

FESTIVAL OF THE SEASON: SHARADIYA DURGOTSAV

Behold the Mother

by Dr Mahanambrata Brahmachari

Sakti does exist and Sakti alone has genuine existence. All the objects of the universe are various conglomerations of one Sakti. Though manifold in appearance Sakti is essentially one. Unlike electromagnetic energy of modern science, Sakti of Tantra is ever conscious, merciful, compassionate and most affectionately disposed towards the created beings as a warmhearted Mother.

SHE has come. Our Mother has come to us. With all Her grandeur and greatness, with all Her magnanimity and majesty, with all Her retinue and resources, come before Her humble children, who are constantly suffering and earnestly longing for happiness and joy both here and hereafter. It is incumbent that we should welcome Her for realising the significance of Her august visit and having the shower of spiritual blessing that she wants to bestow on us.

To being with very concept of the Motherhood of Divinity — it is a unique conception in Hindu thought, most tender and lofty, most cordial and catholic in significance. The Supreme Being, however, great and vast, comes, when the thought of as a Mother, close to our heart and as its consequence motivates us to embrace all mankind with a deep feeling of fraternity. Affectionate reverence for the creator and passionate love for the created ones are the twin-born idealities that springs forth out of the realisation of Motherhood in Godhead. This sublime concept with all its idealism and universality we owe to the Tantric lore of our cultural heritage.

Tantra and Vedanta: Tantra represents the scientific mode of thinking of our ancestors and the Vedanta stands for their philosophic outlook. The Vedanta aims at a synthetic grasping of the Truth in its integrality whereas Tantra endeavours to reach the same goal by analytic factorisation of the cosmic existence. The highest achievement of the Vedanta is Brahmanvada and that of Tantra is Saktivada. The former is highly abstract and the latter is tangibly concrete.

Ultimate Matrix: The ultimate and essential matrix of this cosmos is Chaitanya, say the Rishis of Vedanta. But the Tantra upholds that to be Sakti. Sakti is a peculiar notion that can never be denied. One can, if he so wishes, deny God or deny absolute Brahman, but nobody can by any means say even verbally that Sakti does not exist since its denial presupposes its existence.

Sakti does exist and Sakti alone has genuine existence. All the objects of the universe are various conglomerations of one Sakti. Though manifold in appearance Sakti is essentially one. Unlike electromagnetic energy of modern science, Sakti of Tantra is not inert or dead. She is ever conscious. Merciful, compassionate and most affectionately disposed towards the created beings even as a warmhearted Mother. She is all and she permeates all that exist. She is matter and the matrix. She is spirit and ever matronly. She resides in every object as the life and soul of the total existence. Such is our Mother.

From the Mahalaya on we prepare ourselves for the vision of Visvarupa in the Mother even as Arjuna did in Sri Krishna. In Pitri-pakha we invoke our forefathers and seek their blessings so that we may have real darsana of the essential unity and the unifying principle of the universe in the Mother. Now she is come. Let us behold her.

Many in One: The concepts of many-in-one and one-in-many are made corporeal in the delightful person of the Divine Mother. In her facial expression is manifested Shiva, genuine essence of goodness. Mother's arms are Vishnu, the cosmic power which upholds and preserve all quarters. Her feet are Brahma, the dynamic principle that constitutes the essence of creativity. The earth is her lap on which we move and rest our being. Her fingers show solar energy. So we see entire universe in the Mother's person. As Arjuna beheld Visvarupa. So do we gaze at the Mother with wonder and receive a vision of the totality of existence in her.

She stands of the animal power and destroys the demons. Animality is kept under her feet for subjugation and the demonic powers are done away with for the purpose of sublimation. The touch of Mother's weapons elevates their lives. Even in the most cruel act of devastating. Her all-composing mercy is eternally manifest. She is tender and terrible, killer and healer, all-consuming and all-

embracing at the same time. She is beautiful and dreadful, all-bounteous and all-devouring. As extremes meet in Her infinitude.

The two sides of the Mother are adorned by the energies of wealth and wisdom — the vigor of physical and spiritual necessities of man. The occupier of the two extreme borders are Kartikeya and Ganapati, the defensive and creative energies respectively. The militant Kartikeya maintains the status and benignant Ganesh brings about fulfillment in all collective efforts towards social welfare. Kalabou is a deity of fine arts and standing by the side of Ganapati, indicates the fact that the development of arts and crafts demands social solidarity.

