while *Kāma* signifies desire as an activating, transient force dependent upon external conditions. Rati's lamentation following the “consumption” of *Kāma* reveals that the feminine principle persists even when the masculine impulse of desire is extinguished. Rati endures as latent emotional capacity *bhāva* without activation- demonstrating that the feminine principle is ontologically stable,

⁵⁹ By unknown <https://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/78255?rpp=https://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/78255?rpp=60&pg+18&ao=on&ft=india&pos=1070>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=31759659>

while desire functions as episodic and contingent. The absence of *uddīpana vibhāvas*, such as Vasant and *Kāma* himself, further renders Rati incapable of manifesting her inherent potential. As the receptive ground of emotion, Rati requires stimulation for expression, yet her continued existence affirms that love is not annihilated with the cessation of desire. Rather, it remains dormant, awaiting conditions that allow manifestation.



The cyclical rebirth of *Kāma* reinforces this “gendered” aesthetic structure. Desire repeatedly arises and dissolves, circulating around Rati as its object of fixation and *cintan*, who remains the constant emotional axis. *Kāma*, therefore, operates as a *vyabhicāribhāva*- periodic and unstable- while Rati, as the “feminine principle”, functions as the permanent ground (*ādhāra*) upon which desire acts. Through this portrayal, *Kālidāsa* aligns poetic narrative with classical *rasa* theory and philosophical conceptions of the feminine principle which sustains emotional continuity, while the masculine principle initiates activation. *Śṛṅgāra rasa* emerges only when transient desire engages with the stable emotional capacity embodied by Rati. As eminent scholar Prof. Gyan Prakash Shastri has said, *kāma* is the mental power, its completion is its spiritual power. Thus, Canto 4 articulates a nuanced aesthetic vision in which Rati, as both *sthāyibhāva* and feminine principle, ensures the persistence of love beyond desire, confirming the primacy of emotional endurance over momentary impulse.

These lines (*Kumārasambhava* IV. 9-10) show Rati’s determination to follow *Kāma* into death, reflecting *karuṇā-rasa* (compassionate pathos) tempered with *vipralambha śṛṅgāra* (the erotic pain of separation). Rati calls to *Kāma* (whom she lovingly calls “Lord of my life”) and resolves to immolate herself on his funeral pyre, illustrating *tanhā* (yearning) and *viraha* (separation) typical of tragic love. Later verses describe how a celestial voice assures Rati that *Kāma* will be reborn when Shiva marries *Pārvatī*, thereby promising their eventual reunion.

Kālidāsa's Sanskrit also contains resonant imagery (though our focus is on translation here). For example, the original describes Rati raising her eyes to search for Kāma and finding only “a trace of dove-grey ashes”. In Kaṇakadasa's later Kumaravyasa Bharata, a Kannada retelling, Rati is called Nārī and similarly laments, but Kālidāsa's portrayal remains the classical archetype of spousal devotion in Hindu poetry. The combined effect of these Purāṇic and kāvya passages is to canonize Rati as the epitome of a wife's unwavering love and desire, even unto death. That Kāma is incinerated by Śiva's fire while Rati survives, grieves, and persists points toward a distinctly Indic understanding of desire and erotic experience. The episode in Canto IV compels us to ask not whether Rati is “independent” of Kāma in a modern individualist sense, but how Hindu cosmology differentiates between **impulse and experience, force and affect, provocation and fulfillment**.⁶⁰

In Indic thought, Kāma and Rati are not ontological equivalents but theological. *Kāma* functions as a **cosmic impulse**—a catalytic force that initiates attraction, arousal, and then movement toward union. He is weaponized, externalized, and intrusive, carrying the bow and arrows of stimulation (4 arrows with a bow made from bamboo). Rati, by contrast, is not the cause of desire but its **experienced sweetness**. In *Alaṅkāraśāstra* and *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *rati* is classified as a **sthāyibhāva**, an enduring emotional state, whereas *kāma* aligns more closely with *icchā* or *pravṛtti*, the impelling urge. What Kālidāsa dramatizes mythically is what śāstra articulates philosophically: **impulses act**. Śiva's third eye does not burn indiscriminately. Its fire is not anti-erotic; it is anti-intrusive. Kāma's crime is not that he represents desire, but that he violates the interiority of tapas. Rati does not disturb; it exists in silence. Once eros has been lived, it becomes *saṃskāra*. It migrates from the realm of action (*kriyā*) to the realm of imprint (*vāsanā*).

