



॥ श्री रामकृष्णः शरणं मम ॥



DURGĀ PŪJĀ

Its Intention and Inner Significance



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*Clothed with the darkest night,
Moved hidden the Brightest Light
Seers witnessed such a sight
Somewhere Dark, elsewhere Bright.*

*When they saw with their divine eyes
Divine it looked with divine ties
Smiling with the charming skies
Heaven leaven the heart that flies.*

*'Lo! It's Mother' said the inner voice
Drowned in trance without a choice
Eyes stood streaming with no swish noise
Dipped in Bliss the Soul found poise.*

*Love that surpass sky and earth
To Souls wonder did spring forth
Fell spell senses died all dirth
Love is Truth and search was worth.*

DURGĀ PŪJĀ (दुर्गा पूजा):

The Inner Spiritual Significance

The panorama of Indian Culture is vast with varieties and diversities. Spinning and weaving its way, progressing and developing through millenniums, it has gathered various colours, passing over several eras. Although it bears proof of foreign influences, its roots still lie in spirituality. It transcends the boundaries of meaningless customs and traditions and has been always found serving a higher purpose. Durga Puja is one such ceremony which is a source of religious inspiration and cultural expression, designed for every individual's spiritual unfoldment.

The Durga Puja which we usually witness is the outermost *shell*, the religious garb blended with customs and traditions. Inside it there is its *seed*, the religious sentiments. Within the seed is the life principle and that is spirituality, expressed as The Supreme Knowledge and the love of God. We shall only discuss this invisible part of Durga Puja, the pure spiritual aspect leaving aside the commonly discussed cultural and religious aspects. It is like analysis and identification of the Spiritual Essence, the *Atman*, looking through the body of a person. We shall confine to the core significance, the Spiritual Unfoldment, and blooming unto Realisation in the evolutionary process of a *Jīva* (जीव) from its gross animal-hood to the grand refined Divine -hood.

Man in the Lap of Nature

The best and the supreme part of the creation is Man. As an organism he has many things in common with other living beings. His uniqueness however lies in his intellectual capabilities (to be able to think, understand, analyse, discover, plan, invent etc.) and the capacity to love: this makes him the best part of the creation. Whereas his supremacy lies in his capacity to transcend Nature and manifest Divinity. Coming to this world he looks at this vast expanse of Nature with wonder and awe – but remains busy in composing and attending to the commitments of life. A section of men enter into the enquiry: 'what is this world?, what is there in it?, how can I make use of it for a better life?' – they light the lamp of civilisation; scientists emerge from this section of people. A few go beyond the normal course of thinking, being possessed by the deep search for the truth – what is this Nature?, who governs it?, who am I?, why am I here? and so on: they are the real seekers, the aspirants longing for truth; from these emerge the spiritual stalwarts, the Saints and the Seers. Nature has its own laws and plans that govern the life and destiny of all beings, so also of man. As in case of all other beings, man too is subjected to his instinctive nature directed by one of the Nature's principle 'the self-preservation and the preservation of species'. This induces the animal nature in man. Diametrically opposite to this is the Nature's plan – the evolution of *Jīvas*. Evolution presupposes involution. Herein lies the secret that the man in his original state is Divine. This Divine

nature being veiled, he attains *Jīvatva* (जीवत्व), and the human is an intermediate state between the animal and the Divine. So, we can derive the spiritual status of man thus:

We are not human beings having human experiences but we are spiritual beings having human experiences; and as spiritual beings, having spiritual experience shall be the aim of our human life. The more we move towards our spiritual nature, the more we expand to transcend our bodily limitations and feel more oneness with others and live in harmony with the Nature. Those who harbour the idea that they are limited beings identifying themselves with their bodily existence subscribe to a paradigm or belief system that rests on individualisation, separation and isolation, with the final culmination in death. Whereas those who nurture the idea/conviction that they are unlimited, beyond the limitations of space and time, beyond all dualities, subscribe to a paradigm resting on oneness of all beings – their interconnectedness – intimately related to the One Supreme Power functioning as the universe, and on the immortality of the Soul. There is a marvel experience of Sw. Yatishwaranandaji Maharaj which depicts how the unitary experience dissolves the separateness and the diversities:

