

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पूर्णमुदच्यते । पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते ॥



KALYANA-KALPATARU

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Bhavānī Śaṅkara

भवानीशङ्करौ वन्दे श्रद्धाविश्वासरूपिणौ ।
याभ्यां विना न पश्यन्ति सिद्धाः स्वान्तःस्थमीश्वरम् ॥

I greet Goddess Pārvatī and Her consort, *Bhagavān* Śaṅkara, embodiments of reverence and faith respectively, without which even the *Siddhas* cannot perceive God enshrined in their very heart.

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Editor's Note

For our special issue *Śakti Number* which came out last month (October 2014), we received many good articles which could not be accommodated therein due to paucity of space and late receipt of some write-ups.

We therefore, include some of those in this November 2014 issue of *Kalyana-Kalpataru* which makes it as an addendum to the *Śakti Number*.

—Editor

Ten Mahāvidyās

The order in which the *Mahāvidyās* are given varies somewhat, as do the goddesses included in the group. In contemporary sources, however, the following goddesses in the following order are most common—

(1) Kālī, (2) Tārā, (3) Tripurasundarī (Ṣoḍaśī), (4) Bhuvaneśvarī, (5) Chinnamastā, (6) Bhairavī, (7) Dhūmāvātī, (8) Bagalāmukhī, (9) Mātāṅgī, (10) Kamalā.

Kālī is black, which in fact is what her name means. She has a fierce countenance, stands on the supine body of the God Śiva and has four arms. Her upper left hand holds a bloodied cleaver and her lower left hand a severed head. Her right upper hand makes the sign “fear not”, and her lower right hand makes the gesture of bestowing boons. She is naked, apart from a garland of severed heads and a girdle of severed arms; her hair is unbound and dishevelled; and she is often standing in a cremation ground or on a battlefield. She is almost always mentioned as the first of the *Mahāvidyās* and occupies a pre-eminent place in the group. In some texts and some settings, the other *Mahāvidyās* are understood to arise from her and to be her different forms. Her abode is in the cremation ground. She has three red eyes. Her hair is dishevelled, and she is awful to look at because of her emaciated body. In the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Lord Śiva calls Pārvatī ‘Kālī’ because of her dark complexion. Hearing him use this name, Pārvatī takes offense and undertakes austerities to rid herself of her dark complexion. After succeeding, she is re-named Gaurī (the golden one).

Tārā is usually given as the second *Mahāvidyā*, and

in appearance she is similar to Kālī. She is dark; her left foot is placed on a corpse or on Śīva; she wears a tiger skin; her hair is tied in a long braid; she is pot-bellied and has four arms. In her left hands she holds a knife and a severed head, and her right hands make the sign of giving favours and granting fearlessness. She often stands in the midst of cremation fires. She is sitting on a white lotus.

Tārā occupies a central place in Tibetan Buddhism and to a great extent plays the role of a Tibetan national deity. Nīla-Saraswatī is the *Avatāra* of Tārā.

Tripurasundarī (also known as Ṣoḍaśī, Lalitā, Rāja Rājeśwarī) is a beautiful young girl of sixteen with a red complexion. She is sometimes shown astride Śīva. They are on a pedestal or couch supported by the Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra and Indra. Some descriptions say that the four gods who support her pedestal are Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra and Yama. Sometimes she is said to sit on a lotus that emerges from the navel of Śīva, who is reclining below here. Her four arms hold a noose, goad, bow and arrows. She represents the penultimate vision of enlightenment consciousness, a stage of consciousness fused with *Sāttvika* qualities but lacking the fully enlightened consciousness, represented by Kālī which is beyond all quality and form of *Nirguṇa* she embodies the three principle powers of *Ichchā Śakti* (will), *Jñāna Śakti* (consciousness) and *Kriyā Śakti* (doing action).

Bhuvaneśwarī, who is said to nourish the three worlds, holds a piece of fruit in one of her four hands, makes the sign of assurance with another and holds a goad and a noose in the other two. She has a bright, light complexion and smiles pleasantly. Her hymn of praise in Rudrayāmala says that she is the mother of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śīva and the cause of their forms and functions that is, the cause of creation, maintenance and destruction. She is also called

Jagaddhātrī. She nourishes the world and protects it. She said to be food itself on which all creatures depend.

Chinnamastā has cut off her own head with a sword. Her left hand supports her head on a platter, and her right hand holds the sword with which she cut it off. Three jets of blood rush from her neck: one stream enters the mouth of her severed head; the other two jets enter the mouth of two female companions. Chinnamastā stands on the copulating bodies of the goddess Rati and her husband Kāma. They in turn are lying on a lotus or sometimes a cremation pyre. Sometimes Chinnamastā (with her head chopped off) is shown astride Śiva. Her hair is loose.

The Chinnamastā icon also suggests certain aspects of *Kuṇḍalinī Yoga* in which spiritual energy is awakened, traverses the subtle body, pierces the different centres of energy called *Cakras* in its ascent to top of the skull, unites with Śiva in the thousand petaled lotus *Cakra* and then creates a flood of nectar that flows downward, drenching the practitioner in bliss.

Bhairavī has a fierce appearance; her primary role in the cosmic process is destruction. Her complexion is said to be as bright as thousands of rising Suns. She wears a garland of skulls and clothes made from the skins of demons she has killed; her feet and body is covered with blood.

Her four hands hold a rosary and a book and make the signs of fearlessness and granting wishes. The *Kālikā-Purāṇa* says that her eyes roll from intoxication and that she stands on a corpse.

She is with Pañcamukha-Śiva (Śiva having five faces i.e., *Sadyojāta*, *Vāmadeva*, *Aghora*, *Tat-Puruṣa* and *Īśāna*).

Dhūmāvātī is tall, with a pale complexion and a stern, unsmiling face. She is dressed as a widow, in white clothes with no adornments. Her clothes are dirty and her hair

dishevelled. She is toothless, and her nose large and crooked. She is hungry and thirsty, has a quarrelsome nature, and rides a crow or is seated on a chariot. She holds a winnowing basket and sometimes a trident. Dhūmāvātī is said to be the same as Nirṛti, Jyeṣṭha and Alakṣmī. All three of these goddesses are inauspicious, dangerous and avoided by people.

Bagalāmukhī, “she who has the head of a crane,” usually sits on a throne of jewels, which is sometimes in the midst of a body of water. She is dressed in a yellow sari in one hand she holds a club, with which she is about to beat a dark complexioned enemy. With another hand she is pulling his tongue. Sometimes she sits on a corpse and in some cases she has a crane’s head, or a crane is her vehicle or *Vāhana*. The name probably means “she who has the face of a crane.” In Kāśī-Viśwanātha temple in Varanasi take her name as Vagalāmukhī. (*Vagalā* means ‘bit’ in Sanskrit) and that the name refers to her ability to control one’s enemies.

Another has the view that *Vagalā* means “to paralyze” and refers to Bagalāmukhī’s giving the *Siddhi* of *Stambhana* i.e., paralysis.

Mātaṅgī, has several different forms. Usually she is a beautiful young woman with a dark or black complexion. The moon adorns her long hair and she sits on a jeweled throne. She wears a beautiful robe and a garland of flowers. Her four hands hold a goad, noose, sword and club. Her eyes are described as intoxicated from passion.

The garland around her neck is of *Kadamba* flowers. Mātaṅgī has association with left over food, which is normally considered highly polluting. Indeed she herself actually arises or emerges from Śiva and Pārvatī’s table scraps. And the first thing she asks for is sustenance in the form of leftover food (*Ucchiṣṭa*).

Kamalā, is a beautiful and young woman with a golden complexion. Two elephants flank her and pour pitchers of water on her while she sits on a lotus and holds lotuses in her hands. She is clearly a form of the Goddess Lakṣmī, one of whose common epithet is Kamala “lotus”.

Lakṣmī is an ancient and extremely popular goddess, worshipped throughout India in a variety of contexts and sectarian movements. Her iconography and her descriptions in *Dhyāna Mantras* leave out certain aspects of her character.



O Invisible spirit of Beauty! O Lord, all things are beautiful because they have borrowed their beauty from Thee. The moon smiles and the stars twinkle because Thou art sparkling there. Because Thou art beautiful, all things are beautiful; without Thee nothing is beautiful. O Infinite beauty, Thou art more beautiful than all things beautiful that come from Thee.

—*Divine Romance*

Concise Story of Durgā Saptasatī

(Abridged version of Durgā Saptasatī)

Introduction: During the reign of the second Manu there was a king of Caitra dynasty named 'Suratha'. When his enemies conniving with his wicked ministers seized his kingdom, wealth and army i.e., everything belonging to him as a king, he took refuge in the sacred *Āsrama* of *Rṣi* Medhā seeking protection and peace. At that time the overthrown king met a merchant named 'Samādhi' in the *Āsrama* of *Rṣi* Medhā. The merchant too was in a state of misery as he was tricked by his own kith and kin. The king and the merchant approached the *Rṣi* with reverence and saluting him asked—'O Holy Sir! Even on perceiving the inherent evil is enjoying sense-objects our minds cling to them with attachment. What is the reason that, despite being endowed with power of discrimination, we err? Please tell us the reason for this delusion of ours?

The *Rṣi* replied—'O king! Mahāmāyā (the great deluding potency of the Lord) sways the mind of even *Jñānīs* into the vortex of delusion'. Hearing this the king became curious to know about that Goddess Mahāmāyā.

The *Rṣi* replied—That Mahāmāyā is eternal and pervades the whole universe. When she manifests herself to accomplish the work of the gods, she is said to be 'born'. When further queried by the king, the *Rṣi* divulged three narratives about the goddess which are as follows.

First Narrative—

After the deluge (*Pralaya*) two *Asuras* arose from the earwax of Lord Viṣṇu while He was engrossed in '*Yoganidrā*'.

These *Asuras*—Madhu and Kaiṭabha attacked Lord Brahmā seated in a lotus sprung from the Lord Viṣṇu's navel. Then Lord Brahmā eulogised Goddess *Yoganidrā* (Mahāmāyā) and prayed to Her to grant him three boons.

1. To wake up Lord Viṣṇu from His *Yoganidrā*.
2. To inspire Him to kill the two *Asuras*.
3. To delude the *Asuras* and get them killed through Lord Viṣṇu.

Then the Goddess appeared before Lord Brahmā. The Lord awakened and inspired by Goddess Mahāmāyā started fighting with both the *Asuras*. Deluded by *Bhagavatī*, the *Asuras* wanted Lord Viṣṇu to ask boons from them, ie., they swelling with pride (deluded as they were by the Goddess) were ready to confer choicest boons on Lord Viṣṇu. In the end tricked by the Lord, both were killed by Him.

Second Narrative—

Long ago there was born a mighty *Asura* named 'Mahiṣa'. Usurping the powers of the gods by his might the tyrant claimed heaven. All gods were defeated and the *Asura* sat on the throne of Indra (king of gods). The defeated gods began to wonder in the mortal world as their power and positions were snatched away from them. At last the gods approached as assembly of the Divine Trinity (Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva) and told them the calamity that had overtaken them.

As the gods were telling the woes, bright radiant light manifested from the faces of Lord Viṣṇu and Śiva. Further, light manifested also from gods like Brahmā, Indra, Sūrya, Candra, Yama etc., and collected to form a big mass of radiant Effulgence. That Effulgence transformed into a divine goddess.

The Trinity Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva followed by other

gods gave their own respective weapons to that radiant Goddess. Then the Goddess laughed aloud making the three worlds tremble. Hearing the loud laughter of the Goddess, Mahiṣa accompanied by all the *Asuras* ran towards the direction of Her laughter. Reaching there he saw the Goddess of terrible form. All the *Asuras* started fighting with the Goddess. The Goddess along with her mount—the lion slaughtered crores of *Asuras*. Fifteen commanders of Mahiṣa's army Cikṣura, Cāmara, Udagra, Karāla, Baṣkala, Tāmra, Andhaka, Asilomā, Ugrāśya, Ugravīrya, Mahāhanu, Viḍālāśya, Mahāsura, Durdhara and Durmukha were killed by the *Bhagavatī* (Divine Mother). Then using his power of illusion, Mahiṣa transformed himself into a buffalo, an elephant and human and fought with the Goddess. At last he was killed by the Goddess.

On finding all their enemies annihilated by the Goddess the overjoyed gods praise the Divine Mother *Ādyāśakti*. And gods asked boons from the Goddess that whenever any calamity befalls them, from the *Asuras*, at all such times the Goddess should provide them succour and annihilate their enemies. Also She should grant all happiness and bounty to those ardent devotees who recite or hear this narrative of Her's.

Granting their cherished prayers the Goddess vanished at once.