Does Rati exist independently of Kāma? The Indic answer is yes, but not autonomously. Hindu metaphysics does not conceive of independence as isolation. Rati is not a detachable abstraction nor a subordinate appendage. She exists in a symbiotic polarity with Kāma, much like *śakti* exists with *śaktimān*. Yoga also supports this; Yoga must only be practiced by those well of body and mind, both but not one. Kāma without Rati degenerates into an unmoderated appetite. Rati without Kāma becomes questionable sweetness without ignition. Their relationship is not hierarchical but complementary. Yet *Kālidāsa's* narrative insists on a crucial asymmetry: Rati does not ontologically collapse when Kāma disappears. Her grief itself becomes a mode of being, a form of rasa, and therefore of life. This reveals an Indic insight that contrasts sharply with many Western eros-narratives where it must be stressed that love does not vanish when desire is thwarted; it transforms.

Thus, when Śiva destroys Kāma, he annihilates not desire as such, but **desire as aggressive stimulation**. Rati remains because she is no longer stimulus; she is **memory and resonance**. And it is here where we must ask

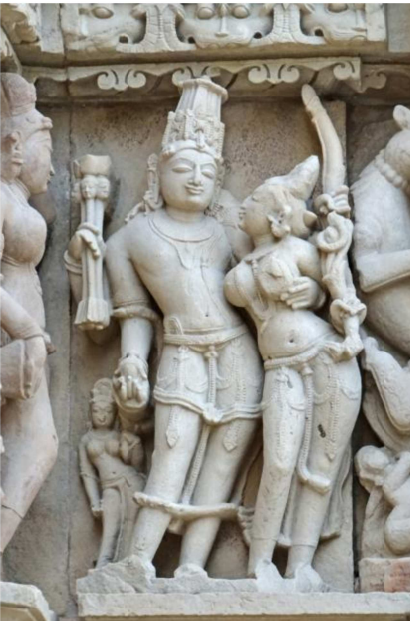
⁶⁰Painting of the Madana Bhasma (Kāmadeva being reduced to ashes by Śiva). Accession Number: 2013.1. OS

ourselves the question, would an ascetic god allow Rati to live unless she were more dangerous *and* more sacred than *Kāma*?

REGIONAL INDIAN TRADITIONS

Beyond classical texts, Rati figures in various regional and Tantric contexts. In Himalayan and tantric Śaiva lore, for instance, Rati can be invoked as *Śrī Kāmambikā*, a goddess of sexual power supplementing the male god *Kāma*, although explicit Tantric scriptures on her are scarce. However, an important folk-Tantric movement around Rati emerged in Assam. The Rati-Khowa (lit. “worship of Rati”) sect, arising within the 16th-17th c. Assamese Śaiva and neo-Vaiṣṇava milieu, performed secret nightly rites venerating Rati’s love-power. Scholars note that the *Kalāsamhati* branch of Assamese *Vaiṣṇavism* had “esoteric cults of Rati-seva or Rati-khowa” propagated by itinerant renunciants. June McDaniel, a popular Folk and Tantra researcher describes Rati-Khowa as a “folk Tantra” blending Hindu and animist elements, perhaps traceable to Tantric Buddhism or tribal customs. Its adherents (sometimes called *Purnadhari* or *Barkhelia*) conducted clandestine

night-worship (hence “Rati-khowa”) in which Rati’s erotic energy was ritually celebrated. This illustrates how Rati’s figure was integrated into regional devotional practices and Tantric belief, symbolizing fertility and passionate devotion even outside orthodox temple worship.



⁶¹In mainstream South Indian iconography, Rati appears mainly as *Kāma*’s attendant or consort. Temple sculptures from medieval Chennakesava, Belur to Khajuraho often show *Kāma* holding Rati beside him, embodying the conjugal pair (By Jean-Pierre Dalbéra from Paris, France - *Kāma sur le temple de Parshvanath (Khajuraho)*)

A survey of temple reliefs notes that Rati was “depicted along with *Kāma* in temple sculpture,” especially in South Indian and Indo-Gangetic art. Textual sources confirm her cultic role:

*“Rati also enjoys worship with Kāma in some festival rites dedicated to him. The love-deity couple also symbolize maithuna (ritual union) ”.*⁶²

For instance, the **Carnatic festival** of Karadaiyan Nombu (observed by married Hindu women) invokes *Kāma*-Rati’s blessing for conjugal happiness (linking to Parvati’s penance to wed Śiva).

