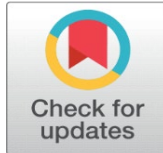
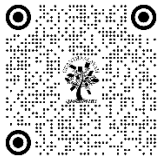


THE ICONOGRAPHY OF LORD BHAIRAVA IN LITERARY SOURCES

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the captivating realm of Lord Bhairava's iconography as portrayed in literary sources. Despite the immense power and significance of Lord Bhairava, he often resides in the shadows cast by the more widely recognized deity, Lord Shiva. Consequently, the visual representation of Lord Bhairava, characterized by its richness and intricacy, has been relatively neglected in scholarly investigations. By closely examining various literary references, this study endeavors to unravel the multifaceted aspects of Lord Bhairava's iconography, including his distinctive features, diverse forms, captivating myths, and legendary tales. Furthermore, it aims to dispel prevailing misconceptions and kindle awareness about the nature of this fierce and enigmatic deity. Employing a comprehensive analysis of literary iconography, this research illuminates the unique attributes and profound significance that Lord Bhairava holds within the realm of mythology and religious art. Through an exploration of the nuances and symbolism embedded within his depictions, this study contributes to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Lord Bhairava's representation and its broader cultural implications.

Keywords: Iconography, Bhairava, Tantra, Shiva

1. INTRODUCTION

The analysis of religious images such as paintings, mosaics, and sculptures, is known as iconography [Banerjee \(2002\)](#). This involves noting the various artistic mediums and deciphering the meaning of the images. These images, particularly in the Hindu faith, are varied and change across time and space, giving rise to countless variations in the representations of different deities. Hinduism places a high value on mythology, and it has been suggested that the precepts of Shiva's mythology, in particular, 'rest at the very heart of Hinduism' [O'Flaherty \(1981\)](#). Examining the representations produced by adherents of a particular faith can provide insight into the gods and goddesses that were worshipped as well as possible methods of worship and their societal values.

The term "iconography" is used to describe the grammar of image-making, which literally translates to "detailed description of icons" [Gupta and Asthana \(2007\)](#). According to Cambridge dictionary, the representation of ideas through pictorial or symbolic means, or the specific symbols and visuals associated with a religious or political group, etc. is known as iconography [Cambridge Dictionary. \(2023\)](#). Art historians also use the term "iconology," which literally means the science of icons. This scientific study involves more than just the identification and labelling of icons through their characteristics, stances, and positions; it also involves assessing various social, religious, literary, and personal factors. Iconography and iconology can be differentiated based on what are known as the "marks of cognisance," which can range from hairdos to head coverings, from marks on the chest to marks on the soles, from vahanas to ayudhas.

The rituals played a central role within the Hinduism tradition, and as the cult image gained increasing significance and became the focal point of devotion, they symbolized a profound departure from the Vedic emphasis on diverse forms of offerings, encompassing sacrificial practices among others [Guy \(2007\), p. 25](#). Vedism places a strong emphasis on priest-directed rituals, in which the lay devotee has no part. With the advent of the new Hindu rituals, the emphasis switched from priests to devotees, giving the latter the opportunity to actively participate in the ritual of worship. A faith based on rituals had little need for religious images; however, one based on devotion did. As Vedic rituals and sacrifices became less important, icon worship rose in prominence, resulting in the construction of temples for the new deities to be worshipped and to perform prayers and rituals to receive their grace [Guy \(2007\)](#). At the same time, the recently developed temples offered a blank canvas on which a rich iconographic and narrative legacy, mostly literary, could now be given visual expression. The stage was set for religious sculpture to be inextricably linked to the temple, incorporated into the structure itself, and made integral to the temple's function and significance.

On one level, the manifestation of the deities in their many varied forms was designed to facilitate the telling of the great creation myths and legends that form India's greatest inheritance, the ancient cosmologies [Guy \(2007\), p. 32](#). With time, iconography began to include representations of various Hindu deities. Numerous images of Shiva, his sons Ganapati and Kartikeya, Vishnu's avatars, Krishna legends, and Devi tales started to appear on the walls of temples. Shiva, as the celestial dancer Nataraja and the slayer of innumerable demons, became the most frequently depicted deity among all of these in iconography.

2. LORD SHIVA: THE SUPREME ASCETIC

See the god!