Last Narrative—

Long ago there were two mighty and valiant *Asuras* named Śumbha and Niśumbha. They seized the throne of heaven from Indra. Haughty and arrogant as they both were, they even seized the right of gods to *Yajñabhāga* (Sacrificial Offerings). They seized all powers of gods—Sūrya, Candra, Kubera, Yama, Varuṇa, Pavana and Agni and became their overlords. Then they defeated gods in

their miserable plight sought refuge in the world of mortals. They reached the Himalayas and started praying for relief. The Goddess Pārvatī came there for her bath in the Gaṅgā. She asked the *Devas* (gods) as to whom their prayers were addressed to? At the same time Goddess Śivā manifested from *Devī* Pārvatī and said, 'Śumbha and Niśumbha have defeated the gods and driven them out of heaven. Indra and other gods are praying to Me!' As she manifested from Goddess Pārvatī's body. She became known as 'Kauśikī'. On Her manifesting from body of Pārvatī, the body of Goddess Pārvatī turned black in colour and was known as 'Kālī'. 'Kālī' stayed back in Himalayas.

Here, on seeing the Divine beauty of extremely beautiful Goddess Ambikā (Kauśikī). Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, two *Asuras* reported the matter to *Asura* lords, Śumbha and Niśumbha. Hearing the infatuating description of beauty from the two *Asuras*, Śumbha sends an *Asura* named Sugrīva to fetch the Goddess. Sugrīva approaches the Goddess and praising the power, valour and glory of *Asura*-Lords, conveys to Her the proposal of marriage by his lords—Śumbha and Niśumbha. In reply the Goddess says, 'Only he who defeats me in a fight, crushes my pride, can win my hand. This is my unchangable vow!' Returning to Śumbha and Niśumbha, the envoy *Asura* Sugrīva informs them in detail about the vow of Goddess. The angry *Asura* lords sends *Asura* Dhūmralocana to fetch the Goddess by force dragging her by her hair. But the mighty Goddess burnt the *Asura* Dhūmralocana to ashes by a mere *Humkāra*.

After this the *Asura* king sent a vast army under the *Asuras*—Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa to bring the Goddess *Kauśikī* by force. On reaching there, they tried to catch hold of the Goddess. Then, the terrible Kālī manifested from the

forehead of Goddess Kauśikī. Kālī destroyed the whole *Asura* army and slaughtering the *Asuras*—Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, She took their heads to the Goddess. So, for this very reason *Devī* Kālī came to known as 'Cāmuṇḍā'. Hearing the death of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa, the *Asura* king sent seven commanders to fight with the Goddess. In response the seven *Śaktis* (female representations of power) of the deities Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Indra, Varāha (boar incarnation of Viṣṇu), Nṛsimha (man-lion incarnation of Viṣṇu) and Kārtikeya manifested and started fighting with the *Asuras*. Then from the body of Goddess Ambikā arose a frightful *Śakti* known as Śivadūtī.

This *Śakti* Śivadūtī sent Lord Śiva as a messenger to the *Asuras*—Śumbha and Niśumbha. With the message—'If you wish your welfare then give back heaven to the gods and their right to enjoy offerings of sacrifices (*Yajña*). Go back to the netherworlds (*Pātāla*) if you wish to live!

The *Asura* kings, haughty and infatuated by their own strength mocked at the words of the Goddess. When the Goddess, with Her *Śaktis* started fighting the *Asuras*, Raktabīja, the commander-in-chief of *Asura* army fought back with the Goddess. When struck by various weapons of the seven *Śaktis* (*Mātrkāś*) blood flowed from Raktabīja's body. As many drops of blood fell on the ground from *Asura's* body, so many Raktabījas were born. And they all fought back the divine powers. Finally seeing the plight, the Goddess ordered *Devī* Cāmuṇḍā to open Her mouth wide and drink the drops of blood. Cāmuṇḍā did as she was ordered, and the Goddess killed the *Asura* Raktabīja. After that Niśumbha fought with the Goddess and was killed by her.

Now angered on seeing the slaughter of his brother Niśumbha and his whole army, Śumbha spoke thus to the

Goddess—'Depending on others' strength and bloating over it you intend to fight!' The Goddess replied—'In this whole world I am the only one. There is no second to me. All these are my own manifestations. Having emerged from Me, they will merge back into Me. On the Goddess speaking thus, all seven *Mātrkās* (*Śaktis*) merged back into Herself. Śumbha too was killed by the dexterous Goddess. The overjoyed gods eulogised the *Devī* Ambikā. Pleased by their praise the Goddess said, 'Ask boons that would be beneficial to the whole world.' The *Devas* (gods) replied— 'As and when evil forces (enemies) attack us, please destroy them and bring us solace.' The great Goddess—*Ādyāśakti* said, 'So it be!' After narrating how She would save the world and devotees seven times by manifesting Herself and also describing the greatness and fruit of reciting Her stories She disappears.

Conclusion—

After describing the birth and greatness of the Goddess by the three narratives, *Ṛṣi* Medhā advices *Rājā* Suratha and merchant Samādhi to adore the Goddess. Both of them following the advice of the *Ṛṣi* adore the Divine Mother in a very arduous way. In the end the Goddess manifests and confers the boons of returning the kingdom to the king and that of *Jñāna* (realization of God) to the merchant. As a result of the boon King Suratha became *Sāvārṇi* Manu, born from the Sun-god (*Sūrya*).



Kāmākhyā—the Yoni Pīṭha

—*Jyotishacharya Prof. Koosal Sen*

Kāmākhyā in Kamarup described in ancient classical text as Prāgjyotiṣapura is one of the holiest places on Indian soil where the female organ—*Satī-Yoni* fell on dissection following the *Ātmadāha* by *Satī* in the *Dakṣayajña*. It is considered as the leading *Śakti Pīṭha* among the fifty-one *Pīṭhas* in India. The *Yoni* has been converted into the *Pinḍa* form by Lord Śiva at the *Nīla Śaila* or the Blue Hills or *Nīla Chaitra*.

Prāgjyotiṣapura or an ancient city for astrological and astronomical research or the present state of Assam is having a *Navagraha* temple on the eastern side of the ancient location Chitrachala Hill and it is believed to be the place where Lord Brahmā started creation of all the stars.

The *Purāṇa* says it is these hills where all the three Supreme Gods—Lord Brahmā, Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Śiva have performed *Tapasyā* to appease the Mother Power or the *Mātrī-Śakti* and as a result of their *Tapasyā* the Blue Hills dwarfed in size from its original height.

It is also mentioned that the *Devī* Kāmākhyā resides here with Lord Śiva and is worshipped in various forms such as Kāmākhyā, Tripurasundarī, *Śāradā Mahotsava* or Kāmeśwarī, Lalitā and Mātāṅgī representing the three *Śaktis*—Mahālakṣmī, Mahāsaraswatī and Mahākālī assuring fulfilment of all the desires or *Caturbidha Phala-Prāpti* of the worshipper including *Mokṣa* as observed in *Kubjikātantra*.

कामरूपो महापीठो सर्वकामफलप्रदम् ।

कलौ शीघ्रफला देवी कामरूपे जपस्मृता ॥

The *Śakti-Pīṭha* Kāmākhyā is here since time not measurable in precise terms of years. The *Purāṇa* records it being built by Lord Viśwakarmā and then known as *Ānandākhyā*.

Another context refers to the temple being built by demon Narakāsura following the instructions of the *Devī* Kāmākhyā herself. The historical records suggest that the *Kāmākhyā-Pīṭha* has been built and rebuilt many a times between the *Gupta* dynasty and *Ahom* dynasty. The present *Garbhagr̥ha* is estimated to be 2000 years old and the Upper Crust approximately dating back to 1500 years now. King Viśwasiṅha, King Nara-Nārāyaṇa and Chillaroy are referred to as the important kings and remodelers involved with the reconstruction of the Shrine.

In *Kāmākhyā-Tantra* it is observed that there is the only best way to get one's fulfilment of all the worldly desires is to worship *Yoni-Swarūpa Devī* Kāmākhyā. It also mentions the importance of *Raktavastra* obtained after *Ambubacee* in the following verse—

कामाख्यावस्त्रमादाय जपपूजा समाचरेत् ।
पूर्णकामो लभे देवी सत्यं सत्यं न संशयः ॥

In Kāmākhyā, a world famous annual celebration takes place known as 'Ambubachee' meaning that the Mother Protects when the Sun transits into Gemini and the third phase of Star *Mṛgaśirā* corresponding to between 6th/7th of *Āṣāḍha* and 10th/11th of *Āṣāḍha* in the *Śuklapakṣa* of Hindu Calendar. During this period, the *Kāmākhyā-Pīṭha* is closed to devotees and the Mother Goddess is considered resting and there is a general restraint being observed throughout the State in the matters of Journeys, agricultural pursuits, study of Vedic scriptures, performing of religious rituals including Deity worshipping and *Śrāddha* or performing of annual rituals for the dead. This period of penance is

called *Bhūmidāha*.

The term ‘Ambubachee’ is significant because of the twin words Mother Protects and their spiritual references since the *Śāstras* describe seven forms of Mother such as *Ātmamātā*—own mother, *Gurupatnī*—the wife of *Guru*, *Brāhmaṇī*—the wife of a Brahmin, *Rāja-Patnī*—the queen, *Gaumātā*—the cow, *Dhātrī*—the foster mother and *Ṙṥthvī*—the earth.

And the protection has significant reference to the creative, generative and abundance of life requirements that the mother Nature provides for protection of humanity. The Hindu month of *Āṣāḍha* is falling under the rainy season and a good and benevolent rain enriches and protects the humans from draught and poverty. A good rain means a good harvest and in a country like India which is primarily an agro based economy a good harvest stands for all round protection.

During the period of ‘Ambubachee’ devotees not only from India but the world converge at Kāmākhyā to worship the Goddess Mother after the fourth day of penance when the Shrine reopens and the devotional worshipping is resumed.



Śaktipīṭha at Kurukshetra

—Dr. Babu Ram

Kurukshetra is known as *Dharmakṣetra*. Here the battle of *Mahābhārata* was fought between *Kauravas* and *Pāṇḍavas*. It is world famous birth place of *Śrīmad Bhagawadgītā*, the song divine. Kurukshetra is also famous for the fair of solar eclipse throughout the world. It is a great centre of pilgrimage. It is also known as *Tīrtharāja*. There is also a *Śaktipīṭha* known as *Bhadrakālī*. There are 51 *Śaktipīṭhas* in Asia. *Bhadrakālī* is only *Śaktipīṭha* in Haryana. It is situated near the bank of famous sacred *Saraswatī* River.

The devotees worship right ankle of the Mother Satī here. A famous Sanskrit *Śloka* regarding the *Pīṭha* as follows—

कुरुक्षेत्रेऽपरो गुल्फ सावित्री स्थाणु भैरवम् ।
गत्वा सुशोभते नित्यं देव्याः पीठो महान्भुवि ॥

It is a well known belief that *Pāṇḍavas* worshipped the *Śaktipīṭha* at Kurukshetra for the victory before the war of *Mahābhārata*. It is also said that *Muṇḍana Saṁskāra* of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa and *Balarāma* was performed by Mother *Yaśodā* and *Nanda Bābā* here.

From ancient times to modern age there is a celebration of *Navarātras* during autumn and spring seasons. There are thousands worshippers visit the *Pīṭha* for the fulfilment of their desires. They offer golden, silver, wooden and clay made horses at *Śaktipīṭha*.

So many saints and sages visited this holy place for perfection. They were blessed by the Mother *Bhadrakālī*.

The President of India Śrī Praṇava Mukharjī visited this Śaktipīṭha during the year 2013. He was offered trident by the Pīṭhādhiśa of Śaktipīṭha. Many miracles happened here. It is said that bells rang up automatically at midnight during the Indo-Pak war. It was considered the symbol of India's victory during the war. The mother is very kind and of peaceful posture and embodiment of peace and auspiciousness.



That which is Brahman is also the Primal Energy. Once a king asked a *Yogī* to impart knowledge to him in one word. The *Yogī* said, 'All right, you will get knowledge in one word'. After a while a magician came to the king. The king saw the magician moving two of his fingers rapidly and him exclaim, "Behold, O king! Behold! The king looked at him and amazed when after a few minutes he saw the two fingers becoming one. The magician moved that one finger rapidly and said, 'Behold O king!' Behold'." The implication of the story is that Brahman and the Primal Energy at first appear to be two. But after attaining the knowledge of Brahman one does not see the two. Then there is no differentiation; it is one, without a second—*Advaita*—non-duality.