The Devi comes as a Mother but strangely enough She leaves as a daughter on the fourth day. Her motherly countenance is changed in to a daughterly one and the elderly ones of the household shed tears to let their beloved daughter go with her husband Shiva for a long period of twelve months. The pangs of separation of the devotees, whose hearts are than full of parental affection, are keenly felt.

Motherland: The Divine Mother is also a living symbol of our beloved motherland. In times of yore the mother Sati, Chastity Incarnate, was the daughter of one Daksha Prajāpati, who once conducted a big sacrifice in which all but Shiva the Goodness was invited and as Sati came there unwanted, Daksha spoke ill of Shiva and could not bear it and passed on instantaneously. Ruthlessly did Shiva demolish the sacrifice and mournfully he took Sati's body on His shoulder and roamed sprightly about all over the country. Vishnu by his Chakra sliced the body into fifty-one pieces that fell scattered all over the land and gave rise to 51 Peethasthanas or divine places.

To sum up, we worship Maha-Sakti devotee as the great cosmic energy ever living. We adore her delightfully as the Divine Mother ever living, we venerate her dearly as our beloved daughter, passionate and lively. We are to serve her diligently as our great motherland ever glowing and heavenly.

The first immersion of the Deity takes place ritually in a mirror that symbolises our mind. The fact indicates that all the sublime thoughts embodied in our Mother-worship should be distinctly impressed on the mirror of our mind stuff, so that we may translate them into action. May our invocation, adoration and immersion be significantly meaningful and vitally needful in our daily living.

Mother Durga and Her Retinue

EIGHT figures are there in the set-up of Mother Durga, as she is worshipped. Mother remains in the middle as the presiding Deity. Lakshmi and Ganesh are on her right side; Saraswati and Kartick, in the left. A lion is beneath her feet. The Demon Mahisasur (in the form of a buffalo) in front somewhat on her left side and Kalabou, on her extreme right. Let me now try to explain the philosophical significance underlying these figures separately.

Mother Durga: Mother attained the name 'Durga' on killing a demon named 'Durgam' mention of which can be found in the sacred book 'Sri Sri Chandi'. The demon Durgam inflicts sorrow and suffering upon living beings. Mother kills the demon and relieves them of afflictions. Though symbolic, in reality it is people's blind selfishness and ignorance, obstructing spiritual attainment, that cause them to suffer enormously, being under the spell of Maya (delusion). Mother Durga destroys the ignorance by her sword of knowledge and arouses good intentions among people.

The term 'Durga' signifies also 'incomprehensible', that is, the spiritual truth about her is very difficult to be comprehended. Only her celestial grace enables one to know her.

Mother Durga wages war



against the demons out of compassion for her offsprings, the living beings. Mother has ten hands, signifying innumerable ones holding various weapons to protect her countless offsprings.

Mother holds ten weapons in her hands; five hands are on the right holding a trident, a sword, a discus, a sharp pointed arrow and shakti; five other hands on the left holding a shield, a bow, a fetter (Pasha), a hook (Ankush) and an axe. Each weapon has its own significance. Mother destroys our material, ethereal and subtle bodies (Karan-deha) with her three-pronged spear (trident) and gives us saintly bodies. The sword is symbolic of knowledge that destroys our ignorance. Mother has placed her right leg on the back of the lion and the toes of her left leg on the shoulder (or chest) of the demon. She is the mother of the universe; she creates as 'Brahmani', preserves as 'Vaisnabi Sakti' and dissolves as 'Shivani'.

Shiva rests in her face. Vishnu in her hands and Brahma in her legs. Moon on her breast, the regent of death (Yama) in her hair, Indra (king of gods) in her waist. The energy of Varuna is on her thighs, that of earth on her posterior, that of Kuver in her nose, that of sun in the fingers of her feet and that of Basus in the fingers of her hands and of Agni (god of fire) in her three eyes. Mother is the embodiment of energies of all the gods. The various gods are limbs of her celestial body.

Although Mother is all powerful, she is affectionate too. She is fierce and at the same time graceful. The profound grace in her is the source of her universal motherhood.

Lakshmi: Sri Lakshmi emerged out of the cosmic ocean when the gods and demons churned it using Vasuki (the great snake) as the rope and Mandar hill as the axis. Ocean is called the mine of gems. Nature is also an ocean. The cultivation of land of nature yields us crops. Forest gives us wealth and the mines underneath give us gold. Commerce and business are also a form of churning ocean.