Sw. Yatishwaranandaji was performing the *Ārati* [vesper service] at the Madras Math (old shrine). His *Gurudev* (गुरुदेव) Srimat Sw. Brahmanandaji Maharaj was sitting in the shrine just behind him, and witnessing the services to the universal Master, with great joy and overflowing love and gratitude. The *Ārati* (आरति) services were approaching the end with the last item being offered – the fanning with *Camara* (चामर). When the *Ārati* song ended, the services too were supposed to end. But to the surprise of all, the fanning was going on and on. Sw. Brahmanandaji Mj. was sitting still as if in *Samādhi* (समाधि), with open eyes fixed on the Master's picture. After a while Sw. Yatishwaranandaji was seen revolving around fanning in all the directions, he was in ecstasy! Finally he turned towards the devotees who were witnessing the *Ārati* and continued his fanning them. After a few minutes Maharaj slowly came to the normal state. Very many violins be tuned to the same pitch and one of them be played, then all the remaining violins replicate the same tune after the one. Every one who witnessed the scene could experience more or less the same bliss and the presence of God. It was, as I understand it, holding the door of the Eternal, the God, open so that his worthy disciple may get a glimpse of It. Or it is like the veil covering the Truth is withdrawn for a while. Its effect and the ecstatic movements of the Swami could tune every mind witnessing it and rouse their consciousness to perceive the 'beyond'. They too could spontaneously enter the Light with him. In fact words are inadequate to describe the incessant flow of love and bliss one experiences at that moment; one who knows, knows. The most deeply moving aspect of the experience is the rising waves of purity from the depths of one's own being – 'I am pure, I am stainless, I am divine', this sensational awakening! What they see is the expression of *Cit* (चित्), generally called the 'Light of God'. The whole area suddenly lights up. Everything – the space, the air, the walls, the floor, the objects around are seen vibrating with life! All the separateness dissolves when one sees this sort of magnificence; nothing is separate. Everything is interpenetrating each other and the one interconnected whole. There is no difference from person to person, nothing at all. Such a pure unalloyed joy suffused every heart! All could experience that bliss.

The man whom we know, understand and see commonly is the apparent man. The real man is hidden within. The entire struggle of every being, be it in its embodied or in its un-embodied state,

be it in the human body or that of any other species, is going on to discover the Real Man so hidden. For, that alone ensures what every *Jīva* is constantly seeking at all times, in all states of existence – Joy/Bliss, Peace and Freedom. Like all other beings man too is in constant search for these three things – happiness, peace and freedom, but is searching for where they are not. He effortfully toils throughout his life, lands in danger and yields to suffering to acquire them, but in vain. They keep on eluding him throughout his life span leaving him in despair at the end. The main problem is that the senses and the mind which are the chief and the only instrument for man to transact, are outgoing and faithfully dwell on objects of enjoyment. The cause being that they are not guided by knowledge and wisdom but by their old tendencies, *Vāsanās* (वासनास). Therefore they not only fail to give a correct picture of things but also fail to allow the intellect to give a second thought about or analyse the world and life. Engrossed in worldliness men fail to distinguish between the good and the pleasant (श्रेय & प्रेय), the eternal and the temporal (नित्य & अनित्य), the real and the unreal (सत् & असत्). But there are a few, though rare, who feel a sense of satiation with the pursuit of the world as if to say ‘no more, enough of it’. They, in spite of the demands of the senses and the attractions of the world, pause for a while and think, try to find out the cause of human suffering, despair and frustrations. They search for the path to peace, happiness and freedom. Saints and Seers, *Rṣi* (ऋषि) and *Munis* (मुनिस) belong to this class, but highly refined. *Buddha* is an elegance among them who sought to solve the problems of humanity. Provided with every conceivable luxury of life, Buddha could peep into the inevitable problems of life. The sight of an old man, a sick man, a corpse and a monk made tremendous impact on his mind. From his charioteer he learnt that human flesh as of all beings had to age, is heir to illness, and is finally subjected to destruction. Distressed at the human plight he left the palace taking to the life of a renunciate vowing to find a solution. He succeeded and following his enlightenment, he preached the path to transcend the Nature and attain the State of *Nirvāṇa* (निर्वाण), the state of Absolute Freedom, Bliss, Peace, Wisdom, Love and Compassion. All those who searched and found blessedness have, without exception, taught us that sickness, old age, death, human problems and agony cannot be obliterated nor avoided; but there is a sure path to transcend them. During my camp here at Vellore, I happened to receive a few magazines published by the local Christian mission. Hardly there is any spiritual matter in them that can be a support to the Soul. The title itself is ‘Jesus redeems from sins, sickness and problems’! The whole magazine is filled with cases of ephemeral benefits, curing of diseases, getting jobs or getting married, through their prayers! With my due respect for the faith healing and giving temporal consolations, where is the real and permanent solutions? Instead of transcending suffering, which means that we must learn and outgrow it, the message of “Modern Times” seems to be that we can eliminate it! People too are in search of shortcut methods (!) to accomplish things without labour; false assurances and false hopes. So many ‘healers’ and ‘pain alleviators’ are cropping up beckoning to their new age solution. Some ‘New Agers’ offer, that contributing to their thinking any one can find cure from illness, prevent ageing, free oneself from problems and live in their present body for hundreds of years, and more than that one can ascend to heaven after death. Are these not lollipops for children who weep for candies, when Christ himself had to yield to crucifixion, Buddha died of food poisoning and Krishna hit by an arrow left his mortal coil?