—*Sri Ramakrishna*

Śaktipīṭha—Maihar

(Smṛti Sumana)

—*Acharya Ashwini Kumar Mishra*

Maihar is a small, charming and a peaceful hill settlement near Satna in Madhya Pradesh having a Railway Station by the same name on the Allahabad-Jabalpur rail route and is well connected with important places in india. The small but peaceful township is glorified by the *Trikūṭa Parvata* or *Rāmagiri Parvata* being the abode of Goddess *Ādi Śakti Saraswatī* also known as *Mā Śāradā*.

The name of the District Satna is a derivation from the name of the great *Muni* *Sutīkṣṇa* where Lord *Rāma*, *Mātā Jānakī* and Lord *Lakṣmaṇa* headed for a halt enroute to *Pañcavaṭī*.

The legend goes back to about timeless reference of 195 crores of years when Lord *Śiva* was installing the fallen organs of *Devī Satī* in the form of *Piṇḍas* at various places in the divine and godly country *Bhāratavarṣa* or the present India.

At Maihar, the right breast of *Devī Satī* fell according to the description of *Maharṣi Vedavyāsa* to King *Janmejaya* as appearing in *Śrīmad Devī Bhāgawatam* in chapter 30 *Ślokas* 53 to 85 when he was explaining the significance of 108 *Śakti-Sthalas* matching with 108 pieces of organs of *Devī Satī*.

At *Trikūṭa Parvata*, the name *Trikūṭa* was the result of a combination of three core energies submerging into one entity at the installation of *Piṇḍa* by Lord *Śiva* namely—

Śivānī (The Mahāsarasvatī or the *Sattva Tattva* of *Ādi Śakti*).

Śāradā (The goddess of *Vānī*, wisdom and knowledge or the Sarasvatī) and Nṛsiṅha (The incarnated man-lion form of Lord Viṣṇu).

The fallen breast was full of flowing breast milk which formed a milky river known as Lijjī and which still exist at Maihar and is known by the name of Liljī.

However in Tantra Cūḍāmaṇi, the list has been revised to 51 *Śakti-Sthalas* with the names of Core *Śakti* and their *Bhairava*. According to the said Text, the Core *Śakti* for *Śaktipīṭha* Maihar is Śivānī and the *Bhairava* is Caṇḍa.

The location of *Trikūṭa Parvata* has been constantly being renamed or referred to by different names through the timeless ages in various epics of Hindu Religion.

The cave where the *Piṇḍa* was installed on the *Trikūṭa Parvata* was visited by Lord Rāma, the incarnated Lord Viṣṇu, while on the way to Pañcawaṭī from Chitrakoot along with *Devī Sītā* and brother Lakṣmaṇa. Lord Rāma visited the ancient *Śakti-Sthala* and worshipped the Goddess and since then the name of *Trikūṭa Parvata* was changed to *Rāmagiri Parvata*.

Lord Rāma along with *Devī Sītā* and brother Lakṣmaṇa also performed a *Pārthiva Śiva-Pūjana* at Maihar and the place of worship is presently known as Golamaṭha—a Shrine of Lord Śiva.

Maihar has been referred to as Mahidhar in the all time great epic of *Mahābhārata* by *Maharṣi Vedavyāsa* where *Pāṇḍavas* regularly worshipped the Goddess during their exile. The word Mahidhar refers to the abode of the Entity who holds *Mahī* or the *Pṛthvī* or the Śeṣanāga and a variety of deadly snakes are still present in the vicinity of *Śaktipīṭha* to justify the name. The name is a legendary reference also

to *Nāgarājas* and their tribes who took the shelter in and or around Maihar to ward off the evils inflicted on them by *Dānavarāja Tārakāsura*.

Maihar had also been known as *Mātrgṛha* or the Mother's House when *Devī Saraswatī* had to take a *Mānavī* birth and she exercised the option to choose Maihar as the location for her curse birth following the curse of *Maharṣi Durvāsā* in the *Brahmaloka* and she was also required to marry a human *Ṛṣi Dadhīci*. The Wedlock gave birth to a son *Sāraswata* and with the birth of the son, *Sāraswata*, *Devī Saraswatī* got relief from the curse. However, in Maihar many saints have had the opportunity to see the travelling *Jyoti* or the heavenly Light between the Shrine and the shrine of *Dulhadeva*, the shrine erected in the memory of *Maharṣi Dadhīci*, the human husband of Goddess *Saraswatī* and they believed that Goddess *Saraswatī* used to travel to Maihar to meet *Ṛṣi Dadhīci*.

Maihar has been a constant source of inspiration and bountiful for the noble seekers in the charismatic History of the great saints and the brave hearts of India.

Mā Śāradā worshippers were always placed in highest positions such as *Ādi Guru Śaṅkarācārya* who did stay and worshipped the Goddess for his Victory while heading to *Māhiṣmatī* in *Madhya Pradesh* to hold the *Śāstrārtha* with *Pandit Maṇḍana Miśra*. *Ādi Guru Śaṅkarācārya* won the debate and became glorified as the most knowledgeable saint of his times.

The *Tapobhūmi* for Great saint and *Yogī Guru Gorakhanātha* who performed a very difficult *Tapasyā* at Maihar seeking from the Goddess *Saraswatī*, his *Ārādhyā*, for the release of his *Guru Yogī Matsyendranātha* and was blessed by the Goddess *Śāradā* with a musical instrument called *Hunuk* and the magical lyric and rhythm to rescue

his *Guru* from the *Māyānagarī*.

Maihar had been the *Tapobhūmi* for Ālhā, the great warrior and one of the famous pair of Ālhā and Ūdala. Ālhā on hearing of the death of his comrade in life and arms Ūdala at the hands of Pṛthvīrāja Cauhāna conquered his enemy in the battlefield and was about to kill him when at the insistence of *Guru* Gorakhanātha he pardoned Pṛthvīrāja Cauhāna and returned to worship the Goddess Śāradā to be awarded *Amaratva* or immortality and *Pārasamaṇi* as the *Prasāda*! It is a belief at Maihar that the immortal Ālhā still performs the first *Pūjā* at the Shrine at times.

Ācārya Dāmodara also known as the Son of Saraswatī believed to be the reincarnation of *Ādi Guru* Śaṅkarācārya was blessed with the sound knowledge of *Vedas* in all its six different areas at the tender age of ten compatible with *Ādi Guru*. It was Śaiva Samba a *Sādhu* who was responsible for erecting the present shrine at the heritage site in the memory of his great disciple Ācārya Dāmodara believed to have died as a teenager at the age of 16.

Maihar and the Goddess *Mā Śāradā* has been bountiful to the musical legends of the Maihar *Gharānā*, the Royal family and the great Allauddin Khan Saheb who used to worship Goddess Śāradā at the courtyard of the *Śaktipīṭha* and the one who rose to international appearances and fame during pre-independence era and the one of the many blessed sons of the Goddess having the distinction of having played 100 varieties of musical instruments in his Career as the musician. Beside him, his son, the Sarod Mastero late Ali Akbar khan, Pandit Raviśaṅkara, the Sitarist, the great Pannālāla Ghoṣa in flute, are some of the world illuminaries in the field of Music from the soil of Maihar.

Maihar has been a centre of *Śakti*, the energy in its

core form through the Various *Yugas* of *Satyayuga*, *Tretā*, *Dwāpara* and the *Kaliyuga* and thus had been the most prominent in *Śaktipīṭhas* in the Country for timeless ages.

Entrance to the shrine of *Mā Śāradā* or the *Śāradā Pīṭha* in Maihar presents a memorable and picturesque sight of a Valley bordered by the Rāmagiri Hills.

There are ample vehicular arrangements around the town for a desired visit to the *Śaktipīṭha*. Roads are well maintained and there is an atmosphere of peace, calm and discipline all around. Presence of the Goddess can be felt without a doubt.

During *Navarātris* the town becomes alive with lakhs of devotees with a mission of worshipping the bountiful Mother Goddess and the Festivities attain the level of a Fair of considerable magnitude whereby Indian Railways make special arrangements for providing a stoppage for all the passing trains at Junction Maihar.

Various Temples and or shrines in Maihar beside the *Śaktipīṭha-Sthala* are—

Dulhadeva, Golamaṭha, Ancient Rāma Mandira (Baḍā Akhāḍā), Ālhā Mandira, Pannī Khoha, Gaṇeśa Ghāṭī, Rāmpura Gobinda Sarakara) Mandira, Swāmī Nīlakaṇṭha Āśrama, Musaladāsa Samādhi-Sthala, Saṅgīta Samrāṭa Smāraka.



Śāradā-Pīṭha of Odisha

—Dr. Purna Chandra Ojha

शारलादाससेविनि जननि प्राग्नीलवटनिवासिनि मानिनि
झङ्कडपुरवासिन्यद्य शारले मातः श्रीशक्तिवाणीस्वरूपिणि ।
वीणापुस्तकधारिणि सिंहवाहिनि घण्टाखड्गधारिणि तारिणि
पादाम्बुजे प्रणमामि ते प्रसीद नित्यं विद्याबुद्धिप्रदायिनि ॥

‘Pīṭha’ means ‘Shrine’ or ‘Temple’ dedicated to Gods or Goddesses of Hindu religion. Kashmir was sometimes called “Śāradā Deśa” (शारदा देश) because of its Śāradā-Pīṭha (Shrine of the Goddess Śāradā and in the same way Śāradā of Kashmir was similarly called *Kāśmīrapuravāsini* (काश्मीरपुरवासिनी). Similarly, one of the famous Śakti—Shrines of Odisha is Śāradā-Pīṭha of Jhaṅkaḍa in the undivided district of Cuttack (Now in Jagatsinghpur District), Odisha. Before going to pen on the Śāradā-Pīṭha of Odisha, it might not be redundant to shed light on the Śāradā-Pīṭha of Kashmir in brief.

The *Kāśmīrīs* are highly devoted towards the great deity Śāradā Bhagavatī. During their daily worship, they often say—नमस्ते शारदादेवि काश्मीरपुरवासिनि! त्वामहं प्रार्थये नित्यं विद्यादानं च देहि मे, meaning “salutations to you, O’ Śāradā, O’ Goddess, one who resides in Kashmir. I pray to you daily; please give me the charity of knowledge”. Śāradā-Pīṭha is one of the 18 *Mahāśakti-Pīṭhas* of India. *Devī’s* (of the Goddess) right hand is said to have fallen here. During 16th Century, when Akbar, the Moghul emperor was in his regime at Delhi; Abul Fazal, one of the Nine Jewels (नवरत्न) in his court has written about Śrī Śāradā Devī’s temple which is near the banks of river Madhumati (currently Nīlumā River)

which is full of gold particles and he also wrote that one can experience miracles on every eighth day of the bright fortnight of the month. Similarly, other some scholars like Kalhaṇa, the great Sanskrit poet and historian have thrown light on this temple. Saraswatī is otherwise known as Śāradā is worshipped here as the Goddess of knowledge and education, *Ādiguru* Śaṅkarācārya has written many hymns (स्तोत्र and स्तुति) here. The first verse of “Prapañcasāra” composed by him is devoted to the praise of Śrī Śāradā Devī.

In the same line, out of the famous 8 *Śakti-Pīṭhas* of Odisha, the *Śāradā-Pīṭha* dedicated to Goddess Śāradā mainly called the Goddess of Learning has earned its name and fame in every nook and corner of the state and abroad. Goddess Śāradā also is invoked and worshipped in other names as *Śāradā*, *Śāralā*, *Śārolā*, *Śāralā-Canḍī*. *Vidyādātrī*, *Vāgdevī*, *Mā-Śāralā*, *Citra-Maheśwarī*, *Siddha-Śāralā*, *Simha-Śāralā*, *Utkala-Bhāratī* etc. Hence the region where this shrine is located is known as *Śāradā-Pīṭha*, *Sāraswata-Pīṭha*, *Vāṇī-Pīṭha*, *Jihwā-Pīṭha*, ‘*Saraswatī-Pīṭha*’ etc.

The present Śāralā-temple is situated in the village of Sarola (Kanakpur) of Jhaṅkaḍa Pragaṇā (झङ्गड प्रगणा) in the district of Jagatsinghpur which is 60 K.M. away from Cuttack via Jagatsinghpur or Tarapur in Paradeep line of Odisha. Also one can reach the temple from Konark (place of the world famous Sun-temple) via Kakatpur and Jagatsinghpur by travelling a distance of around 70 K. M. The travelling Road-Square at Dosadi (Śāralā Road) is marked by the huge gate (तोरण) in the Paradeep Road from Cuttack. To reach this *Pīṭha* the nearest railway-station is Cuttack and the nearest air-port is Bhubaneshwar.