Lakshmi is the goddess of

wealth and prosperity. Devoid of riches makes one unfortunate and that of character makes one wretched. To the Sadhak (worshipper) spiritual attainment is his wealth. So he worships 'Lakshmi and Narayan'.

Lakshmi is the means of our livelihood. River is another form of Lakshmi. It is said that on being cursed, Lakshmi turned into river Padma, which has made East Bengal rich with sufficient water, sweet fruits and bumper crops.

Lakshmi's vehicle is owl, which is blind at day time. Riches usually make people blind and unconcerned of others. All good intentions to render help and services to helpless and needy, relatives and neighbours vanish as soon as one gets wealth. He turns blind like an owl.

But there are people who do not lose their eye-sight on getting riches. To them the owl gives advice, saying 'Oh, be blind, don't look at those people means. Look, I am a messenger of Yama. If you make money by unfair means, Yama, the regent of death will punish you. Think of death; nothing will go ultimately with you. So don't do unfair means to earn money.'

Those who are striving after spiritual attainment are being reminded by the owl of the message of the Geeta wherein Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that a Yogi remains awake in the sphere of realisation of God, over which all others sleep and that he sleeps over the sphere of worldly pleasures and pursuits in which all others remain awake.

Ganesh: Sri Ganesh holds in his four hands a conch, wheel, club and lotus which are also found in the hands of Lord Vishnu. In fact, Ganesh is a part incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Parvati, the Mother worshipped Lord Vishnu to get him as her son at the instance of Shiva. Vishnu also cherished a desire to be the son of the Universal Mother. This has been narrated in Brahma Balbarta Purana.

Ganesh, immediately after birth, lost his head at the evil glance of Sani (Saturn). In ancient days Sani was considered as the last of nine planets. As it

was the remotest from the sun, it had as if encircled the endless sky, symbolising infiniteness. The infinite Lord Vishnu coming to this finite world lost head. Head of an elephant which was present at the moment, was cut and joined to the truncated neck of Ganesh.

Ganesh literally means 'God of Gana' or masses. He is worshipped particularly by businessmen and workers for success in trade. He is also the leader of the masses and is called Ganapati. Masses have appetite but no brain which is signified by his big belly and head of a beast.

Though Ganesh has the head of an elephant, his vehicle is rat, a small creature which is symbolic of unity between big and small, rich and poor, high and low, which alone can en-

sure peace and prosperity in our individual, social life and salvation to his devotees and frees them from the bondage of maya (delusion). His rat possesses sharp teeth to cut those bondages.

Saraswati: Divi Saraswati represents Mother's Jnana-Sakti or power of knowledge and wisdom. As the goddess of learning, she holds in her tow hands a book and a Bina (stringed musical instrument). The book symbolises Sabda-Brahma and the Bina sweet music and rhythm or Nada-Brahma. As an embodiment of goodness and purity she has white complexion and clothes. Whiteness is indicative of spiritual revelation. Anybody in pursuit of supreme knowledge must have to be pure in body, mind and soul.



Who will Play Cupid?

POLLINATORS: small insects like bees and butterflies, animals like bats and small birds such as the hummingbird, play a big role in helping plants propagate. This unique relationship between plants and pollinators took thousands of years to develop but human intervention is destroying it swiftly. Today, pollinator deaths is leading to not only to the death of plants that depend on them but also to grave agricultural crises with frequent crop failures worldwide, which may eventually lead to famines in the not-so-distant future.

There are some quarter million flowering plant species on our planet. More than 80 per cent of them undergo pollination to produce seeds or bear fruit. Fertilisation is impossible without pollination. And though plants on the lower rungs of the evolutionary ladder, such as mosses and lichen, can propagate on their own, one in every three kinds of food crops need help.

Pollination occurs when pollen is transferred from the male sex organ of the flower, the anther, to the female organ, the stigma. In most plants, certain external agents — insects, birds, animals and in some cases, even wind and water help in this transfer. They are the pollinators or pollinating agents.

There are an estimated 120,000-200,000 invertebrate and vertebrate species that act as pollinators. Invertebrates such as honey bees, for instance, are credited for the pollination of some 100-150 major crops grown in the US, while vertebrates such as bats, hummingbirds, monkeys and many other animals and bird species are known for their roles as pollinators in different regions of the world. Together, they are crucial for maintaining plant biodiversity and boosting crop production.