Most of the people cherish the wrong idea about God, religion and spirituality. God they project as some unseen Person sitting somewhere in a far off heaven who is as if some kind of

cosmic peeping Tom with black book listing man's sins, errors, and shortcomings to decide whether he deserves reward or punishment! Where is the All-Merciful God, the embodiment of love, the silent witness of all events and where is the small minded God who punishes His creation with illness and ill fate?

There is an interesting historical event of the 14th century. Earlier to the 14th century the belief prevailed that health and illness were associated with the man's relationship to God. Good devoted life would be rewarded with health, the fate of the evil minded lacking faith in God would be illness. During the 14th century one-third of the population across Europe was wiped out owing to the black plague. The Church's eyes searched out a scapegoat. They blamed the Jews for poisoning the wells although the Jews were equally affected and were dying like others. At every nook and corner the innocent Jews were tortured by the so called religious people in the name of God. Demanding false confession from them, they were burnt alive to death. Plague did not abate. The Church caught hold of another scapegoat, turning their torch to witches. For almost three centuries between 14th and 17th, women in millions were brutally man-handled, for sake of life, they confessed that they were witches. The wilderness of plague continued. Finally the Europeans thought that the God and religion cannot adequately account for the gross physical and material life of man, instead they felt the need to search for the causes at the physical level, that made them enter the field of Science. The course of science is pulling man to the other extreme, apart from its harmful consequence to the extent of obliteration of human race. Most of the humans are even now stuck to such a framework of mind as of the medieval church; to assign our deeds and the Nature's laws to the acts and judgement of God.

Let us not blame or praise God. Let us analyse, search for the truth. Let us shoulder the responsibilities on our own shoulders. Then it becomes clear that man is the maker of his own destiny. Jesus alerted his disciples by teaching them to seek the Kingdom of God first, and then all the things would be added unto them. Prophets and saints have time and again told us that nothing here can be changed. They never assured us that disease, death and misfortune shall not visit us. Nor did they teach us the method of working with the power of mind to manifest wealth and glory or to win friends or to influence people. Freedom was neither about fulfilling our endless desires nor was the liberation of the body. It was precisely transcendence of Nature, attainment of Peace – as the biblical phrase expresses “The peace that passeth understanding”, the freedom of Self, the Soul of the soul, the attainment of everlasting Bliss.

The Durgā Concept

Of all the mysteries, life has been the greatest mystery to man. Its source, origin, growth, decadence and disappearance are known to be law-bound and yet they have kindled the emotions and thoughts of varied dimensions. The efforts of the ancient Hindus to unravel this mystery of life and of creation through contemplations, unflinching observations and experimentations that led to experiences that transcend normal human perceptions, had developed the Durgā (दुर्गा) Concept. The whole mystery was unveiled and known to be a ‘Divine Play’. The intimate association of this truth with the Nature in all its aspects gave birth to The *Devī* (देवी) and The Mother concepts. The Nature in its entirety, the whole creation, was ‘Durgā’, nay the manifestation of that Divine Being! The Durgā!