Most of the eminent archaeologists, historians, scholars and Pandits trace the period of the origin of the goddess

Śāralā in Jhāṅkaḍa to 8th Century A. D. i.e. during the early Bhaumakar rule 736 A. D. when the eight-armed idols of Goddess Durgā appeared in the sculptural masterpieces of Odisha. The legend says that the old temple of Śāralā was ravaged by Kalapahada in 1568. After that, before 500 years of old the temple was built by the *Rājā* (king) of Manijanga. It is also said that the temple was constructed during the period of Marahatta administration between 1753-1803. The remnants of old temple is not visible, but folklore goes that it was at Baḍaśārola (बडशारोल), a place where the God Gaṇeśa Temple (नण्डादेउल) stands as witness. Again it is said that the present temple of Śāralā was consecrated in 1914. Before that *Mā* Śāralā was worshipped in a room of a temporary platform named as '*Dhūliā-Maṇḍapa*' made of wood.

The present temple area covers a place of around 5 acres and the temple existed including the (गर्भ मन्दिर, जगमोहन and नाटमन्दिर) 3005 sq. feet of area. The main temple and Jagamohana consist of 5 crests (पंच चुडा) and the *Mukhaśālā* of 16 pillars. The wall-openings between the pilasters are designed as cusped arches. Images of *Dasamahāvidyā* are carved at spaced intervals just below the ceiling of the *Bhogamaṇḍapa*. The flat roof has two tires. A large image of Mahiṣamardinī is at the front edge of the roof. The *Devī* is eight armed and placed within a circular medallion decorated with lotus petals.

In the sanctum sanctorum of the main temple, on a platform (रत्नवेदी) of three feet high the idol of Goddess Śāralā is worshipped. On this throne-platform three idols are placed. The main idol (मूलविग्रह) of eight armed carved out of a wonderful form of glittering Basalt-stone 20 inches of height and 10 inches of breadth footing right foot on the lion in Mahiṣamardinī posture. This main idol (*Mā*

herself) is stationary (अचल) and she holds sword (खड्ग), Spear i.e. Trident (शूल), Manuscript/ Book (पुस्तक) and Lute (वीणा) in her four right hands and Disk/Shield (पट्टिश), Bow (कार्मुक), Bell (घण्टा) and the head of the Buffalo-demon (महिषासुर) in her left hands. The type of description can be inferred from the meditative-hymn (ध्यानमन्त्र) of *Mā* as follows:

सिंहस्योपरि दत्तदक्षचरणां विभ्राजमानां शुभां
 वीणापुस्तकखड्गशूलदधतीं दक्षैः कराम्भोरुहैः ।
 घण्टाकार्मुकपट्टिशासुरकचान् वामैः करैः विभ्रतीं
 भिन्दन्तीं मटिषं नमामि वरदां सिद्धिप्रदां शारदाम् ॥

The second idol of *Mā* is four-armed holding शंख, चक्र, वरद and अभयमुद्रा. The third idol is two-armed. Both these two idols are made out of eight precious metals (अष्टधातु). These two idols mostly the second idol of *Mā* are taken out of temple in different-ceremonial occasions and known as movable idols (चल-विग्रह).

Goddess *Śāralā* is called the manifestation of three Goddesses of three energies like *Mahālakṣmī*, *Mahākālī* and *Mahāsaraswatī*. It is verily known from the four auspicious syllables like: ऐं, ह्री, श्रीं, क्लीं. It is considered the above three Goddesses worshipped in three forms bear the similarity of the Goddess *Vaiṣṇodevī* of Jammu. Goddess *Śāralā* is attributed as the Goddess of learning, self and power in one. Mostly she is known as *Vāgdevī* conceived as the active and eternal source of all wisdom, intelligence and inspiration. *Vāgdevī* is Goddess—*Saraswatī* Herself who is considered as the personification of all knowledge—arts, science, crafts and skills. Knowledge means the anthesis of the darkness of ignorance. She is the mother of the *Vedas* and the inventor of the *Devanāgarī* letters. *Mā Śāralā* is Goddess *Saraswatī* Herself which is proved as she holds Lute and Book in her arms. This was also authenticated

in the 15th Century A. D. Siddheśwara Parīḍa, a devotee belongs to a traditional farmer-family adopted his name 'Śāralā Dāsa' (Servant of *Mā Śāralā*) like Kālidāsa by the name of his beloved Goddess. Later on Śāralā Dāsa' (Servant of *Mā Śāralā*) like Kālidāsa by the name of his beloved Goddess. Later on Śāralā Dāsa was designated as the foremost poet (*Ādi Kavi, Matira Kavi* even if the *Jāṭiya Kavi*) of *Oḍiā* literature by his composition of great epics—*Oḍiā Mahābhārata* (*Śāralā Mahābhārata*), *Bilaṅkā Rāmāyaṇa*, *Caṇḍī Purāṇa*. The great poet Śāralā Dāsa admitted himself time and again that he had been an illiterate man and composition of the great and epoch-making verses in *Oḍiyā-Mahābhārata* was the result of the magic power transferred to him by his beloved Goddess *Mā Śāralā*. For example it is mentioned in '*Bilaṅkā Rāmāyaṇa*' as:

श्रीशारलाचण्डीङ्कर	सदा	अटे	दास			
अज्ञानर	शास्त्र	किछि	करिछि	अभ्यास		
से	याहा	करन्ति	आज्ञा	मुँ	ताहा	लेखइ
अपण्डित	मूर्ख	मोर	शास्त्रज्ञान	नाहिँ	॥	

Similarly in his *Oḍiyā Mahābhārata* he wrote:

झङ्कडनिवासी	चण्डी	श्रीशारला	सेवि
ताहाङ्क	प्रसन्ने	वोलाउछि	कवि ॥

Similarly, writer, authors, orators, above all the persons of pen and folk song dances like Pala, Daskathia, Ghodanacha, Opera etc. pay their obeisance to Goddess Śāralā. *Mā* is said as *Kavi-Kaṇṭha-Vāsinī*. In this form she is always—
“सदाप्रसन्ना-शान्तिस्वरूपिणि-मङ्गलमयी-वाग्देवी”.

Mā is the female deity of Pelf, the bestower of wealth since she bears the bell and above all, She is Goddess of vigour, power and prowess for which she is endowed with bow, sword, shield, trident in her arms. This form of her as *Mahiṣamardinī* and *Simhavāhinī* proves the fact emphatically.

Mā Śāralā is worshipped along with other side-gods whether chiselled, installed in temple walls and encircled by others remaining in her temple-premises. The side-Gods and Goddesses are Gaṇeśa, Dakṣiṇakālī, Uttarakālī; Balabhadra-Subhadrā-Jagannātha, Kārtikeya; Rādhākṛṣṇa, Basudevagadi, Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa-Sītā; Lakṣmī (in store house), Dasa Mahāvidyā, Śiva-Parvatī, Śani, Patitapāvana-Jagannātha, Sadāśiva, Harihara, Sun-God with his Charioteer in one-wheeled chariot.

Like in other main Goddess-Shrines of Odisha, the Daily *Nītis* (नीतिपूजा)—rituals of *Mā Śāralā* are performed systematically everyday from 5 a.m. to 11.30 p.m. *Mā* is worshipped by her two types of worshippers (सेवक) known as 'ब्राह्मण' and 'राउल'. The *Nīti* of four Types like 'पूर्वाहणनीति, मध्याहणनीति, अपराहणनीति' and 'सान्ध्यनीति' having different types of offerings. The offerings are offered in the name of Vanadurgā hymn (वनदुर्गामन्त्र and 'उत्तिष्ठ पुरुषि.....') The peculiarity of this temple is the spiritual rites are performed with both the leaves of *Tulasī* and *Vilwa* (तुलसीदल and बिल्वपत्र) but in *Mahāṣṭamī* only *Vilwapatra* is used. There was the practice of Animal-Sacrifice on the occasion of *Mahāṣṭamī-Sandhi Pūjā* of Dussehra (*Durgā Pūjā*). It was in practice that a buffalo was sacrificed on this occasion mainly which was supplied as offering by Sandharāja (King of Kujanga). This practice has now been dropped from 1946.

Besides the Daily *Nītis*, some Fairs and Festivals are observed in the temple. The following festivals are celebrated throughout the year as per the Hindu Calendar Months. The famous of these festivals are: *Mahāviśuva Saṁkrānti* (*Paṇā Saṁkrānti*), *Candana Yātrā*, *Kumārotsava*, *Puṣyābhiṣeka*, *Rājasamkrānti*, *Śunian Śārādīya Durgā Pūjā*, *Makarasaṁkrānti*, *Sāvitrī Amāvasyā*, *Mṛgaśirā Guruvāra*, *Śrīpañcamī*. The most five important festivals

are *Mahāviśuva Saṁkrānti*, *Durgā Pūjā-Mahāṣṭamī*, *Candana Yātrā*, *Navārṇa Pūjā*, *Śunian*. *Mahāviśuva Saṁkrānti* is observed as the *Jayantī-Utsava* of *Mā*. This *Saṁkrānti* (*Jhamu Yātrā*) otherwise known as “Fire-walking-festival” is one of the most important festivals of the Goddess. *Śūdra-Sevakas* belong to *Roul*-caste on this occasion wear a picturesque costumes and dance bare-footed over burning charcoals. Some ritual gestures are subsequently go round the villages for nearly one month in order to campaign and spread the magnanimity of *Devī-Mahimā*, i.e., the glory of the Goddess *Śāralā*. This practice is known as “*Ghaṭa-Paṭuā*”. Here in this practice, a wooden stand carrying potful of water (*Ghaṭa*) is decorated in flowers. *Roul-Sevaka* wearing sarees, bangles, ankle, vermilion, *Kājala*, different types of ornaments, decorating himself in a mythological picturesque manner heading the *Ghaṭa* without any support gives swinging dances. It is supposed that the will of the Goddess is acted in dance-form of the *Roul*.

Goddess *Śāralā* is worshipped with several *Veśas* (वेश) on different festive occasions of the Hindu Calendar year. *Veśa* means costume, attire or dress. So Goddess is ornated with several ornaments, dress, flowers-wreaths and is worshipped with specific *Nītis* connented with the *Veśas*. Out of these *Veśas* the following ones are important like; *Sunā Veśa*, *Mahiṣamardinī Veśa*, *Lakṣmī Veśa*, *Gajalaksmī Veśa*, *Saraswatī Veśa*, *Mahākālī Veśa* and even though she is a female deity, she is ornated with the male Goddess like *Śiva-Veśa* on the evening of *Baḍa-Oṣā* (बड ओषा) in the month of *Kārtika* and also she appears in ‘जगन्नाथवेश’ in every 11th day (एकादशीतिथि) of every fort night ‘शुक्लपक्ष’ and ‘कृष्णपक्ष’ honouring Lord *Jagannātha*, the State God of Odisha and well-prominent laudable God of the world.

For the management of daily and occasional spiritual

rites, fasts and festivals the temple has its personal and real properties. The temple now acquires landed properties tentatively of 118 acres reduced from 537 acres of the by gone days. Besides this, the temple has its income from the *Bhoga-Shops*, market, donations given by the devotees and not so grand help of the Government. The temple administration is now functioning under the guidance of the Trust-Board as per the Devottar Endowment Act, 1939.

Mā is called a legendary powerful deity. A number of folklores and stories are in vogue regarding the mother and Her glory. The story prevails in the “*Devī Bhāgavata*” “*Devīpurāṇa*”, *Rudrayāmalatantra* and in some other Puranic texts that there the *Śakti-Pīṭhas* grew up where the limbs scattered and fell being sliced by Viṣṇu from the corpse of Satī shouldered by Śiva from the incidence, we know, happened in *Dakṣa-Yajña*. Out of several limbs, the Tongue of Satī fell down here i.e. in Jhaṅkaḍa and it is known as ‘*Jihwā* or *Bāṇī Pīṭha*’ as mainly mentioned in *Oḍiyā* folklores and in some *Oḍiyā*-Puranic texts. It is also known from an adage prevails in *Śāralā Mahābhārata* that the sage Krupajala practised austre penance and gained *Brahma Pada*. He had his wish (अभिलाष) to get Saraswatī as his daughter. At this Goddess Saraswatī was pleased. She appeared before him. Having seen her, Krupajala was astonished and his joys knew no bounds. Remaining for a short while, *Devī* disappeared leaving before him an idol of her. Krupajala kept the idol in his *Āśrama*. Time rolled on and that idol was buried to the ground. In the next incarnation Viṣṇu, Paraśurāma in an incidence recovered the idol. He worshipped this stone-idol with great awe and from that day *Śāralā* was worshipped. This story is also described in other form that in *Tretā Yuga*, Paraśurāma, the incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu as a Brahmin warrior went

round (तीर्थपर्यटन) sacred places with an aim to establish Goddess Sanctuary (मातृतीर्थ) on his way. While moving from place to place, he came near river Candrabhāgā, took a dip in the river and took rest under a banyan tree. While meditating, he came to know about a power (शक्ति) kept self-hidden and desired to have self-expression. After that Paraśurāma recovered a shining stone (परशमणिशिला), a wonderful form of glittering Basalt-stone from underneath the earth and carved the divine image of Goddess with his arrow. As per the legend, the name of the Goddess became 'शारला (शारदा/सारदा)' as the figure of the Goddess is carved out by arrow (शर) of Paraśurāma. The place still bears the legend as meeting Banyan tree (भेटवर). The name (झङ्कार) or (झङ्कड) is lexically related in the magical reverberations of the sound Paraśurāma's arrow and divine stone.

