

Durga Puja: Concept and philosophy

Worshipping the Divine Mother

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"HINDUISM as a religion is both a way of thinking and a way of living. It includes both a theory of the world and a code of life, that is to say, it is a code of life with a philosophical background. ...Hinduism believes in one ultimate spiritual reality or Universal Spirit who is self-luminous and manifests himself in many worlds and dwells in all living beings as their inner ruler or guide. This ultimate reality is the Supreme God in Hinduism. It also believes that though God is one, He has various manifestations in many gods and goddesses, any one of which may be worshipped as a form of worship of god. It believes rather in the unity of the gods in God. It finds one in all and all in one. Hinduism also holds that God can and does incarnate Himself in the world. When the moral exigency of the world requires it, God comes down to the world as a human being to save mankind and restore the moral order of the world. The theory of incarnation is stated by Lord Krishna himself in the Bhagvat Gita, "Wherever there is a decline of Dharma and rise of adharma I incarnate myself for the protection of the good, the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness... I come into being from age to age.

The world, according to Hinduism, is created, maintained and destroyed by God. The world is a moral stage on which individual souls have to play their parts and enjoy or suffer in life according to their merits or demerits.

God alone is the eternal reality and absolute. ..What distinguish Hinduism in the comity of religions are its noble ideals of spirituality and renunciation. For it, the reality of man and the world is the infinite, eternal spirit. Man is the immortal and not the mortal body. It is eternal, all-pervading, unmoved and everlasting. Hinduism calls upon one and all to hear about this transcendent self, meditate on it day and night, know it, realise it, and be free and fearless in life. This is the central teaching of the Upanisads. So says Dr S C Chatterjee in Hinduism: The Eternal Religion.

In sociological terms, man is the total circle including both the centre and circumference. He is both self and not self. Lord Krishna says, "I am the same for all beings: There is none whom I hate, none whom I favour"(The Holy Gita-ix /29). The eternal message of Hinduism which came down the time of the Vedas is: 'Ekam sad, vipra bahudha vadanti' (Truth is one sages describe it in many ways). It also believes that though God is one, He has various manifestations in many gods and goddesses, any one of which may be worshipped as Ishta devota for the supreme God (Brahma). There is the historic conflict between the religion of the absolute formless (nirakara) and the religion of personal God



(Ishtadevota) with forms (sakara). The fundamental idea of the Mother-goddess cult was the belief in a female energy as the source of all creation.

The Keno 'Upanishad' and 'Markendaya Purana' have portrayed the integrated character of Devi Durga. She is preeminently a perfect goddess, truth and beauty, omnipotent, omniscient who loves sweetly and mightily orders all things. In Sri Sri Chandī, The Mother-goddess Devi Durga says, I the only and one in the world, I have no second.'

Shri Shri Chandī has the following on the revelation of Mother-goddess Durga: "Mahishshura's way was to strike at the very roots of existence. The cosmic structure was very near collapse. The radiance, the powers, the energies, the Sakti of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva met in a flash of creation. The darkness that had settled on the world burst open in a dazzle -- and of the effulgence was born the sound and fury of blazing wrath that is Devi Durga, difficult to attain destroyer of all evils. Fiery red in hue, clad in the blue of the firmament her many arms fanned out to fill the sky as she received the martial equipment that each god separately created out of his own special weapons -- a trident from Shiva, a discus from Vishnu, staff of death from Yama, a club from Kubera, a battle axe from Vishwakarma, a thunder bolt from Indra and many more. The gods watched in wonder and relief as she went riding to battle on a rampant lion, her dreadful laughter mingling with its roar, the three worlds echoing with the sound of fury as she made her way to the Vindhalyas to seek out Mahishashura.

In a final burst of triumph, she pinned Mahishashura down with her foot, drove the trident into his heaving chest as he strove to hold back his escaping life-breath. Thus the demon met his doom, gazing into her frenzied eye; for the glance reread his doom -- and his deliverance' (Goddess of Goddesses: Shyam Lal, TOI, October 1980).