See him who is higher than the gods!

See him who is Sanskrit of the North

And Southern Tamil and the four Vedas!

See him, who bathes in milk and ghee,

See the Lord; see him, who dances, holding fire,

In the wilderness of the burning-ground,

See him who blessed the hunter-saint!

See him who wells up as honey

In the heart-lotus of his lovers!

See him who has the unattainable treasure!

See Siva! See him who is our treasure

Here in Civapuram!

(Translated by [Raasamanickanar \(2011\)](#))

Lord Shiva is revered as the destroyer, preserver, and creator because he brings about the renewal of creation and ends the Hindu cosmic cycle. He wears his hair in a chignon with curls and has a vertical third eye in the middle of his forehead. He is frequently pictured with four arms, a trident, and a string of beads as a representation of his teachings. The Padma Purana, specifically in Uttara Khanda, Chapter 57, acknowledges that the beads, known as Rudraksha beads, are referred to in reverence to Lord Shiva's original name, Rudra. It is mentioned that these beads are formed from the tears shed by Lord Shiva, and they hold great spiritual and healing properties. The name "Rudraksha" is derived from the combination of two words, "Rudra" (one of the names of Lord Shiva) and "aksha" (tear). Shiva is revered as the ascetic god who, while meditating, is ferocious, passionate, and loving at other times [Storl \(2004\)](#). He produces and destroys the universe in his capacity as Lord of the Dance. His cosmic dance depicts the cycles of creation and destruction that occur in the world, in the lives of people, and in the histories of nations [Menon \(2019\)](#). Shiva is also represented in the inner sanctum of his temples by a phallic symbol known as a linga. It is in this form that he is most frequently found [Stutley \(2019\)](#). Shiva devotees consider him to be the greatest deity who holds and governs all of creation [Vanamali \(2013\)](#).

The Vajasaneyi-Samhita of the White Yajur Veda includes Shiva as an epithet of Rudra [Kashyap \(2012\)](#). In all hymns, Rudra is glorified and depicted as a malevolent god who causes destruction to humans and animals. Therefore, the hymnists implore him specifically to alleviate his fury towards them, protect their families and livestock, and simultaneously destroy the possessions of their enemies. The hymns vividly describe Rudra's physical features, including his complexion variously described as tawny or fair, a beautiful chin, gold jewelry, youthfulness, and hair styled in a spiral braid. Other hymns depict Rudra carrying a bow and arrows, as well as possessing a thunderbolt. It is important to note that Siva-Rudra, a later addition to the Hindu triad, is currently known by various epithets [Rao \(2017\)](#). One of the names attributed to Shiva is Bhairava, meaning that Lord Shiva manifests as Lord Bhairava or Lord Bhairon.

3. BHAIRAVA: THE RULER OF THE UNIVERSE

Holding the trident its prongs flashing like the rays of the sun with resounding drum in hand,

He came in the guise of Kaal-Bhairava;

He ripped apart the elephant's skin,

Seeing Uma shrink in fear His beautiful mouth widened into laughter...

Thus, did he shower his grace; the beautiful lord of Tirucheraï

-Appar

(Translated by Dr. Vidya Dehejia, The Sensuous and the Sacred: Chola bronzes from South India, 2002 [Dehejia et al. \(2002\)](#))

Vijnanabhairava Tantra states that Bhairava is the synonym for the supreme reality (Parama Shiva). Bhairava is the one who strikes fear and eliminates the sense of self. The term Bhairava is composed of three parts: Bha, ra, and Va. Bha stands for Bharana, which is the act of sustaining the universe; ra symbolizes Ravana, the act

of withdrawing the universe; and Va represents Vamana, the process of releasing or projecting the universe, which is also known as manifestation. The three elements of the divine, namely Sristhti (manifestation), sthiti (maintenance), and samhara (withdrawal) are all represented by Bhairava [Singh \(2003\)](#).