From several angles, *Mā Śāralā* is famous. Her glory is indescribable and unique. He who prays Her with great awe, it is said, *Mā* appears before him and rescue him from dangers of any type he faces.

At present, taking the permission (अज्ञा) of *Mā* from the main temple of Jhaṅkaḍa, subsidiary temples are being built in many places of Odisha. *Mā* is everywhere, she is hic-et-ubique whether she is in temple or in our heart. Anyway *Śāradā-Pīṭha* otherwise known as *Vāṇī-Pīṭha* or *Sāraswata-Pīṭha* or Jhaṅkaḍa *Śāralā* is one of the most important and eminent *Śākta Pīṭhas* of Odisha namely the *Śākta Pīṭhas* (Shrines of Goddesses) of Vimalā (Puri), Biraja (Yajapur), Tārinī (Kendujhar), Samaleśwarī (Sambalpur), Maṅgalā (Kakatpur) and others.

Glory to *Mā Śāradā* (*Śāralā*, *Saradā*), Glory to *Śāradā-Pīṭha* and glory to Odisha, the state of Gods and Goddesses ever worshipful and memorable.

Om Śānti, Śānti, Śānti Om.

Śakti the Mother

—R. T. Nathan

Our country together with some adjoining areas known as Bhāratavarṣa is a holy land, (*Puṇya Bhūmi*). Many thinkers, philosophers, seers and sages from Pre-Vedic times have made deep study on life and its principles and analyzed life from various aspects. They arrived at the conclusion that life is not confined to mere material aspects alone but the real life is of a divine aspiration and spiritual search of the soul through moral and ethical values and higher ideals as against the temporal desire and mundane comforts which are of short duration. The specialty of this holy land is its commitment to virtue, peace, simplicity, contentment, devotion to God, realization of God and ultimate liberation of the soul leading to its merger with the Universal Soul.

The whole of this Universe is occupied by a Supreme Spirit actuating all beings and objects therein in all their activities always acting as the substratum. We call it self, *Ātman*, *Brahman*, *Śivam*, etc. There is also a creative energy called '*Śakti*, *Parāśakti* etc. enabling the substratum in the various forms viz. *Brahmā*, *Viṣṇu* and *Śiva* in its functions of creation, sustenance and dissolution respectively. While *Śiva* is static, *Śakti* is dynamic. While the former is known as *Puruṣa*, the latter is identified as *Prakṛtī*. *Śrī Śakti* is the driving force behind all happenings in all the worlds of men and gods acting as the live wire in them. Had it not been for *Śakti*, this world would not have been thus. *Śrī Śaṅkarācārya* in his *Saundarya Laharī* says *Śiva*

becomes capable of creation only with the association of Śakti with Him and if it is not for Her energy Śiva would not be able to even move about. She is functioning as *Māyā* in this world of superimposition of the subtle *Brahman* to reveal the truth of *Brahman*.

The relationship of Śiva and Śakti is that of fire and heat and Sun and light. Fire burns, rain showers, wind blows, seasons change, earth revolves, living beings including animals, creatures, plants, etc., are born, they interact and perish. All these are on account of the effect of Śakti and Her association with Śiva. This is how joint names such as Umāmaheśwara, Lakṣmī-Narasimha, Sītārāma Rādhākṛṣṇa, etc., are assigned by us to God. We also presume Śiva as Ardhanārīśwara having Śakti as half of his body and Śrī Lakṣmī dwelling in Mahāviṣṇu on his breast portion. In the realm of physical manifestation the same relationship is applied between energy and mass (matter). Thus it is Śakti which is the basic truth behind the universe.

Śivaśakti Aikya Rūpiṇī is the last of the thousand names assigned to Goddess Lalitā Devī. Śakti is honoured as Universal Mother (*Jaganmātā*). The very name assigned to Śrī Lalitā in the hymn in Her honour in *Śrī Mātā*. Śakti is considered as mother. We call our land as *Māṭṛ Bhūmi* and our language as *Māṭṛ Bhāṣā*. We honour all rivers which are the basic necessity of life prefixing or suffixing with the word Mother. *Prakṛti* is called Mother Nature. According to convention, Mother, Father, Preceptor and God are held in descending order of supremacy for worship, devotion and honour. Mother is the first and foremost relation for anyone and it begins from the minute she conceives the child. She bears the child in herself till she is delivered of the child unmindful of the inconveniences

and suffering faced by her during the period of pregnancy and also after giving birth. She also develops affection towards the child because of the untold suffering undergone by her to bring up the child. The child also develops a close affinity towards its mother because of its initial association with the mother. Until the child grows, mother is the only assured protection. In the arms length of mother the child feels safe. There is no parallel for the love between mother and child. The mother becomes the vehicle for the embodied *Jīva* to get into this world. Hence the supremacy of mother. Śrī Śaṅkara in his *Mātrkā Pañcakam* laments His inability to compensate the mother for all deprivation suffered by her from the time of conception in the womb. In another hymn to *Devī*, seeking pardon for sins, he says that there can be a bad son but never a bad mother.

While doing the special *Śrāddha* in Gayā, we are asked to offer 16 rice-balls to mother—one for each pain inflicted on her—while all other manes are offered only ball each. So high is the esteem at which mother is held in our custom and scriptures. Mother is offered 16 rice-balls one for each of the distress she had to suffer while doing the *Śrāddha* in Gayā, while all other ancestors are offered only one rice-ball. So high is the esteem at which mother is held by us.

Mother is the epitome to kindness and grace. She is ever ready to suffer any pain or sacrifice for the sake of her offsprings, even if they cause harm or sorrow to her. She is all love and compassion towards her children. When this is the position in the mortal mothers who give birth to a few children and her relationship with them is restricted to a short time, what about the greatness to the Universal Mother in respect of love, kindness, sympathy and forgiveness showered by her as the mother on crores of *Jīvas* in all

their crores of lives right from inception till liberation?

Thus Śakti is mother and mother is Śakti, the Goddess, She is called *Avyaja Karuṇā-Mūrti* in the 1000 named hymns for Śrī Lalitā. She influences the Lord to take a lighter view of sins committed by us and save us from the due punishment according to *Dayā Śatakam* of Śrī Swāmī Deśikan. Her love, mercy and sympathy to her devotee children are copious.

Śakti worship is primordial in our country, the forerunners being the northeast. From there it has spread all over the country, especially the southern parts. There are 51 Śakti-Pīthams covering the whole of the country.

Śakti is worshipped in the forms of Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahāsaraswatī, as the consorts of Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Brahmā respectively. Each of them is worshipped again in various forms and names. There are shrines for Goddess all over the length and breadth of our land. A few among the important temples are those for Śrī Mīnākṣī in Madurai, Śrī Kāmākṣī in Kanchipuram, Śrī Viśālākṣī in Varanasi, Śrī Mahālakṣmī in Mumbai, Śrī Durgā in Kolkata and Śrī Vaiṣṇo Devī in Kashmir.

Apart from as mother she is also worshipped as virgin girl. Kanyakumari temple in the southern tip is famous.

There are also village Goddesses prayed statewide and locally all over eg., *Mariamā*, etc., in Tamil Nadu, *Bhagavatī*, *Bhadrakālī*, etc., in Kerala, Yellama, etc. in Andhra, etc.

May Śakti the Mother shower her unlimited grace and blessings on us!



Śiva-Śakti on the Creation of Universe

—S. Hari

Tattvas, the guiding principles play an important role in the creation of universe. Their presence or absence, combination and permutation play an important role in the creation of the diversity of worlds. The most popular expression in *Upaniṣad* is “*Tattvamasi*”. ‘*Tat*’ means ‘that’ and ‘*Tvam*’ means ‘you’ or an individual. Hence, ‘*Tattvamasi*’ points at the transcendental, immanent, macrocosm and microcosm. The importance of *Tattvas* is evident from that Jainism and Buddhism have their own version of *Tattvas*.

Based on different aspects, Sāṅkhya school of Philosophy identifies 24 *Tattvas* while *Shaivism* adapts 36 *Tattvas* identifying Śiva *Tattvas* as the supreme of all. These *Tattvas* can be classified as *Śuddha* (Pure) and *Aśuddha* (impure) *Tattvas*. They do reinforce the supreme unity of Śiva and Śakti. Ādi Śaṅkara emphasizes how the universe is the confluence of Śiva and Śakti in the very opening verse of *Saundarya Laharī*.

शिवः शक्त्या युक्तो यदि भवति शक्तः प्रभवितुं
न चेदेवं देवो न खलु कुशलः स्पन्दितुमपि ।
अतस्त्वामाराध्यां हरिहरविरंच्यादिभिरपि
प्रणन्तुं स्तोतुं वा कथमकृतपुण्यः प्रभवति ॥

(*Saundaryalaharī* 1)

The set of 36 *Tattvas* are bunched into various groups as *Īswara Tattva* (5), *Śakti Tattva* (5), *Ātma Tattva* (6), *Indriya Tattva* (5), *Karma Tattva* (5), *Tanmātrās* (5) and *Mahābhūta Tattva* (5).

We shall look into certain aspects of these categorical divisions of *Tattvas* in a very broad sense based on what we observe in our life.

Īśvara Tattvas that control the pure world have five subdivisions pervading in every cosmic activity. These *Tattvas* occupy different levels and they are connected to the activity of creation.

1. Śiva Tattva—This symbolizes the first outward movement of Paramaśiva. It is described as “Static” aspect of universal consciousness, the support and root of all things and potentialities of the world. Universe is the creation of Gods own mind (the supreme intelligence). The first reality of *Tattva* is God himself. This level of reality consists of Pure and Infinite Consciousness.

2. Śakti Tattva—It is the activity of Lord Śiva. From here, the rest of *Tattvas* spring out. There is no real separation between Śiva and Śakti. At this level, *Śakti* is in the form of “*Ānanda Śakti*” being full of bliss. This *Śakti* give out the five fundamental activities which give rise to the world are Emission, Reabsorption, Concealment, and Grace. This form of Śiva holds a visualization of a body composed of *Mantras*, which can be visualized, worshipped and meditated upon.

There are three primal powers which are known as *Īcchā Śakti* (power of aspiration), *Jñāna Śakti* (Power of Knowledge) and *Kriyā Śakti* (power of action). As we observe in *Māyā*, the above three primal powers take the form of ego (*Ahaṅkāra*), Intelligence and *Buddhi* and memory (*Manas*). It is the delusion of *Māyā*, which prevents one individual from realizing the oneness with Śiva and Śakti. One may observe that in the mundane life we have *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* which are the embodiment of Śiva and Śakti.

3. Sadāśiva Tattva—In the third level, God experiences himself as an unlimited independent force that can perform any action he wishes. At this stage, God resolves his power of creation into operation.

4. Īśwara Tattva—In the fourth level, the creator is able to know all things. He begins to conceive in his mind, the universe to be created.

5. Satvidyā Tattva—In this fifth level, the divine power of action is the power. God may assume and manifest himself into any form or shape.

Creation is ideal and is very much with the mind of God as thought or idea is with the mind of a human. The Universe at this level is purely spiritual and is inhibited by spiritual beings such as Gods, Enlightened *Yogīs*, Sages and Saints who are aware of their Oneness with the creator. These are great spiritual powers. Although they assume any form or shape they wish, they have nobodies to claim their own. They are known as *Devas* and *Devatās*.

The next five *Tattvas* are *Śakti Tattvas*. They are the same as Spiritual Magnetic Energy.

6. Māyā Tattva—God performs miracle on his physical creation. It is called magic power and *Māyā Śakti*.

The sun envelops itself under the cloud and produces rain, which nourishes different forms of life. God in his infinite majesty manifest the material universe with innumerable forms of limited life. The Sun hides himself by night to reveal stars and moon. Also God conceals His glory and man can see the wonders of his creation and understand the power of God. Look around and watch—there are the wonders of creation everywhere.

7. Kalā Tattva—In this case the divine power (consciousness, bliss, will power, knowledge and Action) assumes limited forms giving rise to the first creation called

Kalā Tattva. It represents limited power of action.