Of the 1,330 cultivated crop species including fruits, vegetables, beans, coffee and tea in the world, almost all require pollinators. 'In tropical rainforests, a great deal of the biological diversity is caused by co-evolutionary relationship between the pollinating agents and the flowers that produce the seeds,' says tropical biologist Scott Mori, of the New York Botani-

cal Garden. So when, during the last few years, biologists and plant experts noticed a marked decline in the number of pollinators across the globe there was cause for concern.

Garry P Nabhan of the Arizona Desert Museum, USA, records a 70 per cent loss in Arizona's wild honey bees. European honey bees, both managed and wild, are experiencing major population declines throughout the US and other nations such as France and Germany (in the US for instance, colony numbers have plummeted from 2.5 million in 1995 to 1.9 million in just one year); and in India there is a 90 per cent decline in the native *Apis cerana*. At least seven other species of sunbirds that pollinate plants in tropical and subtropical forests are also at risk.

Australian, Indonesian, Micronesian and Polynesian hovering birds have been classified as endangered after large-scale habitat destruction. The IUCN similarly lists over 70 species of perching birds that play important pollinator roles as either threatened, endangered or probably extinct and predicts a global loss of over 20,000 flow-

The vehicle of Saraswati is a white swan which takes the milk only separating it from water. The wise and conscientious person accepts only the real object rejecting all that are unreal and transitory. Swan or 'hangsha' or 'Sho hong' means literally 'I am one with God' which is being pronounced always in the process of breathing in and out.

Brahman, the ultimate Being is boundless and limitless while living beings are very much limited within small bounds. Brahman is vast like an ocean while living being is a tiny drop of water.

Though Ganesh has the head of an elephant, his vehicle is rat, a small creature which is symbolic of unity between big and small, rich and poor, high and low, which alone can ensure peace and prosperity in our individual, social life and salvation to his devotees and frees them from the bondage of maya (delusion). His rat possesses sharp teeth to cut those bondages.

Kartick: Kartikeya is the God of powers and chivalry. He is the offspring of Shiva and Mother Sakti, Hara and Parvati, born out of deepest meditation. When Mother Sati sacrificed herself in the Yajna of Prajapati Daksha, Siva became

dead and began to dance with her dead body on his shoulder. Vishnu cut the dead body of Sati into pieces with his wheel. When Shiva became aware of this, he absorbed himself in deep meditation. Mother Sati took rebirth as Uma in the Himalayas and was also meditating Shiva. At that time Tarakasur, a fiery demon had been ravaging the heaven and the gods could not withstand him and fled away. The gods were in need of a powerful general whom they found in Kartick, the offspring of Shiva and Sakti.

Peacock is the vehicle of Kartick. Peacock cannot endure envy or jealousy. The serpent symbolises envy and jealousy. Peacock kills and devours the serpent. All that is youthful, beautiful, chivalrous, energetic and full of fortitude are symbolised in Kartick and his peacock.

The Lion and the Demon: The Lion symbolises 'Raja Guna' the energy element in all beings and things and represents the most fierce and terrific animal force. Animality in varied degree is there in every person.

Mother Durga is full of 'Suddha Sattva Guna' having purity and goodness in his entirety. Asura or the demon is the embodiment of 'Tama Guna'. The battle between Mother and Asura is the battle between two gunas, sattva and tama, in which one who has had the assistance of raja guna will be the winner.

Mother has held the lion under her feet, i.e. at her command. So victory is ensured on her side. The brutal force has all ways to be kept under rigid control and subservient to sattva guna or Mother's will to become blessed, virtuous and happy.

As per earlier interpretation the term 'Asura' is meant profusion of vital energy. The later meaning of Asura is anti sura, that does not recognise any god or goddess but possesses abundant vitality. In these days there is, no doubt, plenty of vital forces but those are unfortunately misdirected and applied to evil designs causing grave harm and distress in our social and national life. Eternal war is going on between good and bad, virtue and vice, and gods and demons. Mother, bent on welfare of all beings, strikes the demonic forces ruthlessly in order to bring them to right path, because Asuras are also her offsprings.

Kala Bou: The spiritual name of Kala Bou is Nava Patrika which means a collection of nine saplings. These are plantain, paddy, bilwa, tamaric and five others. These nine plants are fastened together with white Aparajita creeper to transform it into Kala Bou.

Collectively Kala Bou represents the entire vegetation of the world and is the symbol of Mother Durga. Through the medium of Kala Bou we offer our pranam (salutation) to Mother Durga who exists in the vegetation all over the world to maintain her countless children. We pay to her to make our life's journey smooth and peaceful and immune from evils and dangers, sorrows and sufferings.

TOM & JERRY By Hanna-Barbera