Lord Bhairava is widely worshipped by Tantrics and yogis in order to acquire numerous siddhis. Bhairon is revered as both the kotwal and the protector. Lord Bhairava, being the Lord of Rahu in astrology, is worshipped by people in order to maximise the effects of Rahu. The Tantras state that before beginning any tantric ritual, all tantric practitioners must seek the permission of the great Lord Bhairava. Any tantric ceremony must include singing mantras in praise of Bhairava and invoking him. There are numerous literary sources such as Shiv Purana, Vijnana Bhairava Tantra, Rudrayamal Tantra, Kurma Purana etc. that mention Bhairava. In some interpretations, he is Shiva himself; in others, he is Shiva's son; in others, he is a form of Vishnu; and in very few instances, he is an independent deity. According to tantric ritualistic texts, he is known by various names, such as Akash Bhairava, Swarnakarshana Bhairava, Pataal Bhairava, etc. According to the Tantras, Lord Bhairava assumed a variety of forms, including Ekadash-Rudra, Baavan Bhairava, Khshetrapal Bhairava, Betaal, etc. Apart from these, he also assumed the form of the Bhairavas associated with the Dashamahadivyas. [Nagar \(1998\)](#)

Figure 1



Figure 1 Bhatuk Bhairava, Vijaya Nagar School, 13th Century, Benares Hindu University Museum

Source

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/78/Batuka_Bhairava%2C_Vijay_Nagar_School%2C_13th_century_CE%2C_Benaras_Hindu_University_Museum.jpg

Siva's ferocious form, Bhairava, is known by numerous names. He embodies the transcendence and terror of Siva [Kramrisch \(1981\)](#), p. 471. He is the Purna Roopa, or complete form, of Shiva, but he exhibits appalling traits that are not appropriate for an all-powerful deity. His name is a translation of the Sanskrit word bhiru, which means afraid or timid. The way that Bhairava should look is debatable at best because there isn't a single image that accurately captures the terrifying mystery that is Bhairava. He has long, matted black hair, is occasionally encircled by flames, is as black as Kala, and has a sly smile on his face, according to some, while others think he is stern and fat [Kramrisch \(1981\)](#), p. 297. According to yet other literary sources, he possesses fiery hair, a necklace made of skulls, and a serpent wrapped

around his neck Knappert (1991), p. 49. The variety of Bhairava's physical characteristics attests to his enigmatic, mystifying presence. Some parallels between literary descriptions of Bhairava include his general lack of clothing, whether it is nakedness or filthy rags emphasizing his nakedness, and his fangs that shine whenever he smiles Kramrisch (1981), p. 297. In his left hand, he holds a skull, a damaru (drum), a trishula (noose), and a pasha (noose) Knappert (1991), p. 49. It seems strange for a heavenly god like Shiva to have such a terrifying form. The myths of how Shiva took the form of Bhairava will clarify the complexity and apparent peculiarities of this mystery.

4. BHAIRAVA IN LITERARY SOURCES

Bhairava is deemed the Purnarupa, or the full form, of Shiva in the Shiva Purana Shastri (2002). Those with minds deceived by Maya cannot comprehend Bhairava's superiority and choose not to revere him. He is given the name "Bhairava" for his position as the Guardian of the Universe (Bharana) and because of his frightening demeanour (Bikshana). He is renowned by many names such as Kalabhairava, for even Kala (the God of Death) quakes in his presence; Amarddaka for vanquishing the wicked; and Papabhakshana for devouring the sins of his worshippers. He is the sovereign of Kashi City.

Bhairava is connected to Lord Shiva's Brahmasiraschchedhakamurti form in the Varaha Purana Shastri (2013). It is mentioned that this manifestation of Shiva severed Brahma's fifth head. Brahma created Rudra, and to insult him, he addressed him as Kapali. Shiva was offended and used his left thumbnail to cut off the fifth head of Brahma, yet the head remained firmly attached to his hand. In desperation, Rudra turned to Brahma for guidance on how to remove the head sticking out of his palm. In response, Brahma advised Rudra to lead a Kapalika life for a period of twelve years, after which the head would, he assured him, fall off. Rudra journeyed across the globe, adorning himself with a sacred thread of hair, a necklace made of bone beads, a skull ornament affixed to his Jatamukuta, and a skull filled with blood in his hand. He visited all the holy places along the way. At the completion of his 12th year, Rudra arrived at Varanasi, where Brahma's skull was removed from his grasp. The place where the head landed was named Kapala Mochana. Subsequently, Rudra took a dip in the Ganges, venerated Vishveshvara at Kashi, and then went back to Kailasa Shastri (2013).