8. Vidyā Tattva—It emphasizes the understanding of creations. Though the power of Knowledge, the creations can understand a few things.

9. Rāga Tattva—It is here we observe the power or weakness of desire by the beings. The living beings have limited power and they can desire only limited things.

10. Kāla Tattva—In this stage, the soul is unlimited and uninterrupted. Further, happiness becomes temporary and limited.

Next we have six divisions of *Ātma Tattvas*.

11. Niyati Tattva—Soul's consciousness is limited and will have only a limited experience of itself.

12. Puruṣa Tattva—The consciousness having been limited comes into existence as the embodied soul completes the above limited powers of consciousness, happiness, desire, knowledge an action. Hence, it is called the *Puruṣa* or Personal soul.

The universe is created by God and every element was given a shape (*Rūpa*) using the basic 12 *Tattvas* cited above.

The next 24 *Tattvas* are applied to have the qualities of every *Rūpa* created.

13. Prathama Tattva—The aspect of the soul following the limitations of its consciousness becomes unconscious and forms soul's first objective experience. It is called the *Prathama Tattva*. The soul is formed with the three *Guṇas* namely *Sattva* (light), *Tamas* (Darkness) and *Rajas* (Activity). The third *Guṇa* is formed through the interaction of the first two *Guṇas*. They are experienced as pleasure and pain.

14. Buddhi Tattva—This is the first product of *Prathama Tattva*. It is formed from the *Sattva Guṇa* in which both soul and experience are reflected. In the

everyday life, Buddhi constitutes everyday life as a soul's intellect, or power of Reasoning whereby one analyses his experience.

15. Ahankāra Tattva—It represents the power of personality or identity. Through this the soul creates an identity for itself out of sense of perception, emotions, thoughts and memories. Hence it is called as '*Ahankāra*' or 'I' maker.

16. Manas Tattva—The lower mind selects sense perception and builds them into intelligible images, names and classifies and presents them to the higher level of mind for processing further.

The next twenty *Tattvas* are *Prakṛti Tattvas*. They are the faculties of *Indriyas*. They manifest themselves in the *Jivas* as their physical, mental and Subtle bodies.

Five *Tattvas* associated with the faculties of perception form the *Jñānendriyas*. They are identified by the act they do as hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, and smelling. Thus we have the following five *Tattvas*.

17. Śrotra Tattva—Hearing (ears)

18. Tvak Tattva—Touching (skin)

19. Cakra Tattva—Seeing (eyes)

20. Rasanā Tattva—Tasting (tongue)

21. Ghrāṇa Tattva—Smelling (nose)

Hearing, feeling by touch, seeing, tasting and smelling are the soul's powers of perceptual knowledge and these are extension of the lower mind.

Next we have the faculties of action. They do their duty associated by the *Jñānendriyas*. These are:

22. Vāk Tattva—Speech (Voice)

23. Pāṇi Tattva—Grasping (Hands)

24. Pāda Tattva—Walking (feet)

25. Paya Tattva—Excretion (anus). This is action of rejection.

26. Upastha Tattva—Procreation

Speaking, grasping, moving, Exerting and Sexual activities are the soul's powers of responding and interacting with the other world.

Next, we have *Tanmātrās*, which are the five faculties of primary sensation.

27. Śabda—Sound**28. Sparśa—Feel or touch****29. Rūpa—Form****30. Rasa—Taste****31. Gandha—Odour**

Sound, Touch, Form, Flavour and Odour constitute the sense data and these are together soul's external experience.

Now we have matters outside the body which are not controlled by the body but whose presence are realized by the body. These five gross elements are called *Mahābhūtas*. These are the five states of ether, air, fire, water and earth.

32. Ākāśa Tattva—Ether**33. Vāyu Tattva—Air****34. Tejas Tattva—Fire****35. Āpas Tattva—Water****36. Pṛthvī Tattva—Earth**

Ether, Air, Fire, Water and Earth are the condensation of the above primary senses. They represent the constituent forces that make up the material substance. That which gives solidity is associated with Earth *Tattva*, Fluidity with Water *Tattva*, Form and shape with Fire, movements with Air, location and extension with Ether.

Due to variation in the matter, the gross *Tattvas* are perceived differently. Earth is perceived by the qualities of odour, taste, colour, feel and sound. Fire by colour, feel and sound, Air by feel and sound, and Water by its qualities of taste, colour, feel and sound, Ether being the most subtle

is perceived by the quality of sound.

The five-fold nature of the universe (*Prapañca*) according to this view is shown in the table. The members of the tantric “trinity” are represented by the principles of action, reconciling and inactive. Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva represent *Guṇas* as *Rajas*, *Sattva* and *Tamas*. From this trinity come all forms, including the five elements through different blending.

The Five Elements	क	ख	ग	घ	ङ
	Earth	Water	Fire	Air	Space
The Five Impressions	च	छ	ज	झ	ञ
	Scent	Taste	Sight	Touch	Hearing
The Five instruments of Actions	ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण
	Excreting	Sexing	Grasping	Moving	Speaking
The Instruments of Sensing	त	थ	द	ध	न
	Smelling	Tasting	Seeing	Feeling	Hearing
The Empirical Individual	प	फ	ब	भ	म
	Prakṛti	Ahaṁkāra	Buddhi	Manas	Puruṣa
Limitation of Māyā	य	र	ल	व	ल
	Action	Knowing	Desire	Time	Fate
The Five Varieties	श	ष	स	ह	क्ष
	Kriyā	Jñāna	Ichchā	Śakti	Śiva

Tattvas are defined by their exclusive capacity to perform a specific function in the scheme of reality. And as the sole agent or acting force is consciousness, it follows that the *Tattvas* are nothing but functions of consciousness.

Jiva forgets the unlimited nature which is actually one with Śiva-Śakti, considering the individual to be a limited individual (*Puruṣa*) with a certain nature (*Prakṛti*). This is a reflection or shadow of the 36th *Tattva* with a mental

apparatus which is also a reflection of *Īcchā*, *Jñāna* and *Kriyā Śaktis*. 'I' the *Ahaṁkāra* is the reflection of *Īcchā*.

The individual plays the role until realizing the 36th *Tattva*. It is Śiva-Śakti itself, immanent in the universe and vibrating with the power of sound.

Looking at the *Devanāgarī* alphabets comprising consonants and vowels, we have another point of view. Thirty-six consonants indicate Śiva and the 15 vowels point Śakti—the whole being the universe as sound. The assortments are sometimes defined as five bodies of Śiva.

It is the delusion of *Māyā* which prevents an individual from realizing the individuals' oneness with Śiva-Śakti and the three primordial *Śaktis* of *Īcchā*, *Jñāna* and *Kriyā*.



The way to true happiness is to do your best in the role in which God has placed you, without creating further desires. Then you can be a king within, no matter what your outer conditions. You can be happier than a million are—in fact, if you know the troubles of millionaires, you wouldn't want to be one. The fear of losing all that money; the fear of disease; the feeling of insecurity, never knowing who one's real friends are; there are some of the struggles and sufferings of those who have too much.

—*Divine Romance*

Mother Durgā: The Benevolent Goddess

—Dr. M. S. Manhas

Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa says in the *Gītā* (IV. 7-8); “O Bhārata (Arjuna), whenever there is decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, I embody Myself for protection of the pious, for destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of righteousness age after age.” This is exactly what He did in His Kṛṣṇa incarnation, and that is what other divine powers have been doing since antiquity. History is replete with such examples. Prophets and saints of different religions have been helping mankind in the same way.

Invariably during all cases of divine intervention, the act of benevolence takes place in several stages. There is an oppression of *Devas* (good people) by *Asuras* (evil forces). The aggrieved party supplicates the divine power to come to their rescue in order to uphold the cosmic order. The divine power (male or female, depending upon the faith of the supplicant) appears on the scene to defend *Devas*. After ascertaining the cause of the dispute, the divine power, individually or through the help of surrogates, annihilates the cause of suffering. The divine power then departs with a promise to rescue devotees in the future also, should there be any further atrocities perpetrated by the evil forces.

Mother Durgā’s accomplishments in destroying *Asuras* and her benevolence towards her devotees are described in great detail in *Devī-Māhātmya* (exploits of the goddess), which constitutes chapters 81 through 93 of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*. They can also be found in the *Śiva Purāṇa* (*Umā*

Saṁhitā, Chapter 1. 59) and *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. *Vāmana Purāṇa*, *Skanda Purāṇa*, *Kālikā Purāṇa*, *Mahā Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* have described in detail the prominence and accomplishments of Mother Durgā. They also describe the method of worship and the underlying philosophy of the Śakti Religion (worship of the female deities in Hindu religion).

Coming to the main subject of Mother Durgā, she is one such manifestation of the Supreme Reality. She is the most beloved, magnanimous, and formidable goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. She has been worshipped as the supreme power since very early times and its references can be found in *Yajur Veda* and *Taittareya Brāhmaṇa*. She not only destroyed the most vicious *Asuras* (evil doers) but also helped her innocent devotees, who supplicated for her protection when faced with dire adversities beyond their control. In addition to this, she also helped the devotees by demolishing their ego, which was one of the main causes of their material and spiritual down fall. Instead of considering such an act of the Mother as a punishment, it should be taken as the remonstrance of a fondling mother to her naughty offsprings for bringing them back to the right path. No harm is ever intended in motherly love. Some of the divine accomplishments of Mother Durgā on behalf of her devotees are briefly summarized in the following examples.

How the Mother teaches Her Children—

Once upon a time there was a fight between *Devas* and *Asuras* to gain supremacy over the world. (Such fights were very common in the olden days, and they are still being fought between the evil forces and the law abiding citizens.) In this fight *Devas* were successful and *Asuras* had to retreat. This success inflamed the ego of *Devas*. They claimed divine powers and expected everyone to adore them for their exalted status. Little did they realize that their

achievements are only through the grace of the Supreme Being who is omnipotent, omnipresent, and knowledge absolute. This boastful behaviour is unbecoming the wise and the powerful. All of a sudden, *Bhagavatī Umā* appeared as a mass of energy in the form of dazzling light. *Devas* could not understand the nature of this unexpected and inexplicable appearance. On consultation among themselves it was decided by *Indra Devatā*, the king of *Devas*, that *Vāyu Devatā* (wind-god) should find out the truth about this mysterious object. They did not know at that time that this mass of energy was none other than *Mahāmāyā* (supreme illusion, *Bhagavatī Devī*), who had appeared there to destroy their ego.

When the wind-god went there, the *Devī* asked him who he was. The wind-god arrogantly replied that he was *Vāyu Devatā* who supports all life in the universe. He was the one who had full control on all moving and unmoving objects. Nothing could exist without his command. *Bhagavatī Devī* then placed a blade of straw on the ground and asked *Vāyu Devatā* to move it using all the divine powers at his command. At this challenge, the wind-god tried his best to move the blade of dry grass using the most powerful gusts of wind, but was unable to move it. *Agni Devatā* also tried his power but could not burn that dry blade of grass. Similarly other *Devas* also used their respective powers but none was able to move it. Then all of them went back to *Indra Devatā* and expressed their inability to move even a blade of straw she placed before us, let alone finding about the nature of this divine force. In the meantime *Bhavānī Devī* disappeared.

Indra Devatā realized that this mysterious object that defeated all *Devas* must be *Mahāmāyā* (another appellation of *Bhavānī Devī*), because none else could defeat their combined power. He therefore, eulogized her with utmost

love and humility and begged for her forgiveness for any wrong committed by them. He also requested for a boon that *Devas* may never entertain the sin of ego in the future. (This story about the eradication of *Devas*' pride is also narrated in the third chapter of the *Kena Upaniṣad*). At this Bhavānī *Devī* appeared in her true form and admonished *Devas* for display of ego after defeating *Asuras*. She advised them that humility must accompany power, because brute force can only result in the downfall of the wielder of power. Right is might is humanism, but might is right is animalism. I am the only one who can incarnate as a female (Pārvatī), male (Śiva), or male and female combined (Ardhanārīśwara Rūpa, half male and half female form of Śiva). Knowing this give up ego and worship Me as the originator, sustainer and annihilator of the universe. This will be the secret of your success in future. (This lesson in humility was also given by a teacher to *Devas* after they had completed their education. See *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.)

How the Mother got Durgā Appellation!

There was an indomitable *Asura* by the name of Durgama (lit, difficult to conquer), His name reflected his ruthless character. He was powerful, ferocious, and merciless. In his younger days he ardently prayed to Lord Brahmā. Through severe austerities Durgama pleased Brahmā, and by the grace of Brahmā he acquired complete control of the four *Vedas*. At the loss of Vedic knowledge, mortals and *Devas* lost their spiritual and material power. People forgot about the essentials of their religious austerities. They were soon conquered by the *Asuras*. Even the *Devas* did not fare any better. *Asura* Durgama became the undisputed ruler of the three worlds (earth, heaven, and the space in between). With the loss of *Dharma*, unrighteousness prevailed all around. There was a dry spell for a long time and people were starving because of the famine. As a last

resort, *Devas* went to *Yogamāyā Maheśwarī* and supplicated for help.