The term Durgā literally means ‘The Impenetrable’ (*Dukhena Gantum Sakhya*, दुःखेन गन्तुं सख्य) or ‘the impossible to cross-over’ (*Durgamya*, दुर्गम्य). Centred round this knowledge grew up many philosophies and ideologies. Later on with clear and specific symbolisation and efforts to make even the ordinary *Jīvās* (जीवास) utilise this knowledge to reach Ultimate Perfection, it was clothed in grand picturesque religious garb of the ‘Durgā Pūjā’ (दुर्गा पूजा). This facilitated the flow of the mystery as a part of the Divine Play and the Supreme Knowledge as a *Vidyā* (विद्या).

[*Vidyā* (विद्या) in the *Śākta* (शाक्त) system means a definite spiritual discipline which is taught to a qualified aspirant to unravel certain specific spiritual secrets. For example: *Śrī Vidyā* (श्री विद्या) and the *Daśa Mahā-Vidyā* (दश महा विद्या)].

We see this Durgā concept elegantly brought out by Sir Albert Einstein in a document of his which intends to give its meaning, the manifestations and the faithful products, in his own scientific language with himself being an informal but a true devotee of that Divine Principle. “The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom his emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapt in awe, is as good as dead. His eyes are closed. The insight into the mystery of life, coupled though it be with fear, has also given rise to religion. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties comprehend only in their most primitive forms – this knowledge, this feeling is at the centre of true religiousness. In this sense, and in this sense only I belong to the ranks of devoutly religious men.”

These are the words that sprang out from the heart of a man who belonged to that class of men who in search of truth could not perceive anything other than truth. How deep were their thoughts, how sincere and how much devoted. The one-pointed devotion to know the Nature and its secret! This is the actual way expected of us to approach the Truth, The Mother Nature, with open mind, open eyes and open heart – all devoted to truth and truth alone. The only extra thing we need is to develop the spiritual insight.

Never the less it demanded high refinement, intense training and superior inward cultivation if it were to manifest the inner beauty and inner divinity, which alone could ensure the true understanding and promise the fulfilment of the desired result. Without realisation of the true principle governing the Durgā Pūjā and without evaluation of the philosophies and spiritual truths embodied in them, the Pūjā would turn to mere ritualism and external pomp and festivity without the inner stuff. Swamiji realising this fact thought that this end cannot be achieved except through renunciation and pledging one’s life to The Mother. So to keep the ball of knowledge, realisation and devotion rolling in the society, Swamiji introduced this Grand Durgā Pūjā in the Ramakrishna Order at Belur Math and handed it over to the sannyāsins to carry it forward. He knew that it would encourage and invigorate the monastics, fill them with strength, purity, confidence and divine love and keep the organisation in its purest form.

THE NINE NIGHTS OF THE SOUL, NAVA-RĀTRI (नवरात्रि)

What is 'transcendence of Nature'? What does enmesh us that we need to crossover or transcend it?

There are a set of nine *Ślokās* (श्लोकाः) which narrate and elucidate the natural factors that obscure the vision of a *Jīva*, impart *Jīvatva* and make it run about in a state of being deluded. Each factor envelops the *Jīva* like a sheath, limits and narrows down its vision to earthly living and feeling, not allowing it to perceive the Light of Truth. It is often compared to being in the womb, in a state of darkness and invisibility or wandering in the wilderness. Or it is like the life of the white ants that live enveloping themselves with utter darkness in an anthill. Thus these factors – nine in number – are called the dark Nights, the *Rātri's* (रात्रिः). They being nine, *Nava* (नव) in number are called the *Nava-Rātri* (नवरात्रि).

The 15th century Christian mystic, St. John of the Cross, coined the term – 'dark night of the soul' to describe the passage of the soul through the critical period of spiritual crisis, which he believed, was an indispensable part of the spiritual journey. The *Nava-Rātri's* (नवरात्रिः) are somewhat similar to this but in a more deeper and original sense. For, when St. John uses the term 'dark night of the soul' he refers to the inner turmoil and darkness that is associated with the external conditions, whereas the 'Nine dark Nights of the *Jīvātman*' (जीवात्मन्), the *Nava-Rātri* are adhesions superimposed on the *Jīva*, presence of which entangles him in the Kārmic Sphere and the release from which secures him Freedom.