Figure 2



Figure 2 Brahmasiraschchedhakamurti

Source

https://hi.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E0%A4%AD%E0%A5%88%E0%A4%B0%E0%A4%B5#/media/%E0%A4%9A%E0%A4%BF%E0%A4%A4%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%B0:Bhairava_Brahma.jpg

[The Kurma-Purana \(1998\)](#) presents a somewhat different version of this story. Once, Rishis posed a question to Brahma inquiring who had created the universe. Brahma proclaimed it was him. Just then, Shiva showed up and asserted he was the creator of the universe, causing an argument to break out between Brahma and Shiva. The Vedas, manifested in physical form, declared Shiva to be the supreme deity, yet Brahma did not accept this. Then, a huge illumination appeared with a discernible figure of Shiva. Shiva commanded Bhairava to sever Brahma's fifth head due to his arrogance and lack of respect. Through his yogic powers, Brahma escaped death and also learned Shiva's supremacy by sacrificing one of his heads.

[The Kurma-Purana \(1998\)](#) mentions the Bhairava form in another story that is associated with the chastisement of Andhakasura. After the chastisement of Andhakasura, Shiva commanded the Matrikas and Bhairava to return to Patala-loka, the tamasic and destructive Vishnu Nrisimha's residence. They followed through on this as they should, but very quickly Bhairava—who was simply an amsa of Shiva—merged with Shiva, leaving the Matrikas all by themselves and without any means of support. For the sake of sustaining themselves, they started destroying everything in the cosmos. The Matrikas' destructive essence was afterwards abstracted from them after Bhairava pleaded to Nrisimha for help.

Tantric Bhairava sadhana [Bahal \(n.d.\)](#), in the second adhyaya, tells the story of Bhairava Nath's form. According to this text, Lord Shiva incarnated in the form of Kaal Bhairava to teach Lord Brahma about his growing ego. This incarnation of Lord Shiva is considered the best of all the incarnations.

According to the Mahesvarakhanda of [The Skanda Purana \(1950\)](#), Lord Kartikeya was once asked by Sage Agatsya to recount the tale of Lord Bhairava Nath's incarnation and his abilities. Lord Kartikeya goes on to explain that some sages once asked the gods, "Who is the greatest of the gods?" All the gods looked at Lord Brahma to answer since he was the only one who was expected to give an acceptable response. At that time, drowned in ego, Lord Brahma claimed to be the greatest of the gods as he was the creator of the universe. Ritudeva, a form of Lord Vishnu, was also present there at the time. He, in his anger, claimed to be the greatest, as he was the preserver of the universe. Both the gods started quarrelling, and the arguments got so out of hand that none of the gods were able to pacify them. All the gods suggested that instead of arguing, they should ask the Vedas about who is the greatest of the gods, as the Vedas are the essence of knowledge and the oldest of the Granthas. They proceeded to ask the Vedas, and the Vedas claimed Lord Shiva to be the best of the divine beings. Except for Lord Brahma, everyone agreed with the Vedas. In his ego and anger, Lord Brahma insulted Lord Shiva and refused to recognise him as the greatest god. Suddenly, a pillar of fire emerged between Lord Brahma and Ritudeva. A boy emerged from that pillar, and the fifth head of Brahma asked him who he was. After getting questioned, the boy started crying, and Brahma, who in his ego thought that this boy emerged from his fifth head, named him Rudra as he was crying. After hearing this, the young boy turned into a majestic man. Still believing that the man emerged from his fifth head, Lord Brahma started showering him with boons and gave him the name Bhairava. He made Bhairava the guardian of the city of Kashi. Feeling insulted, Bhairava chopped off the fifth head of Brahma that was still hurling insults at Shiva. Lord Brahma realised his mistake, and all the gods started singing praises of Bhairava.