The essence of this deepest layer of Hindu religious conduct is conveyed in a prayer to the Goddess Durga : "O great Goddess Durga thou art fame, thou art prosperity, thou art steadiness, thou art success, thou art knowledge, thou art intellect; and as I bow to thee ... O Supreme Goddess grant me protection."

The devotional songs in our culture -- the devotional approach to the divine -- place the devotee himself in relation to the Godhead as a child to his parent; he seeks forgiveness for transgressions and tries to evoke the parental response. To give two illustrations: the first a short poem by Saint Kabir of fifteenth century: " Mother, I am your child why not forgive my faults?...Kabir says, it is evident child's unhappiness is the mother's pain." Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam also wrote quite a considerable number of devotional songs i.e. Shyama sangit. The second is by the Bengali poet and saint Ramprosad: "O Mother! my desires are unfulfilled, my hopes are ungratified; but my life is fast coming to an end. Let me call thee, Mother, for the last time; come and take me in thy arms ..."

These songs mirror a widespread pattern of spiritual longing for a transcendence of separation

from the Godhead. The attributes of the child (a devotee) emphasised are his yearning for infinite and unconditional love, the wish for a forgiving acceptance of his imperfections and his search for the Mother's responsive blessing. The conception of which Devi Durga is made is the stuff of eternal challenge and fight and victory over the ugliness and terror that forms the morass of the world out of which like the lotus from slush the beauty of the good arises.

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The mystic eight

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THE eighth chapter of the Saptasati Chandī throws abundance of light on the subject from another angle of vision. Let us begin from the context.

Chanda and Munda, the two generals of the demon king Sumbha, were beheaded by Chandika by her dazzling sword, and when that information reached Sumbha, he was mad with rage and very wrathfully issued an order to all his battalions to proceed to the war front and fight their utmost of win. "Pull that proud Durga by hair to my house or finish her for good" -- was the standing order of the demon king.

The mighty army, headed by

PREM RANJAN DEV

SANATAN Dharma is the most ancient and insightful among the Dharmas of the world; it is called Hinduism. Our Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas and the Gita have dealt with the philosophy extensively. This Vedic Hinduism is an unfathomable ocean. Hidden beneath its surface are the pearls of wisdom and essence of life. Many sages and great men have travelled the path to this goal of finding the truth and experiencing total enlightenment. They left behind their legacy to inspire and help mankind. At a time when interest in Hindu thought and spirituality is increasing globally and when scholars from many disciplines are discovering parallels between Hindu thinking and scientific thoughts true spirit of Hinduism seems relevant as answer to problems of relationship between man and man, and man and God; it brings man closer to man and creates love for all creations.

Sanatana Dharma explains the way for attaining liberty according to each individual stage in life. However, there are a number of concepts in Sanatana Dharma which are rarely understood in true depth. But now man's superior intellect, wisdom and inventions failed to bring a real solution to the world problems. An aggravation of all these is experienced on the other hand. Today, the confusions of the world make it, so to say, a vicious circle.

Man has created such an environment that reacts unwholesomely upon him. Mankind is terribly heading as if towards committing licentious suicide. Heart-rendering cry for peace and happiness is heard from all corners of this bewildered world. The state of affairs resembles that of the Devas in the reign of Mahisasura. In the course of the eternal strife of the Devas (gods) and Asuras (demons), the former being defeated, the latter reigned supreme in the heaven inflicting intense sufferings to the Devas.

The helpless Devas came to Brahma, the creator of their distress. Brahma, afflicted with the sorrows and sufferings of the Devas, led the commission of the gods to Vishnu and Shiva for appraisal of the grave situation and redress. The tales of intolerable atrocities of Mahisasura raged vehement anger in Vishnu and Shiva and in a feat of this their vital energies came out in the form of burning flashes. This created similar reaction among other gods whose vital energies too came out in like manner. These energies took the form of an unmatched, sublime and superb woman. She is Divine Durga. This Divine-embodiment of all spiritual energies had decoration with the numerous weapons offered by the gods. Thus descend the Divine Mother, the Supreme Being. Energy-incarnate who embodies in herself the multifarious modes of life, happens to be too affectionate to Her children to become fierce to those who tend to do evil to them.