(P.T.O)

Rātrayaḥ Navadhā Proktā Jīvānām Bandhakārahāḥ |
Tamo Dveṣaṁ Mamatvañca Bhogopyahamajñānītā ||

Moharātrirkālarātrirmahārātrīti Durdamāḥ |
Navarātrivratenaiva Tāśca Naśyanti Sarvaśaḥ ||

रात्रयः नवधा प्रोक्ता जीवानां बन्धकारकाः ।
तमो द्वेषं ममत्वञ्च भोगोप्यहमज्ञानिता ॥

मोहरात्रिकालरात्रिर्महारात्रीति दुर्दमाः ।
नवरात्रिव्रतेनैव ताश्च नश्यन्ति सर्वशः ॥

Nine are the dark Nights those that create bondage:

Lethargic state of spiritual slumber (तमः); hatred or aversion (द्वेषः); Mine-ness (ममत्वः); Craving for enjoyment [especially desire for flesh (भोगेच्छा)]; Ego (अहं); Spiritual Ignorance (अज्ञानिता); Delusion [The sense world to be real and everlasting, and happiness lies in it (मोहरात्रि)]; Not knowing ones own real nature (कालरात्रि); Not knowing the God, the Ultimate and the Absolute Truth (महारात्रि).

Only through observing the *Navarātrivrata* [नवरात्रिव्रत, observance of the 9 days during autumn dedicated to the Divine Mother Durgā, of which on the last 3 days of *Āśvayuja Śukla Saptamī, Aṣṭamī* and *Navamī* (आश्वयुज शुक्ल सप्तमी, अष्टमी और नवमी) there will be special worship of the Divine Mother] they get completely eliminated.

Rātrayaḥ Kramaśaḥ Krāntāḥ Prāptāḥ Syurdivasā Nava |
Smṛtiḥ Prītirārjavañca Trayaite Vitamaḥ Smṛtāḥ ||

रात्रयः क्रमशः क्रान्ताः प्राप्ताः स्युर्दिवसा नव ।
स्मृतिः प्रीतिरार्जवञ्च त्रयैते वितमः स्मृताः ॥

Having crossed over each Night, a new day dawns forth in the same order as of the nine Nights. They are: Unbroken memory of God (स्मृति); Universal Love [प्रीति (विश्वप्रेम)]; Guilelessness/simplicity [आर्जवम् (सरलता)] : these three are the result of the transcendence of the Nature's quality of *Tamoguna* [(तमोगुण), the quality of dullness of inertia and rudeness], and thus known as *Vitamaḥ* (वितमः).

Pāvitryaṁ Vinayaṁ Bhaktiḥ Trayaite Virajāśritāḥ |
Jñānaṁ Prajñā Supūrṇatvaṁ Satvātītetī Prastutāḥ ||

पावित्र्यं विनयं भक्तिः त्रयैते विरजाश्रिताः ।
ज्ञानं प्रज्ञा सुपूर्णत्वं सत्वातीतेति प्रस्तुताः ॥

Then the Purity, being free from worldly tendencies [पावित्र्य (पवित्रता)]; Humility [विनयं (विनम्रता)]; Love of God and relationship with God [भक्तिः (भगवत्सम्बन्ध + शुद्धभक्ति)] : these three are the result of the transcendence of the Nature's quality of *Rajoguna* [(रजोगुण), the quality of indulgent activity], and thus known as *Virajaḥ* (विरजः).

Then, the Wisdom (ज्ञान); Knowledge of ones own spiritual existence (प्रज्ञा); the Wholeness/fullness by the Knowledge of the Supreme Reality (पूर्णत्व) : these are the result of the transcendence of the Nature's quality of *Satvaguna* [(सत्वगुण), the quality of serenity], and is known as *Satvātīta* (सत्वातीत).

Moharātrirkālarātrirmahārātrīti Yā Niśāḥ |
Mahāmāyā Prasādena Praṇaṣṭam Syāt Hi Nānyathā ||

मोहरात्रिकालरात्रिर्महारात्रीति या निशाः ।
महामाया प्रसादेन प्रणष्टं स्यात् हि नान्यथा ॥

The final three dark Nights *Moharātri* (मोहरात्रि, the great delusion), *Kālarātri* (कालरात्रि, absence of Self-Knowledge) and *Mahārātri* (महारात्रि, absence of the Knowledge of God) can be crossed over only by the grace of the Divine Mother [who has put a spell on all the *Jīvās* through Her *Māyā* (माया) power, the power that generates Cosmic Delusion] and by no other means.