Kaal Bhairava Ashtakam [Koushik \(2018\)](#) gives a detailed description of Lord Kaal Bhairava. It also links the Kaal Bhairava form of Shiva with the Brahmasiraschchedaka murti legend. Lord Kaal Bhairava is mentioned as a

fearsome aspect of Lord Shiva, who is the protector of the city of Kashi. Brahma once slandered Lord Shiva and his fifth head mockingly laughed at him. Lord Kaal Bhairava emerged from Shiva and severed Lord Brahma's fifth head. Shiva forgave Brahma at the behest of Lord Vishnu. Nevertheless, Kaal Bhairava was pursued everywhere for the transgression of beheading Lord Brahma. Additionally, Brahma's head was stuck to him. Kaal Bhairava entered the city of Benares in order to escape the sin and punishment that were pursuing him. Sin was unable to enter the city. Thus, Kaal Bhairava was made the Kotwal of Banaras. Lord Kaal Bhairava rides a dog, and a visit to the Kaal Bhairava temple is a requirement for each pilgrimage to Kashi. Another story in the Kaal Bhairava Ashtakam identifies Kaal Bhairava with another form of Shiva, Veerbhadra, the destroyer of the sacrifice of Daksha.

The Kali Khanda of the Shaktisangam Tantra [Bhattacharyya \(1932\)](#) mentions the story of Bhatuk Bhairava. A demon named Apad had obtained a boon by performing severe penance. Because of which he became invincible to all the gods and goddesses. One of his boons was that he could only be killed by a boy who was five years old. Due to the demonic atrocities of the demon, there was oppression in all three worlds. The Devas were deeply troubled by his atrocities. Because of these difficult circumstances, all of the gods resolved to destroy Apad and began devising plans to obtain and save the three worlds. Suddenly, a stream of light came out of each of their bodies. The streams of light met at a point, and a five-year-old boy emerged who was named Bhatuk. This boy killed the demon Apad.

5. ICONOGRAPHY OF BHAIRAVA

The Iconography of Bhairava is an important aspect of religious art in Hinduism, as it is one of the most popular forms of religious symbolism. In most depictions, Bhairava is shown with four hands, holding a trident, a drum, a skull, and a serpent. He is often depicted as a wild-looking figure with unkempt hair, a third eye, and a crown of skulls. The skull and the trident are symbols of his power and his ability to vanquish his enemies. His drum symbolizes the sound of destruction, and the serpent is a symbol of transcendence and liberation. Bhairava's iconography is an important part of Hindu art, as it serves to remind devotees of the power of this god and the importance of adhering to his principles. Many different written accounts portray Lord Bhairava, and each of these accounts has its own unique illustration of his looks.

Tantrasara [Bhattacharya \(1938\)](#) furnishes us with a few general depictions of his form. Typically, he is portrayed as unclothed, having three eyes, and having hair in disarray. His skin is usually of a red hue, and his symbols are the kettle drum, sword, noose, and trident. Generally, he is shown to be riding a hound, accompanied by a multitude of demons and spirits.

Rudra Yamala Tantra [Tripathi \(1994\)](#) describes the iconography of Swarnakarshana Bhairava and Akash Bhairava. Swarnakarshana Bhairava is depicted as having a golden complexion, seated beneath a Mandara tree on a ruby-studded Simhasana, and with a gem-studded bowl full of gold coins. His four hands hold Pasha, Ankusha, Varada, and Abhaya. Pakshiraja, more commonly known as Akash Bhairava or Sharabheshwara, is mentioned in the Rudra Yamala Tantra as a form of Lord Bhairava. He is said to have three eyes, sharp claws, and two wings, as well as two faces, sharp hair, and is often seen drinking blood. He is naked and adorned with snakes and has many arms and eight feet. Sometimes he is depicted with the face of a parrot and the body of a lion.

Figure 3**Figure 3** Sharabheshwara/Akash BhairavaSource <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharabha#/media/File:NarasimhaHara.JPG>

The Vishnudharmottara Purana Kramrisch (1993) provides a thorough description of Bhairava. It is said that Bhairava should have a bulging belly, round yellow eyes, fangs on the sides, wide nostrils, and wear garland of skulls. He should have snakes as ornaments. In addition to these, there should also be other decorations. Bhairava's complexion should be dark like a rain cloud, and he should be wearing robes made of elephant skin. He must have many arms, each carrying various weapons, and he should be portrayed as frightening Parvati with a snake.