⁶¹ Khajuraho Temple, Odisha

⁶² Wikipedia- Rati



In popular **Marathi and Bengali folk songs**, echoes of Rati's role as consort of desire can be traced in references to Rati Sudha (nectar of love) or in devotional poetry addressing Kāma and Rati as divine lovers (though direct evidence is sparse). In **Bengali folk-literature**, Rati is occasionally invoked symbolically as Kāma-Manabhumide Jhule Thaka (she who swings love's swing), reminiscent of Śrī Caitanya songs. Similarly, Marathi abhangs (Bhakti songs) sometimes personify Kāma-Murati with his Patni Ratī, symbolizing the union of divine love. These peripheral references suggest that Rati's mūrti (idol) functions as a cipher for conjugal and erotic devotion in regional cultures.

Rati must survive because cosmology itself depends on her. A universe governed solely by Kāma would be chaotic, restless, and unsustainable. A universe without Rati would be sterile, incapable of stable bonds or enduring creation. By allowing Rati to live, Kalidāsa affirms that **love- not impulse- is what stabilizes the cosmos**. Even gods may renounce Kāma; they cannot abolish Rati. IF Śiva has allowed Rati to live, it is not because she is merely erotic but because she is **irreducible**.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN TRANSFORMATIONS & ADAPTATIONS

Rati's image underwent significant transformation and localization in Southeast Asia. The most famous adaptation is the Javanese- Balinese goddess Dewi Ratih. In Bali and Java, Rati was syncretized with the Moon Goddess: her name "Ratih" is etymologically linked. Legends recount that Dewi Ratih warned the gods of the demon Rahu and was swallowed, causing eclipses. Today she is celebrated on each full moon (purnama): Odalan Yulaning Sasih is a Bali ceremonial festival in her honor. She is explicitly described as "the Hindu lunar goddess worshipped in Java and Bali... known for her beauty and grace," and as an aspect of Chandra (the moon). Balinese Hindus hold night-time rituals and offerings to Ratih on purnama, commemorating her as the embodiment of lunar beauty. In temple art, she is sometimes depicted being swallowed by Kala Rau (the eclipse demon). Thus, in Indonesia, the erotic associations of Rati have largely morphed into celestial (moon-beauty) symbolism.

A related Indonesian epic is the Smaradahana (11th c. Java), which tells the "burning of desire". In this Kakawin, Kāmajaya (Kāma) and his wife Kāmaratih (from Sanskrit Kāma-Rati) are incinerated by Śiva's fire. Importantly, the text explicitly notes "the goddess Rati, known in ancient Java as Kāmaratih", who "out of her love, devotion, and loyalty, jumped into Shiva's fire to follow her husband" (**Smardhana**).



Their souls are said to repeatedly incarnate among humans as lovers, “symbolizing love, lust, desire, and the yearning... suffered by all lovers on earth”. Thus Kāmaratih carries Rati’s name and essence into Javanese lore as the divine ideal of self-sacrificial love. The Smaradahana also gave rise to the Panji-cycle romances: Raden Inu (Panji) is cast as Kāmajaya’s avatar and Dewi Chandra Kirana (Sekartaji) as Kāmaratih incarnate. These love-tales spread throughout Southeast Asia (to Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, etc.). In Thailand, for example, the Panji legend appears as the Inao story (Rama II’s epic drama), featuring a heroine named Chandra Kirana (literally “Moon’s

Radiance”), a clear echo of *Kāmaratih/Rati*.

In Cambodian and Lao versions of Panji (linked to the epic Reamker), the lovestruck queen is likewise named Chandralekha or Somahot, indicating her lunar/divine nature. These adaptations show how Rati’s archetype diffused: her Javanese avatar Kāmaratih became Dewi Chandra Kirana in Thai/Khmer folklore, emphasizing her connection to the moon and beauty.