Sarvajaganmayī Devī Durgā Durgatināśinī |
Sākārā Ca Nirākārā Saiva Nānābhīdhānabhṛt ||

सर्वजगन्मयी देवी दुर्गा दुर्गतिनाशिनी ।
साकारा च निराकारा सैव नानाभिधानभृत् ॥

The Creative Matrix of the Universe, the Luminous Goddess, the Mother Durgā, the destroyer of ill-fate, and also She is bearing various names in accordance with Her various aspects and manifestations.

Navarātrivratam Dhṛtvā Guhyāt Guhyataram Mahat |
Yathoktena Vidhānena Pūjayet Tāmatandritaḥ ||

नवरात्रिव्रतं धृत्वा गुह्यात् गुह्यतरं महत् ।
यथोक्तेन विधानेन पूजयेत् तामतन्द्रितः ॥

With firm resolution, strictly following the scriptural injunctions, observe the *Navarātrivrata* (नवरात्रिव्रत) which is of intricate and deep hidden meaning, worship the Divine Mother with full attention.

Prapadyātmanivedena Svasmināropyacātmani |
Suciram Bhāvayed Durgāmambikām Tanmayo Bhavet ||

प्रपद्यात्मनिवेदेन स्वस्मिनारोप्यचात्मनि ।
सुचिरं भावयेद् दुर्गामम्बिकां तन्मयो भवेत् ॥

Giving oneself entirely to the Mother through self-surrender, one should invoke the Divine Mother Durgā within ones own Heart and through lengthy deep meditations get absorbed to find oneness with Mother.

Evam Sampūjayet Bhaktyā Pratyaham Paramātparām |
Santūrya Durgamāḥ Rātrīrdevī Sāyujyamāpnuyāt ||

एवं संपूजयेत् भक्त्या प्रत्यहं परमात्पराम् ।
सन्तीर्य दुर्गमाः रात्रीर्देवी-सायुज्यमाप्नुयात् ॥

Worshipping Mother with deep love everyday along with meditations, one shall surely transcend the dark Nights that are extremely difficult to crossover, and attain ultimate oneness with the Mother, as the Ultimate Reality, The Absolute.

This is the inner essence of Durgā Pūjā, the soul of the elaborate ritualistic body complex.

Basically the Durgā Pūjā is awakening ones consciousness to the Source. In it alone lies the solution for man's every problem and his salvation. The Source is always a 'Mother', and mother as a person is the most desired and healing element. Viewing psychologically, the impressions found on young tender minds of children since their birth is a valid imagery and intoning factor influencing their life style and the angle of vision. During infancy and childhood, mother being their source and succour, is known to be the most dependable, the dearest, the selfless security, the fulfiller of every bit of the child's needs and its protectress from fear and danger. So 'God as the Source and Mother' is so heart soothing, so pleasant and so natural way to approach God. Not only the Hindu or the Indian mind, but the whole world pays allegiance to this fact. Thus, expounding the subject of 'The Indian Magna Mater'¹ we find Arthur Avalon mentioning thus.

"The worship of the Great Mother as the Great Multiplier is one of the oldest in the world. When we throw our minds back upon the history of this worship, we discern even in the most remote and fading past the Figure, more ancient, of the mighty Mother of Nature. I suspect that in the beginning the Goddess everywhere antedated, or at least was predominant over, the God. It has been affirmed (Glotz: Aegean Civilization, 243) that in all countries from the Euphrates to the Adriatic, the Chief Divinity was at first in woman form. Looking to the east of Euphrates we see the Dusk Divinity of India, the *Ādyā-Śakti* (आद्याशक्ति) and *Mahā-Śakti* (महाशक्ति), or Supreme Power of many names as *Jagadambā* (जगदम्बा), Mother of the world, which is the Play of Her who is named *Lalitā* (ललिता), *Māyā* (माया) and all the rest.

"This Supreme Mother is worshipped by Her devotees from the *Himālayās* (हिमालयास), the 'Abode of Snow', the northern home of *Śiva* (शिव), to the Cape-Comorin in the uttermost south – for the word Comorin is a corruption of the *Kumārī Devī* (कुमारी देवी, Kumārin) or the Virgin Mother. Goddesses are spoken of in the Vedas as in the later scriptures. Of these latter, the *Śākta Tantra* (शाक्त तन्त्र) are the particular repository of Mother-worship.