According to Rupamandanam Sankhyatirtha (1936), Vatuka-Bhairava is said to have eight arms, six of which hold Khatvanga, Pasha, Sula, Damaru, Kapala, and one serpent. He should be depicted with one of his hands holding a piece of flesh and the other hand in the abhaya mudra. Additionally, there should be a dog of the same hue as the master placed near the Bhairava. Meditating on this form of Bhairava is said to fulfill all of the wishes of the devotees. Vakuta-Bhairavakalpa says that this aspect of Bhairava requires a red-coloured jata, three eyes, and a red body. He must hold a sula, a pasha, a damaru, and a kapala in his hands and ride a dog. Vatuka Bhairava must be unclothed and encircled by hordes of demons on all sides. Swarnakarshana Bhairava should have a bright yellow complexion, four arms, and three eyes, and be dressed in a yellow robe. He should be decorated with a variety of jewelry and be revered by all the gods. His appearance is intended to represent absolute joy and majestic power. He holds in his hands chamara and tomara, vessels filled with gold and precious stones, and a large sula rests on his shoulders Sankhyatirtha (1936).

Adi Shankara wrote the lovely Sanskrit hymn Kala Bhairava Ashtakam Koushik (2018). It has eight stanzas, which is typical for an Ashtakam. The hymn perfectly captures the characteristics of the Kashi-born god of death, Kaala Bhairava. According to this hymn, Bhairava should be naked, hideous, sporting protruding teeth and have dark complexion. He is also adorned with a moon on his forehead, interwoven snakes as his sacred thread, a garland of skulls, and bells around his waist. He has three eyes, a blue neck, and holds a trident, a stick, a spear, and a chord as weapons. He has a shiny body and wears gem-studded sandals. The Ashtakam goes on to explain how his terrifying laughter causes the entire creation to tremble, how he has complete authority over all ghosts, goblins, and ghouls, how the fierce Tandava dance destroys evil while also granting emancipation to pious souls.

Vijnana Bhairava Tantra Singh (2003) describes Bhairava as one holding a trident and wearing skulls as ornaments. He takes on the terrifying and dark form of a moonless night sky.

Figure 4**Figure 4** Bhairava, 12th century, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya**Source**

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhairava#/media/File:Karnataka,_periodo_hoyasala,_bhairava,_xii_secolo_01.jpg

The following description of Brahmasiraschchedakamurti can be found in Sritatvanidhi (as cited in [Rao \(2017\)](#)). This depiction of Shiva should feature a white complexion, three eyes, four arms, a Jatamukuta, a Patra kundala in the right ear, and a Nakra kundala in the left ear. He holds a vajra and Parashu in his right hand and the skulls of Brahma and Sula in his left. It should be dressed in tiger skin garments.

Kaal Bhairava Chalisa [Shree Bhairav Chalisa. \(n.d.\)](#) describes Lord Bhairava as the beloved of Kali and the guardian of the city of Kashi. Lord Shiva took the form of Bhairava for the sake of the world. Lord Kaal Bhairava has a Jatamukuta and wears a crescent moon on his forehead. He holds a trident, a damaru, and a spear, and wears a waistband with jingling bells dangling from it. He has a dark complexion and red eyes. He sits on a gem-studded throne and wears a tiger-skin garment. He has three eyes and is accompanied by his dog, Svan.

The Rudra Yamala Tantra [Tripathi \(1994\)](#) also provides an iconographic account of the Chausath Bhairavas. Several texts describe eight Bhairavas or Ashta Bhairavas, and these forms are further divided into eight subsidiary forms for a total of sixty-four. The group headed by Asitanga Bhairava should have golden complexions, and attractive limbs, and be equipped with the trishula, damaru, pasa, and Khadaga. The Bhairavas of the group led by Ruru Bhairava should be completely white, adorned with ruby-set jewelry, and be furnished with an akshamala, an ankusha, a pustaka, and a vina. The third group is led by Chanda Bhairava. All of these must be attractive and blue in colour. They should hold Agni, Shakti, Gada, and Kunda in their hands. The members of the Krodha group should all be carrying Khadaga, Khetaka, long swords, and parashu. They're all smoky hues. The Bhairavas of Unmatta Bhairava's group wear white, they must be attractive, and they hold the kunda, ketaka, parigha (a kind of club), and Bhindipala in their hands. The Kapala Bhairava group is yellow and holds the same weapons as the group before. The Bhairavas of Bheeshana Bhairava's group are all red and have the same set of

weapons as the group before them. The members of Samhara Bhairava's group are lightning-colored and bear the same weapons as the group above.