The *Devas* poured out their grievances and frustrations before *Yogamāyā*. ‘O Mother, if we have erred in the past, knowingly or unknowingly, please forgive us. Children always make mistakes, but only the mother forgives them without remorse. Please reclaim the *Vedas* for us from Durgama so that we can follow the prescribed *Dharma* as mentioned in our sacred scriptures. Currently he has their sole custody, because of the boon that he received from Lord Brahmā.

Mahāmāyā then appeared before them. She was immensely grieved to learn about their sad plight. She fed all of them and removed the dry spell through her *Yogamāyā*. She then told them to go home and promised to retrieve the *Vedas* for them.

Hearing about the promise of *Mahāmāyā* to *Devas*, Durgama surrounded the Kailasa Mountain (the abode of *Mahāmāyā*) with a large army of *Asuras*. *Mahāmāyā*, through her Yogic powers, came out of this blockade riding on the back of her lion and attacked the *Asura* forces from the rear. During a prolonged battle, the *Asura* forces were decimated and Durgama was killed. Because of the annihilation of Durgamāsura and his army, *Mahāmāyā* received the appellation of Durgā *Devī*. Mother Durgā retrieved the four *Vedas* that Durgama had usurped and handed them over to *Devas*.

Incarnation as Mahāmāyā—

Once upon a time there were two *Asuras* by the name of Madhu and Kaitābha. Both of them were extremely vicious and powerful because of a boon that they had received from *Bhagavān* Nārāyaṇa. They were as sinful in their actions as they were fearful to look at. When they

grew up, they overpowered all *Devas* in heaven. This upset the cosmic order. One day the two brothers decided to overpower Lord Brahmā, the creator of the universe. They approached Brahmā in his heavenly abode and arrogantly asked him ‘Who are you?’ After the display of this insolence, the *Asuras* got ready to kill him. Fearing the wrath of Madhu and Kaiṭabha and knowing their unlimited power, Brahmā prayed to goddess Ambikā to come to his rescue. He said, ‘Please entice these *Asuras* with your charm till *Bhagavān* Nārāyaṇa wakes up from His deep slumber. He will then rescue me from the clutches of these infidels.’ *Devī* Ambikā immediately took the form of *Mahāmāyā* and attracted the attention of the *Asuras*.

In the meantime, *Bhagavān* Nārāyaṇa woke up. Sizing up the situation, He got ready to kill the *Asuras*. This fight continued for a long time (one thousand years) without any side taking the upper hand. Sensing that Viṣṇu, in spite of His immense supernatural powers, could not do any harm to them, the *Asuras* said in a fit of arrogance, ‘Viṣṇu, all your powers are ineffective against us. We have conquered all *Devas* and humiliated you as well. Therefore, ask for a boon from us which we shall grant in a spirit of magnanimity.’

At this, Viṣṇu immediately said, ‘If you are pleased, then grant me the boon that both of you will die at my hands. This is the only boon that I want and will not be satisfied with anything else.’ Realizing that they have been tricked and lost the battle through thoughtlessness, the two brothers then made a counter proposal. They said, ‘We are prepared to die only on one condition. Kill us on a dry place.’ They knew that the earth was submerged in the ocean and there was only water all around. So they cleverly thought that the possibility of their death did not arise.

Bhagavān Viṣṇu immediately placed the heads of

Madhu and Kaiṭabha on His thighs and chopped off their heads with His *Sudarśana Cakra*. This relieved the world from the scourge of these two wicked *Asuras*, who had caused death and destruction all around in their lifetime.

The role of *Mahāmāyā* in getting rid of Madhu and Kaiṭabha in this story is indirect but crucial. Without her help, these *Asuras* would have eliminated Brahmā. The loss of the originator of the *Brahmāṇḍa* (the entire creation of Brahmā) would have been a disaster for the living.

Incarnation as Mahālakṣmī—

There was a famous *Asura* by the name of Rambha. His son, Mahiṣa, was a powerful and conceited *Asura*. He conquered all *Devas*. He had the unique power of changing from a man to a water buffalo, and eventually became the ruler of heaven by defeating Indra *Devatā*, the king of *Devas*. His powers originated through a boon that he had received from Brahmā. According to this boon he could not be killed by man or god. Mahiṣa considered this boon as good as receiving a boon of immortality. He did not care very much about the ability of the weaker sex to do him any harm. Unfortunately this proved to be his undoing.

The defeated *Devas* went to Lord Brahmā and made him aware of their desperate situation. Brahmā acting as their spokesperson took them to where Viṣṇu and Śiva were present together. The celestial beings, jointly supplicated Viṣṇu and Śiva and narrated their tale of woes. They told them that all *Devas*, including Indra *Devatā*, have been driven out of heaven and Mahiṣāsura is now accepting the *Yajña* oblations from the mortals. Since the *Asuras* are enjoying the protection of Mahiṣāsura, we find ourselves quite helpless and are made to live amongst the mortals. Mahiṣāsura has usurped all the functions allotted to Agni, Vāyu, Varuṇa, Kubera, Yama, Indra, and other celestial

bodies. We now seek your protection, because only you are capable of relieving us from our misery.

On hearing about the arrogance of Mahiṣāsura and the power that he was misusing because of Brahmā's boon, Viṣṇu and Śiva were filled with rage. At that time an inexplicable lustrous power emanated from their bodies and from the bodies of all *Devas*. The total mass of this force coalesced into one unit and took the form of goddess *Mahiṣamardinī* (killer of Mahiṣa). This goddess had a dark complexion and was bestowed with powers of all the gods. The gods also provided her with their most potent weapons to conquer Mahiṣāsura, a formidable adversary. All *Devas* eulogized her as Mahālakṣmī.

Hearing about these developments and the preparation of *Devas* to kill him, Mahiṣāsura arrived there accompanied by his most trusted soldiers and the deadliest weapons in his armory. The *Devī*, on the other hand, was ready to face this enemy of *Devas*. She was riding on the back of a lion given to her by Kailasa Mountain, and was laced with infallible celestial weapons offered by Viṣṇu, Śiva, Indra, Yama, Varuṇa and others. Before the fight started, the *Devī* dissuaded Mahiṣāsura from fighting to save his life. But the words of wisdom are not relished by those who are destined to fall. The *Asuras*, however, were no match for Mahālakṣmī. They were soon defeated by the *Devī*. Mahiṣāsura was the last to face her in a one to one combat. The *Devī* easily felled him, put her foot on him and killed him with the trident given to her by Lord Śiva. Eventually she beheaded his with a powerful stroke of her divine sword. This relieved *Devas* from the atrocities of Mahiṣāsura and gave her the epithet of *Mahiṣamardinī*.

Incarnation of Saraswatī—

Asuras, Śumbha and Niśumbha, were two brothers. They were extremely ruthless, and in course of time

conquered the whole world. They also subjugated *Devas* in heaven. Because of the atrocities of these *Asura* brothers, *Devas* went to Kailāsa Mountain where Lord Śiva was residing. There they eulogized *Devī* Umā and supplicated her to relieve them from the atrocities of Śumbha and Niśumbha. From the *Keśa* (hair) of the *Devī*, a pretty girl appeared who became famous by the name of Kauśikī. Kauśikī as Saraswatī is the destroyer of the two *Asura* brothers. Since she appeared from the body of mother Umā, Kauśikī is also called Mātaṅgī. Saraswatī *Devī* advised *Devas* to return to their abodes and assured them that ‘I shall soon fulfil your desire to achieve relief from the horrible behaviour of the *Asura* brothers.’

One day Śumbha’s two employees by the names of Caṇḍa and Muṇḍa happened to see Saraswatī *Devī* strolling in the Kailasa Mountain. They were captivated by the heavenly beauty and exquisite charms of Saraswatī. They immediately reported the existence of this lovely damsel to Śumbha and suggested that she would form an ideal life companion for their king. Śumbha sent Sugrīva, his trusted emissary, to Saraswatī with a marriage proposal. Sugrīva pleaded Śumbha’s case using a chaste language and tried to impress her with his many exploits including the defeat of *Devas* at his hands. Accepting Śumbha as her spouse would make her the queen of the three worlds. At this the *Devī* said, ‘I have taken a vow to marry only that person who can defeat me in a fight.’ Hearing this unexpected but firm reply from the *Devī*, Sugrīva returned disappointed to Śumbha and acquainted him with her resolve.

Śumbha brothers then deputed Dhūmrālocana one of their trusted generals, to persuade Saraswatī diplomatically to accept Śumbha as her husband. In case she persisted in her rejection, he was free to use force to capture her and bring her here. Dhūmrālocana was also unsuccessful

in his mission and was killed along with the armed contingent that he had brought with him.

Pressure on *Devī* Saraswatī was increased incrementally. After the defeat of Dhūmrālocana Śumbha then sent a large army under the command of Caṇḍa, Muṇḍa, and Raktabīja, his three most experienced generals. *Devī* Saraswatī destroyed this contingent as well.

Eventually, Śumbha and Niśumbha, assisted by a large force of ruthless and well trained *Asuras*, attacked Ambikā *Devī* (*Saraswatī*) using the most deadly weapons in their arsenal. The *Devī*, mounted on the back of her famous lion, replied with equal ferocity using her impeccable trident. She annihilated all the *Asuras* along with Śumbha and Niśumbha and relieved *Devas* of their deadly enemies.

The Mahāvidyās—

According to the *Paurāṇika* literature, once Dakṣa performed a sacrifice in which the inhabitants of heaven were invited. He did not invite Śiva, his son-in-law, because of his uncouth habits, dishevelled appearance, and ungainly company. On hearing about the big celebration in her father's house Satī, Śiva's wife, was greatly upset. She could not tolerate the insult to her husband. She asked Śiva's permission to attend the function. Śiva tried to dissuade her as it was improper to attend such a function as an uninvited guest. Satī, however, insisted to attend the sacrifice. Before leaving for her parents' house, Satī assumed a dreadful form in anger and manifested in ten different forms. These manifestations are collectively called *Mahāvidyās* and are individually known as: Kālī, Tārā Chinnamastā, Bhuvaneśvarī, Bagalā, Dhūmāvatī, Kamalā, Mātāṅgī, Ṣoḍaśī and Bhairavī. These goddesses are worshipped in different parts of India by followers of *Śakti* sects. Some of them have fearful appearances and wear scanty dresses. Kālī is believed to be a very benevolent

goddess though she has a ferocious demeanor. She is the principal deity in Bengal and neighbouring areas. Some of them, such as, Kamalā and Ṣoḍaśī are beautiful and helpful to their devotees. The rest are ferocious deities who can perform miracles and reside in funeral grounds.

Spiritual Interpretation of Devī's Accomplishments—

Some of the *Paurāṇika* stories about the extraordinary exploits of Mother Durgā have been summarized in the preceding sections. They are quite interesting, romantic, instructive, and informative for the general public. The devotees find them very helpful in fixing their minds on the deity during prayers. They are also delightful for the oppressed people as they find comfort and solace in their hours of grief during everyday stressful life, as they have complete faith in the grace of the Mother. There is, however, a deeper meaning in these stories for the philosophic minds. Spiritual beliefs based on sound philosophic principles in the Mother's deeds have sustained the interest and devotion of even thoughtful people.

Daiṁ Śaktī (divine power), which the Mother represents, is *Sāttvika* (immaculate attributes without any taint whatsoever) in nature. *Devas* (gods) are enamored of power, prestige, and fame. *Asuras* (demons) are fond of displaying their materialistic propensities and will do anything to satisfy their wanton desires without any consideration of the means employed to achieve them. Death, destruction and annihilation of social and spiritual orders are commonly used to spread terror among peace loving people.

In order to bring *Devas* and *Asuras* to the path of righteousness, it is necessary for some divine power to rise and accomplish this task. If allowed to go unchecked, there will only be a rise of animalism and demise of humanism.

If *Brahma* is the source of *Brahmajñāna* (knowledge of the Supreme), *Asuras* like Madhu and Kaiṭabha personify

Rāga (attachment), *Deveṣa* (hatred), and everything else that causes pain and suffering. These *Asuras* are believed to have originated from the ear wax of Lord Viṣṇu. This explains their despicable origin equally reprehensible behaviour. The world is also caught up in the whirlwind of attachment, hatred and greed. As long as these *Tāmasika* qualities prevail, Madhu, Kaiṭabha and their likes cannot be subdued. Therefore, in order to destroy such evil personalities, it is necessary to eschew demoniac tendencies and develop godly traits. Such divine traits cannot flourish as long as these *Asuras* are alive and well. It was only the dexterity and power of Lord Viṣṇu that could destroy them.

