has come to us. With all

comes, when thought of as a

Mother, close to our heart and

as its consequence motivates us to embrace all mankind with a

deep feeling of frat ernity. Af-fectionate reverence for the cre-

ator and passionate love for the

created ones are the twin-born

ideality that springs forth out

of the realisation of M'aternity

in Godhead. This sublime con-

cept with all its idealism and

universality we owe to the Tantric lore of our cultural her-

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 in-

tegrality whereas Tantra en-

deavours to reach the same goal

by analytic factorisation of the

cosmic existence. The highest

achievement of the Vedanta is

Brahmavada and that of Tantra

is Saktivada. The former is

mate and essential matrix of

this cosmos is Chaitannya, 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, derry God or decry

absolute Brahman, but nobody

can by any means say even ver-

bally that Sakti does not exist

since its denial presupposes its

alone has genuine existence. All

the objects of the universe are

various conglomerations of one

Sakti. Though manifold in ap-

pearance 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 affec-

tionately disposed towards the

created beings even as a warm-

hearted Mother. She is all and

she permeates all that exit. 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 exis-

prepare ourselves for the vision

of Viswarupa in the Mother

even as Arjuna did in Sri Kr-

ishna. In Pitri-pakha we in-

voke our forefathers and seek

their blessings so that we may

have real darsana of the essen-

tial unity and the unifying

principle of the universe in the

Mother. Now she is come. Let us

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 prin-

ciple 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

Viswarupa. So do we gaze at the

Mother with wonder and re-

ceive a vision of the totality of

power and destroys the demons.

Animality is kept under her feet

niac powers are done away with

for subjugation and the demo-

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 ten-

der and terrible, killer and

A BRITISH CRUISER

MAS LEFT THE MALDIVES ON A : TOP-SECRET MISSION

REPORTS

.. NOW TAKING

ASTERN ON

She stands of the animal

existence in her.

Many in One : The concepts

behold Her.

From the Mahalaya on we

tence. Such is our Mother.

Sakti does exist and Sakti

tangibly concrete.

existence.

highly abstract and the latter is

Ultimate Matrix: The ulti-

Tantra and Vedanta: Tantra

FESTIVAL OF THE SEASON: SHARADIYA DURGOTSAV

Behold the Mother

by Dr Mahanambrata Brahamachari

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.

Her grandeur a nd great-ness, with all I ler magnanimity and majesty, with all infinitude. The two sides of the Mother Her retinue and resour ces, the are adorned by the energies of Divine Mother has, after a pewealth and wisdom - the giver riod of long separation, come before Her humble children, of physical and spiritual neces-sities of man. The occupier of who are constantly suffering the two extreme borders are and earnestly longing for hap-piness and joy both here and Kartikeya and Ganapati, the de-fensive and creative energies respectively. The militant Kar-tikeya maintains the status and hereafter. It is incumbent that we should welcome Her for realising the significance of Her aubenignant Ganesh brings about fulfillment in all collective efgust visit and having the shower of spiritual blessing forts towards social welfare. that she wan is to bestow on us Kalabou is a deity of fine arts and standing by the side to Ganapati, indicates the fact To being with very concept of the Motherhood of Divinity - it is a unique con ception in Hindu that the development of arts and crafts demands social solithought, most i ender and lofty. most cordial and catholic in significance. The Supreme Bedarity. ing, however, great and vast

embracing at the same time.

She is beautiful and dreadful,

all-bounteous and all-devour-

ing. As extremes meet in Her

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 longperiod of twelve months. The pangs of separation of the devotees, whose hearts are than full of parental affection, are

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 Projapati, 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 devoted 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 heav-

The first immersion of the Deity takes place ritually in a mirror that symbolises our mind. The fact indicates that all the sublime thoughts embodies 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

Mother Durga and Her Retinue

IGHT figures are there in the set-up of Mother Durga, as she is worshipped. Mother remains in the middle as the presiding Deity. Lakshini 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 fig-

ures 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

CRAFT

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 offwealth and prosperity. Devoid

of riches makes one unfortu-

nate and that of character

makes one wretched. To the

Sadhak (worshipper) spiritual

attainment is his wealth. So he

worships 'Lakshmi and

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

which is blind at day time.

Riches usually make people

blind and unconcerned of oth-

ers. All good intentions to ren-

der help and services to helpless

and needy, relatives and neigh-

bours vanish as soon as one gets

wealth. He turns blind like an

not lose their eye-sight on get-

ting 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 ulti-

mately with you. So don't adopt

spiritual attainment are being

reminded by the owl of the mes-

sage 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

his four hands a conch, wheel,

club and lotus which are also

found in the hands of Lord

incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Vishnu. In fact, Ganesh is a part

Parbati, 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

birth, lost his head at the evil

glance of Soni (Saturn). In an-

cient days Soni was considered

Ganesh, immediately after

in Brahma Baibarta Purana.

Ganesh: Sri Ganesh holds in

awake.