Chaturvarga Chintamani of Hemadri [Siromani \(1873\)](#) described him as having a potbellied figure, round eyes, a terrifying face, fangs, and broad nostrils. Even his consort, who is standing by his side, is frightened by him because of the skull garland and snake jewellery he is wearing. He has elephant hide covering the darker-coloured upper half of his body. He possesses all destructive weapons as well as a large number of arms.

According to the text Shilpasara [Sastri \(1995\)](#), the goddess hugs him tightly as he sits on a jewel-encrusted throne beneath the celestial tree Mandara. The same source cites three forms of Bhairava: Samhara, Govinda, and Panchavaktra Bhairava. The Govinda Bhairava has four arms and is holding the mace, conch, and drinking cup. He is young, tranquil, and naked, and he has three eyes. The goddess Vaishnavi-Shakti is by his side, and the bird Garuda is his mode of transportation. The Panchavaktra Bhairava is five-faced and has ten arms. His weapons are the Vaishnavite conch and the sword.

Kaal Bhairava is described in Shilpasara as having a belt of tiny bells around his waist and holding a sword, a trident, a drum, and a cup in each hand. He has a frightening face with protruding teeth, a skull garland, and dishevelled hair.

The text Bhairava Siddhi [Jha \(2015\)](#) gives a detailed description of the form of Bhairava. The author divides the form of Bhairava into three. All three letters of the word "Bhairava," namely "Bha," "Ra," and "Va," have different meanings and represent different forms of Lord Bhairava. The image of the "Bha" Bhairava has a dark complexion and has one face and four hands. He is sitting in Bhadrasana, holding a bow and arrow and Abhaya hasta. The image of "Ra" Bhairava also has a dark complexion and wears red clothes. He has five faces and rides a lion. He holds Khadaga, Kheta, Ankusha, Gadha, Pasha, Trishula, Varada, and Abhaya hasta in his eight hands. The image of "Va" Bhairava has a white complexion and is adorned with white clothes. He sits on a lotus, holding Abhaya and Varada hasta and two lotuses in his four hands. These three forms depict the Rajasik, Tamasic, and Satvik forms of Lord Bhairava, respectively.

The text Bhairava sadhana [Bahal \(n.d.\)](#) further subdivides the forms of Bhatuka Bhairava into Satvik, Rajasik, and Tamasic. The Satvik form is childlike and has a fair, radiant complexion. He wears gem-studded anklets and holds Trishula and Danda in his hands. The Rajasik form of Bhairava is like the rising sun; he is three-eyed and wears a garland of blood. He holds the skull, Trishula, Abhaya, and Varada Hasta. He is adorned with a crescent moon in his jata and wears many jewels. He has a blue neck. The tamasic Bhairava has a blue complexion and is adorned with a pearl and chandrakala necklace. He has three eyes and holds Damaru, Ankusha, Khadaga, Shula, Abhaya Mudra, Svarna, Ghanta, and the skull in his hands. He has scary-looking teeth and is also shown wearing skin and anklets.

According to the Sri Netra Tantra [Chaturvedi \(2003\)](#), Bhairava is depicted as having five faces, seated on a corpse, possessing ten limbs, being the reliever of fear, resembling a mass of night blossoms, and delivering a loud and terrifying roar, as the last clap of thunder. With his gaping fanged mouth and frightening brows, sitting atop a lion's seat, and wearing a rosary of skulls and wearing a garment fashioned from elephant hide with the moon serving as a diadem, Bhairava is depicted carrying a skull bowl, a skull staff, a cleaver, and a goad in his hands. These attributes are symbolic of his role in bestowing blessings and alleviating fears. Bhairava, revered as a magnificent hero, prominently wields a battle axe and a Vajra.

Iconographic descriptions of Veerabhadramurti can be found in the Sritatvanidhi (as cited in Rao (2017)). It should possess three eyes, a fierce countenance complete with intimidating side tusks, and four arms. Bow and Ghada should be grasped by the left hand, while Khadaga and Bana should be grasped by the right. The figure should be adorned with a garland of skulls and perched atop a pair of sandals. There should be a figure of Bhadrakali alongside the one of Veerbhadra. Daksha should be depicted on Veerbhadra's right side, with his hands in the Anjali position and a goat-like head with two eyes and horns.