Mahiṣāsura represents the height of arrogance, which originates in the mind that is corrupted through its unbridled attachment with the sense faculties. Goddess Lakṣmī (another incarnation of Mother Durgā) is the goddess of riches. The real riches are not mere accumulation of material wealth. They constitute such divine qualities as knowledge, love, compassion, forgiveness, kindness, firmness, etc. Only through the force of such qualities, it is possible to destroy Mahiṣāsura. One finds such heavenly attributes in Mahālakṣmī. It was only through the strength of such qualities that she was able to destroy Mahiṣāsura.

Saraswatī is the Goddess of Knowledge. Śumbha, Niśumbha, Caṇḍa, Muṇḍa, Raktabīja and other were completely opposed to knowledge. They were virtually the slaves of lust, anger, greed, and other animal instincts. Only Saraswatī, the Goddess of knowledge, wisdom, and erudition could destroy these *Asuras*. Therefore, it is essential to cut asunder the veil of ignorance with the sword of knowledge.

Thus, it will be evident that the stories narrating the accomplishments of Mother Durgā in various incarnations teach profound principles of *Vedānta*, the knowledge supreme. It is, therefore, essential to understand the spiritual

significance of these *Paurānika* stories, and make the outlined principles a part of one's thought, word, and actions. This is the only way to overcome evil propensities and to enjoy love, freedom and bliss.

Notes:

* During a study of the *Śiva Purāṇa*, one comes across a number of appellations of *Umā Devī*. *Pārvatī*, *Satī*, *Durgā*, *Maheśvarī*, *Śivā*, *Parameśvarī*, *Mahālakṣmī*, *Mahāmāyā*, *Mahāvidyā*, *Mahiṣamardinī*, *Saraswatī*, *Jagadīśvarī*, *Jagadambā*, *Kālī*, *Caṇḍī*, *Mahākālī*, *Ambikā*, *Bhavanī*, etc., are some of the appellations used for the same *Devī*. They differ only etymologically. They are synonymous terms and represent the same entity.

* Since *Śakti* (power, *Pārvatī*) and *Śaktimān* (wielder of power, *Śiva*) are inseparable, they are allegorically called husband and wife.

* In the Northern part of India, *Durgā* or *Vaiṣṇava Devī* is worshipped as a beautiful young lady with eight arms, mounted on a lion, clad in red garments, decorated with exquisite gold ornaments, and holding six weapons, a conch and the eighth hand in the pose of blessing her devotees. Unmarried girls (*Kanyās*) are respected and worshipped as incarnations of the *Devī*. *Halvā* and *Pūrī* are offered to them as *Prasāda* (propitiatory offering). During ceremonial feasts connected with *Devī Pūja*, only vegetarian food is served in which even the use of garlic and onions is prohibited.

* Some of the most important temples dedicated to the *Devī* are situated in Jammu State (*Vaiṣṇo Devī* temple), Tamil Nadu (*Mīnākṣī* temple), Bengal (*Kālī Māī* temple), Assam (*Kāmākhyā Devī* temple), Karnataka (*Cāmuṇḍeśvarī* temple), Maharashtra (*Ambābāī* temple), Rajasthan (*Śilā Devī* temple), Bihar (*Śītalā Mātā* temple), Orissa (*Katak Caṇḍī* temple), Andhra Pradesh (*Kanaka Durgā* temple),

Kerala (Ammathiruvadī temple), Indonesia (Prambanan temple), USA (Durgā Mandira), etc.

Ceremonial *Durgā-Pūjā* is performed twice a year, once during the first ten days of the bright half (*Śukla Pakṣa*) in the month of *Āśvina* (middle of September) and second time during the same period in the month of *Caitra* (middle of March). The *Pūjā* performed during *Āśvina* is considered more important. *Durgā Aṣṭamī* is celebrated on the eighth day. Orthodox Hindus observe fast for the first nine days, and partake of only vegetarian food once a day in the evening. The first nine days are considered very sacred and are called *Navarātra* days. The tenth day is celebrated as *Vijayā Daśamī* (Dussehra), to mark the victory of Rāma over Rāvaṇa. Months according to the Julian calendar are tentative as the *Durgā-Pūjā* celebrations correspond to the phases of the moon.

During *Navarātra* days, Mother Durgā is worshipped in her nine different manifestations, one on each day. The nine manifestations are collectively called *Nava Durgā*. Their individual names are: 1. Śailaputrī, 2. Brahmācāriṇī, 3. Candraghaṇṭā, 4. Kūṣmāṇḍā, 5. Skandamātā, 6. Kātyāyanī, 7. Kālarātrī, 8. Mahāgaurī, and 9. Siddhidātrī. The first day's of worship begins with Śailaputrī and continues sequentially and ends with Siddhidātrī on the ninth *Navarātra*.

Mother Durgā is worshipped on the first *Navarātra* in her manifestation as Śailaputrī. She was born as a result of severe austerities by her father, King Himālaya. Her name in her previous manifestation was *Devī Umā*. On the second day she is worshipped as Brahmācāriṇī. Her name reflects the fact that she facilitates the path of the devotees to achieve Brahman, the Supreme Reality. On the third day she is eulogized as Candraghaṇṭā because moon is present in the *Ghaṇṭā* (bell) that adores her head. On the fourth day she is worshipped as Kūṣmāṇḍā because she bears the

whole universe on her body. According to *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, *Bhagavatī Devī* was accepted as the mother of Skanda (Kārtikeya, the commander-in-chief of the *Devas* who defeated the *Asuras*). For this reason on the fifth day she is worshipped as Skandamātā. To accomplish the task of *Devas*, she appeared in Ṛṣi Kātyāyana's hermitage. The Ṛṣi considered her as his daughter. This is the reason for her worship on the sixth day as Kātyāyanī. Being the *Rātri* (to overcome) of even the *Kāla Devatā*, she is also called *Kālarātri* and is worshipped as such on the seventh *Navarātra*. As a result of intense austerities Gaurī (Pārvatī) acquired a golden glow, and is worshipped as Mahāgaurī on the eighth day. On the last *Navarātra*, she is worshipped as *Siddhidātrī*, because she can bestow the boon of *Mokṣa* (release from the painful cycle of transmigration) on her devotees. Nobody else, except God Himself, has the ability to confer this blessing.

* Durgā Mātā is the most beloved goddess amongst the Hindus. She is the Goddess of mercy for the oppressed, benevolence for the farmers, protector of the children, harmony for the family, a terror for the tyrants, and victory in all noble enterprises.

* *Bhagavān* Kṛṣṇa advised Arjuna to propitiate Durgā *Devī* before proceeding to heaven for receiving knowledge of celestial weapons from Indra *Devatā*. He was also asked to worship Durgā *Devī* to preserve the secret of the *Pāṇḍava* brothers and queen Draupadī in the Virāṭa court during the last year of their exile, and to bestow victory before entering the *Mahābhārata* war.

The Worship of Mahālakṣmī, the Glory of God

—*Swami Krishnananda*

The worship of Mahālakṣmī, which is the theme of all these celebrations on this blessed occasion known as *Dīpāvalī*, is actually the form religion gives to the adoration of the glory of God. The face of God is beautiful. Inasmuch as no one has beheld the face of God, religious prescriptions give us representations of the various types of glory manifest in the world. The glory of God as such cannot be conceived, of course, as everyone knows, but the features of that which gives satisfaction, which looks attractive, which is prosperity in its very nature, that which is magnificence and exuberance, which is robust and grand in every manner can be attributed only to the majesty of God.

Mortal, ephemeral things cannot have that beauty. Perishable objects have within them the sting of the perishable nature to which they are subject. Even when they are born, their death is inscribed in large bold letters on their face. Death always follows birth—not as sequence in time, but as a manifestation of the process beginning with birth itself. Hence, nothing in the world can be regarded as comparable with the majesty of God's beauty.

But religion has applied every means to portray at least a modicum of this masterly majesty of God, which can be deciphered even in this world, because behind the wretchedness of apparently visible physical existence there is a grandeur at the core which has to be brought up to

the surface of cognition and aesthetic appreciation. This is the function of religious worship and any kind of adoration that goes by the name of religious performance.

Mahālakṣmī, who is adored on this auspicious occasion, is represented as the power and the glory of *Bhagavān Śrīman Nārāyaṇa*, the Supreme Being. As beaming, scintillating rays jet forth from the great glory of the orb of the sun, so the power of God, known as *Śakti* in religious parlance, manifests itself in this universe of creation He appears to have made. Though there is a distortion in all things in this world which passes understanding at every stage of our trying to grasp its meaning, there is, nevertheless, as we have to accept, the presence of God Himself in what He has created. God also has to be immanent in order that the creation can be sustained. The world cannot be sustained even for a moment if His presence is not there.

That immanence of God's glory is the beauty of things in the world, and to carry this perception of beauty to the highest point of religious exaltation would be to divinise this form of God and regard it as *Brahmā-Śakti*, *Viṣṇu-Śakti*, *Śiva-Śakti*, and other such names—that is, the glory associated with every performance of God, generally known as creation, sustenance and transformation. The lifegiving, sustaining power of God is supposed to be manifest in the conception of religious worship and adoration of Mahālakṣmī who is veritably, in her essential nature, God manifest in the world in its purest form.

Prosperity is Mahālakṣmī. She is oftentimes also called *Mokṣa Saubhāgya Lakṣmī*—the prosperity which is Ultimate Liberation itself. That also is often associated with Mahālakṣmī, who is not to be confused with the power of wealth—gold and silver—as many people think Mahālakṣmī is the inner connotation of anything that we can regard

as excellent.

We have a verse in the *Bhagavadgītā* where the Lord proclaims His presence in anything which has excellence in it.

यद्यद्विभूतिमत्सत्त्वं श्रीमदूर्जितमेव वा ।
तत्तदेवावगच्छ त्वं मम तेजोऽशसम्भवम् ॥

(X. 41)

Wherever you see prosperity of any kind in its exalted form, there you may see God's hand operating abundantly.

The worship of Mahālakṣmī is not merely an external, ritual act. It is not just garlanding and waving a holy light, though it can be that also. There is much more about it. Our heart has to adore the glory of God. Where the heart is not present, worship is also not there. The adoration of God in His aspect of beauty and magnificence is not a performance with hands and feet, but a deep recognition of our profundity of feeling, where we surrender the limitation of our own personality to the perfection which is God Almighty.

So, in a way, we worship God Himself when we worship *Bhagavatī* Durgā, Lakṣmī, Saraswatī—principally Lakṣmī on an occasion of this kind when we light up the atmosphere with a series of illuminating lamps. We call this beautiful occasion *Dīpāvalī*—a line, a series of illuminations which represents the emergence of the goodness, brilliance and excellence we perceive in people, which is also present everywhere in spite of the ugliness characteristic of human nature, generally speaking, in order to bring forth the beauty in human nature above the surface of its ugliness and distortion, and see beauty, glory, health, vigour, perfection, completeness and inexpressible satisfaction. Such occasion of the rise of human nature from its deepest bottom, the soul rising in its majesty, we may say, is actually the act

of worship of Mahālakṣmī, who Herself is the exteriorised conceptualisation of the soul of God operating in things.

There are beautiful verses, *Stotras* such as the *Mahālakṣmī-Aṣṭaka*, etc., which people recite every day to focus their attention on all success in life. Success is not merely material accumulation of physical comforts. It is, truly speaking, the adventure of the spirit within to expand its dimension towards its ultimate glory, which is direct perception of God in His supreme glory where Lakṣmī is inseparable from Nārāyaṇa where God is one with His creation and His power. It is this deep significance that is behind this religious performance which people generally, in an ignorant and innocent manner, observe with firecrackers, lights, gifts, cards and many other things, making it merely an outer gesture. Rarely do they manifest this beauty that is within themselves, and rarely are they prepared to see the beauty present in the hearts of other people also.

So, briefly to say, this is the worship of the beauty present in all things and the prosperity that is at the core of all things, which gradually rises to the perfection of God-realisation. God bless you!



This entire universe is a manifestation of God's unutterable, primal power, *Anirvacanīya Ādi Śakti*. She is the great power. This power has manifested Itself in all things that we see. If we have strength in our limbs, it is Her power. If we have strength of mind, it is Her power. If we have will-power, it is Her power. If we have intelligence, it is Her power. We are blessed by Her to be endowed with all the powers that go to make our personality. Therefore, they are sacred and divine, because they are Her manifestation.

—Swami Chidananda