Notably, none of these Southeast Asian retellings focus on Rati’s sexuality per se; instead her story is allegorized as a cosmic love-myth linked to the heavenly bodies. Rati’s cult in Southeast Asia diverges from the strictly sexual domain to encompass lunar and royal symbolism. The Balinese continue to honor “Ratih” in moon ceremonies. Meanwhile, the Panji romances recast her as a princess with lunar epithet (Chandra Kirana), often omitting explicit erotic elements. Yet the core theme remains: the undying quest of the loving wife for her beloved husband, manifesting across cultures as the archetype of devoted love.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Feminist Theological Perspectives

From a Western feminist standpoint, Rati is to be seen both as an idealization and as a subversion of female desire. She embodies the traditional image of the devoted wife and *pativrata*, but her intensity of feeling also asserts female sexuality as divine. Feminist theologians such as Wendy Doninger might highlight how Rati’s agency disrupts patriarchal norms: rather than passively waiting, Rati actively implores Shiva and even enters Śambara’s house (as *Māyāvātī*) to fulfill her will. Her willingness to die for love challenges the stereotype of female modesty; instead she channels inner strength (indeed, Shiva praises her *tapas* and calls himself her “willing servant” in *Kumārasambhava* (Kale, 1917)). Some contemporary writers note that Rati’s narrative



allows a positive valuation of female erotic desire, countering the Western tradition that often suppresses women's sexuality. As one scholar remarks, Rati's lamentation exemplifies a "deeply felt female experience" that invites empathy rather than censure.

In modern Hindu interpretations, Rati may be viewed as an independent, liberated divine being: she expresses *icchā* (desire) openly and actively shapes her destiny. The Hindu reading of KS and Rati's literature does not frame this independence in terms of opposition to patriarchy or emancipation from male authority, but in terms of ontological depth. Rati's independence is more than just social, it is meta. It is more. Rati is not primarily evaluated as a moral exemplar (*pativrata*) nor as a transgressive subject resisting masculine control. Those categories, while analytically useful in Western feminist theology, are secondary to the Indic concern with how desire exists, transforms, and survives within cosmic order.

Her actions are understood as the rightful movement of her intrinsic nature (*prakṛti*), not as deviations from feminine normativity. In other words, she does not "break" the ideal of the devoted wife; she redefines devotion as active, intelligent, and erotically charged. Crucially, Hindu hermeneutics do not oppose *pativrata* to erotic agency. Rati is not virtuous *despite* her desire; she is virtuous *through* it. Her fidelity is not sexual restraint but erotic perseverance. The intensity of her longing (*tīvra-viraha*) is itself *tapas*- heat generated **by love** rather than renunciation. When Śiva praises her austerity and grants boons, the tradition reads this not as a concession to feminine suffering but as recognition that eros, when interiorized, produces ascetic power. This is why Rati survives Kāma's destruction. Kāma represents desire as outward propulsion; Rati embodies desire as experienced continuity. Hindu thought privileges the latter. The annihilation of Kāma signals the disciplining of impulse, not the negation of erotic being. Rati's survival marks the migration of *kāma* from the external world into the interior landscape of *rasa* and *saṃskāra*.

Kāma is a function; Rati is a state of being. Thus, where Western feminist readings emphasize Rati's disruption of patriarchal control, Hindu readings emphasize her **irreducibility**. What part of desire can even Śiva not destroy?

Rasa (Aesthetic) Theory

Rati's narrative is also an important case for *rasa* theory in Indian aesthetics. Her experiences evoke a mix of *śṛṅgāra* (romantic love) and *karuṇā* (compassionate sorrow). Abhinavagupta and later aestheticians recognized that Rati's lament in *Kumārasambhava* blends these *rasas*: the audience is moved to pity (*karuṇā*) while still feeling the pathos of erotic love in separation (*śṛṅgāra*). In particular, the event of Kāma's death invokes *karuṇā-rasa*, as the heroine's heartfelt anguish is foregrounded. Scholars note *Kalidāsa*'s "mastery of *śṛṅgāra rasa*" in depicting Rati's grief, turning her private pain into universal pathos. Yet the narrative never loses the context- Rati's very tears are tearful because they spring from love.



In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bharata does not treat *rati* as a derivative or contingent emotion. It is classified as a *sthāyibhāva*, a *stable, enduring emotional state*, without which *śṛṅgāra rasa* cannot manifest at all. *Rati* is named first among the *bhāvas*, not accidentally. Commentators from Abhinavagupta onwards note that *rati* heads the list because it is the most generative of *rasa*, giving rise to other emotions (*rasa-rāja*).

ekonapañcāśadime yathāvadbhāvāstryavasthā gaditā mayeha .