"To the *Śākta*, God is his Supreme Mother. In innumerable births he has had countless mothers and fathers, and he may in future have many, many more. The human, and indeed any, mother is sacred as the giver (of course, under God) of life, but it as the Divine Mother of All (*Śrīmātā*, श्रीमता), the "Treasure-House of Compassion", who alone is both Giver of life in the world and its joys, and who (as *Tārinī*, तारिणी) is the Saviouress from its miseries, and who again is, for all who unite with Her, the Life of all lives – that unalloyed bliss named Liberation. She is the Great Queen (*Mahārājñī*, महाराज्ञी) of Heaven and yet higher worlds, of Earth, and of the Underworlds. To Her all the *Devas*, *Devīs* and Men give worship.

"The *Śākta* System, in its origin possibly Non-Vaidik, is in several respects an original presentment, both as regards doctrine and practice, of the great Vedāntic Theme concerning the One and the Many. As an organic and dynamic system it interprets all in terms of Power, from the atom of Matter, which is said by modern science to be a reservoir of tremendous energy, to the Almighty,

¹ 'Śakti and Śākta' by Sir John Woodroffe (Arthur Avalon), Pg. 262.

which is the commonest name in all Religions for God. It is the cult of Power both as the Partial and as the Whole, as the worshipper may desire.”

For the purpose of worship, *symbolism and concrete form of objectification* becomes essential. The abstract is made attractive to the senses and brilliant to the intellect so that meditations at the subtler level and worship at the grosser level can go together hand in hand. Images, *Yantrās* (यन्त्रास) and other ways of symbolically representing the Divine are used in Durgā Pūjā. We shall discuss these points later on as and when the occasions rise. Images are deeply evocative and lead every onlooker, deeply involved in the ceremony, inward to recognise ones own divinity, and to an experience of universal love. *Yantrās* on the other hand need a little deeper understanding to awaken the worshipper to a higher level of spiritual awareness. Because far from pictures of persons and their surroundings that rouse the feelings naturally, *Yantrās* are just lines and circles, triangles and the Point. For example, if we look through grossly at the outline-meaning of the *Śriyantra* (श्रीयन्त्र), considered as the greatest of the *Yantrās* we find the following version which we are expected to visualise during the worship.

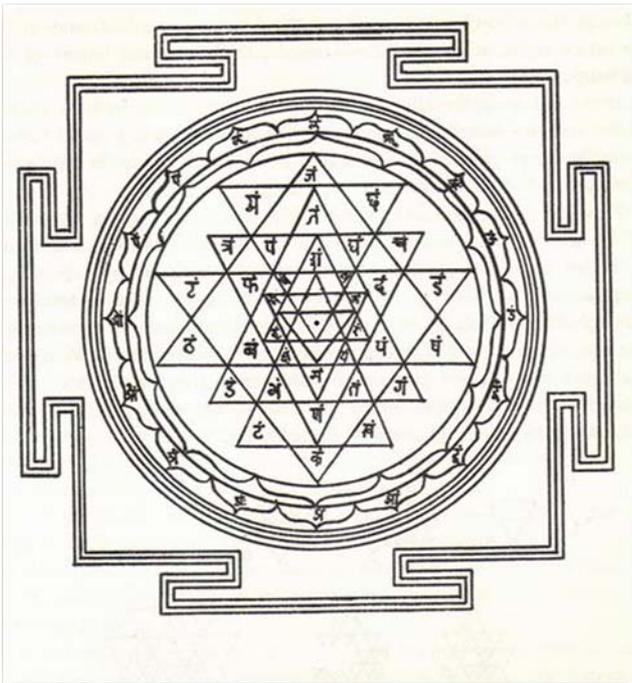


Figure 1: Sri Yantra

“The great symbol of the Mother is the *Śriyantra* (श्रीयन्त्र), from the centre of which She arises like a solar orb at morn, but in a blaze of light excelling the brilliance of countless midday suns and the coolness of innumerable moons. The centre is a Point, or a *Bindu* (बिन्दु) – that is, the Mother as Concentrated Power ready to create. Around Her is the Universe, together with its Divinities or Directing Intelligences. From the (*Bindu*) Point the World issues. Into it on dissolution, it enters. The extended Universe then collapses into an unextended Point, which itself then subsides like a bubble on the surface of the ‘Causal Waters’, which are the Immense.”