The Karanagama Shastry (2020) portrays Veerabhadramurti in a somewhat different way. It recommends that the icon of Veerbhadra should be depicted as having four arms, three eyes, flames emanating from its head, tusks on the side, a necklace of skulls and bells, a snake-yajnopavita, and attractive anklets. It should also be standing, wearing sandals and shorts. Veerbhadra should have a red complexion, a stern expression on his face, and a terrific appearance. He needs to have Khadaga, Khetaka, Dhanush, and Bana with him. This image's erection is thought to erase all major sins and heal all diseases in those who perform it.

Various names of Bhairava refer to his physical features. Some of these names include: Asitanga (one with black limbs), Vishalaksha (one with big eyes), Martanda (one who shines brightly), Sacharachara (holder of chara and achara), Jatadhara (one with dreadlocks), Vishvaroop (one with a worldly form), Virupaksha (eyes without form), Nanarupadhara (one who takes multiple forms), Vajrahasta (thunderbolt holder), Mahakaaya (one with a magnified body), Neelakantha (one with a blue neck), Mundamala (one who wears a garland of skulls), Pingalekshana (one with yellow or brown eyes), Ugraroopa (one with an angry face), Trinetra (one with three eyes), Kapala (skull wearer or holder), Shashi Bhushana (one who adorns himself with the moon), Hasticharmambaradhara (one who wears elephant skin), Atiriktanga (one with extra body parts), Vishalanka (one with big body parts), Virat (one who is huge), Kharparashine (one who wears skulls), Kankalaya (one who is like a skeleton), Bahunetraya (one with many eyes), Shulapanaye (one who holds a Shula), Khadagapanaye (one who holds a sword), Dhumralochanaya (one whose eyes are filled with smoke), Nagaharaya (one who wears snakes as his garland), Vyomakeshaya (one whose hair is like space), Kapalamaline (one who wears a garland of skulls), Bahuveshaya (one who takes many forms), Pandulochanaya (one with yellow or reddish yellow eyes), Sarpayuktaya (one whose body is covered with snakes), Mundabhushitaya (one whose ornaments are skulls), Pita Varna (one with a yellow body), and Chaturbahu (one with four arms), Prasanarupaya (one with a smiling face), Balaroopaya (one with the form of a child), Dvibhuja (one who is double-armed), Bhujatrayasushobhita (one who is three-armed), Svarnahastaya (one who has golden hands), Purnachandrapratika (one who has the form of a full moon), Svarnaalankar (one who is adorned with gold ornaments), Svarnakanthaya (one who has a golden neck), Svarnasimhasanasthaya (one who sits on a golden throne), Svarnapadaya (one who has golden feet), Svarnajanghaya (one who has golden thighs), Kalpavrishasvarupina (one who looks like the Kalpa tree), Gangadhara (one who holds the Ganga), and Chandradhara (one who has the moon as his ornament) Tripathi (1994).

6. CONCLUSION

The diverse manifestations and characteristics attributed to Lord Bhairava serve as a reflection of the intricate mythology and symbolism associated with him, as well as his multifaceted roles within Hindu texts and narratives. While Lord Bhairava is often depicted as fierce and formidable in textual references, a closer

analysis reveals his true nature as a righteous and benevolent deity. Despite his association with tantric practices, which has led to apprehension among the general population regarding his worship, Lord Bhairava is gravely misunderstood as belonging to a malevolent divine realm. Contrary to popular perception, the iconography associated with Lord Bhairava, which predominantly portrays him as a ferocious god, does not accurately represent his inherent benevolence. The examination of Lord Bhairava's iconography in literary sources provides a unique lens through which we can comprehend the intricate and multifaceted nature of Hindu religious ideologies and rituals. Thus, the study of Lord Bhairava's various forms and attributes as depicted in literature becomes an essential tool in unravelling the evolution of Hinduism in the context of Indian culture. This research paper serves as a foundation for further exploration into the iconography of obscure and esoteric deities, contributing to the broader understanding of Hindu religious practices and their artistic expressions.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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