Durga is tranquil and turbulent, serene and fierce, Soumya and Rudra at the same time. This is because Her all embracing motherliness makes Her intolerant of those that are inimically disposed of towards Her human and divine children. The Mother Durga in a feat of destruction raised such a tumultuous uproar that the frightened Asuras came out in large numbers equipped with armours and weapons and the fierce war that followed between Her and the innumerable Asuras brought the ruin of Mahisasura. The other Asuras met the same fate. The heaven was recovered and the Devas cheered the victory with an elegant hymn addressed to the mother.

Durga is the progenitor of the universal process in its entirety. She is the presiding principle of the cosmic manifestation and the source of ultimate goal of all perfection and attainment of all existence. She is essentially Unique and One. She is the fountain-head of the highest good -- both spiritual attainment and

material prosperity. The worship of the Mother Durga would ensure our communion with Her. The constant communion with Her would promote the development of friendly relations and universal fraternity. We pray to the Divine Mother for succour, to save us from the tyranny and turmoil of a confused world order.

Man is the maker of his destiny and he can exercise his free will, but

at the same time he has taken upon himself the responsibility to ensure full participation in the entire cosmos and consequently between man and gods, man and nature, man and other living beings and finally between man and man. May our Durga Puja become fruitful.

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Logos of the Greek Philosophy. Brahmāni alighted from Her Swan-Plane, the swan being a symbol of the realisation of identity between individual and universal Being. The realisation constitutes the conveyance, the Bahana or the Logos. In Her beautiful hands, She carries a rosary in one and a jar in another, the former for uttering mantras and the latter for carrying the animates the devotees with piety and love and also destroys the diabolical tendencies of the demons.

Maheswari: Brahmani is followed by Maheswari. She constitutes the essence of the energy of Siva. Her main activity consists in destructive affairs. She is seated on a bull, hold a trident in hand and carries a crescent on forehead which is a symbol of universal compassion. Two serpents, signifying attraction and repulsion of the forces, wind Her wrists.

Kaumari: Kaumari, the third in the series, comprises all the energies of Kumara, the commander-in-chief of the gods. She is expert in all the arts and crafts of warfare. She holds an iron spear symbolising martial energy. She sits and moves about on the back of a peacock. Peacocks slay snakes that may bring death. Hence the peacock symbolizes conqueror of death (Mṛityunjay). Kaumari is an eternal maiden, no death or decay is known to Her and to Her devotees.

Barahi: Following the Vaishanabi Sakti, the Barahi Sakti steps in the scene. She is the innermost energy of the Divine Boar, who by his teeth lifted the earth and saved it from sinking in the abyss of unrighteousness. Hiranyaksha, literally, one who constantly puts his eyes on gold, was

lords over all that is celestial.

Chandika: The seven Saktis, spoken of above, came from Chandika, the eighth and last of Ashta Saktis, manifested from the very person of Mahadevi Herself. She is so to say, the Sakti of the Saktis. She is otherwise named unconquerable one. She is the emblem of dismay and dreadfulness. She remains surrounded by innumerable jackals, who inhabit in graveyards and live on carcasses. In brief, Chandika stands for death itself.

She sent Siva on an embassy to the opponent with the ultimatum that either Indra should have his heavenly throne back or the demon armies should perish and their flesh eaten up by her jackals. Thus Siva being Her messenger, She is called Siva-duti or Siva-envoy.

Chandika is essentially the transforming energy of time, which works from within and makes ever object on the mundane plane attain maturity. Everything that is mortal is controlled and conditioned by the great time energy.

Chandika, though dismal and inimitable, has Siva, the goodness as Her envoy indicating thereby that all transformations aim at ultimate excellence. Death, though terrific in appearance, is in reality the single gateway to a realm of beautiful existence.

May the Ashta Sakti of the great Mother protect us from eight directions, so that we may live in peace and have spiritual growth in harmony.

The above are excerpts from the writing of
Dr. Mahanambrata Brahmachari.

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