*bhūyaśca ye yatra rase niyojyāstān śrotumarhanti ca vipramukhyāḥ*⁶³

ālasyaugryajugupsākhyairevaṃ bhāvaistu varjitāḥ .

*udbhāvayanti śṛṅgāraṃ sarve bhāvāḥ svasaṃjñayā*⁶⁴

“All the [forty-nine] States except indolence, cruelty and disgust are applicable to the Erotic Sentiment (lit. raise the Erotic Sentiment by their own name).”

More importantly, Bharata defines *sthāyubhāvas* as that which persists beneath transformation. That which is *sthāyāin* does not vanish when its immediate cause disappears. It remains latent; capable In *rasa* terms, *Rati* herself is the *sahṛdayā* (empathetic participant), and the reader/beholder is invited to experience *bhāva* (emotion) of love-sorrow mixture. The evocation of *śṛṅgāra* persists even after *Kāma*’s death (*Rati* speaks of his “loving words” and her desire for union), showing how erotic sentiment transmutes into spiritual longing. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is explicit that *rasas* do not arise from *vibhāvas* alone. Without a pre-existing *sthāyibhāva*, no *rasa* can be generated. When *kāma* the *vibhāva* is destroyed, *rati* does not collapse- because *sthāyibhāva* are ontologically prior to stimulation. They are awakened, not created. Thus it cannot be destroyed by the loss of its object.

Psychoanalytic Perspectives

Psychoanalytic theory, especially Lacanian thought, offers insight into *Rati*’s portrayal of desire as *manquante* (lack). Lacan famously posited that desire persists from the original *manque-à-être* of separation and death. *Rati*’s endless longing even after *Kāma*’s death dramatizes this: her “object petit a” is her husband, whose absence creates an insatiable yearning. *Rati*’s repeated refusal to let go - even threatening self-immolation - can be seen as a refusal to accept the void left by the lost object, thereby illustrating Lacan’s idea that true

⁶³ *Nāṭyaśāstra*- Chapter VII śloka 108

⁶⁴ *Nāṭyaśāstra*- Chapter VII śloka 109

desire can never be extinguished by attainment or loss. Rati's submission to Shiva's will (she enters Śambara's world and waits patiently) might also be read as a kind of sacrificial renunciation of the ego, resonating with Jungian feminine archetypes of the anima longing. More specifically, Lacan's concept of masculine and feminine *jouissance* might apply: Rati's "feminine *jouissance*" is portrayed as boundless (she still desires sexual union despite widowhood), challenging the notion that women's sexuality vanishes after marriage. In this reading, Rati disrupts patriarchal narratives by insisting on her right to desire and by transforming her grief into a creative force (her devotion eventually brings Kāma back). The story thus exemplifies how the unconscious logic of desire (unending, repetitive, symbolic) plays out in mythic form.

Integrating these frameworks, one sees Rati as a figure who both fulfills and challenges archetypal patterns. Feminist theology highlights her autonomy and devotion as empowering, psychoanalysis underscores her representation of desire's limitlessness, and *rasa* theory elucidates how her story engages core emotional aesthetics of Hindu culture. In all cases, Rati's iconography- as the smiling divine consort or as the weeping widow- resists a purely single interpretation, instead embodying the complex interplay of female *icchā* (will) and *samaya* (fate) in Hindu thought.

In examining Rati textually, traditionally, and theoretically, a rich portrait emerges: Rati is more than just a minor wife- goddess; she is an avatar of feminine desire itself. Sanskrit scriptures celebrate her fidelity and highlight the cosmic importance of desire (as seen in the birth of *Kumāra*). Regional practices (from Assam to Bengal) absorb her into local cults, and Southeast Asian art and literature recast her in new guises (moon goddess, epic heroine). Throughout, she serves as a cultural touchstone for discussions on sexuality, spirituality, and the place of women in religious narrative. By bringing her "desire" to center stage, these sources and frameworks collectively rewrite Rati's story as one of agency and transcendence rather than mere subservience.

In the immortal words of a Javanese kakawin: *Kāmaratih*'s spirit "symbolizes love, lust, desire, and the yearning" that energize human life. Rati thus incarnates (and incarnates again) the abiding human quest for union, reflecting changing social and spiritual values across time and space. Together, these ritual, textual, and iconographic elements establish Rati not merely as Kāma's consort but as a dominant manifestation of Śakti, whose autonomous energy generates, sustains, and activates the entire sphere of desire.

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