WHAT'S SHE

GONNA LAND

SHE GONNA LAND IT, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE RUDDY

Those who are striving after

unfair means to earn money

But there are people who do

Lakshmi's vehicle is owl.

and bumper crops.

Lakshmi is the means of our

Narayan'

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 ma terial, ethereal and subtle bodies (Karan-deha) with her threepronged 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

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

was the remotest from the sun.

it had as if encircled the endless

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-

appetite but no brain which is

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

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.

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

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

mad 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 meditat ing 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

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 per-

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

Mother has held the lion under her feet, i.e at her command. So victory is ensured on her side. The brutal force has always to be kept under rigid control and subservient to sattwa 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 demonical 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, tarmaric 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 pronam (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.



Who will Play Cupid?

OLLINATORS, 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

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 ex-

perts 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 bee populations owing to the Thai sac brood dis-

At least 45 species of bats are thought to be extinct and extinction looms large for bats in Australia, Africa, North, Latin and Central America and Asia. Also, thirty-six species of nonflying mammal pollinators such as lemurs, monkeys, oilngos, kinkajous and tree squirrels may be at risk of extinction in the wild due to large-scale forest destruction, habitat fragmentation, changes in canopy structure and hunting.

The black-and-white ruffed lemur, an endangered subspecies of lemur in Madagascar. the only vertebrate with enough strength and agility to open the bracts of Ravenula madagascarencis (traveller's tree) to effect pollination, is suffering a drastic decline in its populations and is now the topmost priority of the Species Survival Commission of the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

As many as 26 species of hummingbirds face the threat of extinction and are the cause of major worldwide conservation concern. At least seven other species of sunbirds that pollinate plants in tropical and subtropical forests are also at

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 flowering plants within the next few

The consequences of pollinator decline have been serious in most nations. The US, for instance, suffered major losses in 1995 when, due to lack of pollinators and adverse weather conditions, the nation registered significant decline in its almond yield. In 1995 in New Brunswick, USA, unplanned pesticide use led to a substantial reduction of pollinators and caused a 75 per cent loss in the blueberry crop production. Translated into economics, that meant a multi-million dol-

lar setback.

There are numerous other instances of how absence of pollinators have led to massive crop failures across the planet. Cashew nut failures in north Borneo have occurred after this nut species was moved from its native habitat in Brazil, without a native pollinator to assist in pollination. A mite attack in Ontario, Canada, that affected regional pollinators, caused cherry prices to skyrocket. And that pollinator declines have been a central cause of failures of alfa alfa, apples, cranberries, pears, pumpkins, cucumbers and many other fruit and vegetable crops worldwide, is known to every biologist and agricultural expert.

such losses can shock any government. The value of the wild pollinators alone, to a nation like the US has been estimated at an astronomical \$ 4 billion. Economist Lawrence Southwick and his brother insect psychologist Edward, calculate that if pollinators such as honeybees were to decline at the current rate, they would drop by 50 per cent in the US and 100 per cent in the Latin America. The consequential economic impact on more than 60 US crops would reach billions of dollars annually. And if no replacement pollinators are

found, the country would likely

be losing anywhere between \$

The resultant economics of

5.7 and \$ 8.3 billion every year. A decline in the populations of most vertebrate pollinators will similarly affect agriculture. Bats, for instance, are important pollinators in the tropics, deserts, and many oceanic islands. In the arid regions North and Latin America, they pollinate most species of columnar caeti and many agave

species, while on the island of Samoa, they pollinate the majority of the dominant rainforest canopy trees. Durians, neem trees, wild bananas, timber species of eucalyptus, several species of palms and other plants of economic value are

mostly bat-pollinated. A decline in their numbers would inevitably cause an imbalance in the regional biodiversity perhaps leading to a gradual extinction of these plant species, a vivid scenario, possible anywhere a pollinator

species disappears. There are some solutions that, if implemented, can arrest pollinator decline - strong conservation measures for endangered pollinators is one such step. Conservation measures for bees, for instance, have to be implemented as widely as possible. There is a need to protect the pollinators by enacting laws that forbid all activities that might affect them and protecting migratory routes and nectar corridors of

the pollinators.

Experts also point out that pollinator replacement should be undertaken only after substantial research have been undertaken. The Himalayan native bee was replaced by a more exotic and volatile bee species, even though the native species was perfectly suited for the region's biodiversity. The result: Populations of the native species declined drastically, while the alien species failed to do any spectacular pollination or crop-production figures.

Nature reserves designed specially with plant-pollinator relationships in mind can be an important step towards arresting pollinator decline. Possibly the only wild bee reserve in the world, the Lomas Barbudal Reserve in Costa Rica was set up in the early 1980s with assistance from the University of California in Berkley, USA, to protect a community of a dozen wild bee species, which pollinate the native legume trees of the area.

All experts agree that more research on pollinators and the decline in their populations should be encouraged by governments worldwide. This is the first of a series of steps that we must take if we want to avoid further losses and save the pollinators from extinction.

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