The detailed explanations of this would run through hundreds of pages. We can now understand how intricate an Yāntric representation is. But it is a wonderful way of

symbolising the Universal Truths in two dimensional geometric or diagrammatic presentations.

In the image worship of Mother Durgā, the *Sādhaka* (साधका) in the lowest rung or even the man of the common run can derive inspiration, and with a little effort can undergo a lasting internal transformation. The contribution of art and beauty to religious sentiments captures man’s mind creating pure spiritual atmosphere where symbols of hope abound, gives positive message for the individuals’ imagination which reassures them and even contribute in their spiritual conversion. Hindus used all naturally available things for journey to the Eternal and also for peaceful living here.

Participation of Nature was one of them. Seasons are the great revolving wheel of nectar for the soul, chromatic environs for mind and a healing medicine for the heart. The energies of changing seasons were keyed to religious feelings and sentiments and to the spiritual practices. The peace and calmness that pervade the onset of Autumn was set to invigorate Durgā Pūjā.

Once Albert Einstein was asked as to what is the important question that the man has to answer. He replied: “Is the Universe a friendly place or not?”. He saw Man weeping and wailing under the stress of the Nature. Perhaps he thought: ‘will the further advancement in science with the selfish nature of man leave the world to remain a friendly place at all?’ With the growing knowledge of science and technology today, man is not only able to utilise some of the forces of nature and provide himself with various amenities of life, but has also gained sufficient capacity to destroy himself and the planet on which he lives. Yet the scientists whisper a note of hope that the human species is passing through the process of an actual transformation from Homo Sapiens [‘man of knowledge’] to Homo Noeticus [‘man of intuition’]. Knowledge here means the understanding through sense perception or through reasoning. Intuition on the other hand is direct perception of information beyond senses and intellect that is not limited by present perception, previous knowledge, belief, space or time. If we happen to examine the power of prayer, meditation, faith etc we can come in touch with a truth much expansive and richer than the modern science can pose. Perhaps then we remain tuned to the Oneness that is underlying all diversities.

But a man who has discovered the Nature to be a mother can derive a million times greater ‘friendly place’ – a place to comfortably strive, to successfully attain and to peacefully rest. The thing is ‘How much of our potential do we invest?’. It is beyond doubt that whatever life people generally live, whether physical, moral, intellectual or spiritual, they live in a very partial or insignificant circle of their potential being. They make use of a very small portion of their possible capacity, possible consciousness – like a man with his whole body at this disposal is in habit of moving only his little finger! We possess huge inexhaustible store of life energy and spiritual power to draw upon, of which we do not even dream. What tremendous achievement it could be if we can learn to draw energy and strength from this source. This storehouse is the Divine Mother within us in Her aspect as *Śakti*. Each dark Night we recognise to be entangling us, and the challenges of misfortunes, death, destruction and disease we face, must help us to re-evaluate our paradigm. For a man/*Sādhaka* initiated into the awareness of the existence and presence of the Divine Mother within his heart, each throes of life crisis would help him to skilfully lead himself to a *rebirth*. Each rebirth is a ‘new bright day’ he finds in his life. Joys or sorrows, pleasures or pain both are equally powerful to jolt the core of man. These dualities – pleasure and pain are the inevitable part of life. We can’t escape from them, they are but valuable. They are our inner physicians serving our evolutionary process. As a force they are identical. When we go to the epicentre, we find their common point of origin – the emotional base within us, the heart. The wisdom lies in the efforts for paradigm shift – the emerging out of our *Tamas* (तमस्), our slumber into the reality of Divine Love. This is the *Pūjā Saṅkalpa* (पूजा संकल्प) – the resolution to worship the Divine Mother Durgā. We shall try to schematically represent the whole *Nava-Rātri*’s – the nine dark Nights, their transcendence, effect and subsequent nine days of blossoming divinity.

Night No.	नवरात्रयः	The ways in which The Nine Nights express	The hold that aids transcendence	नवदिवसाः
	The Nine Nights that the Jiva has to cross over to attain Perfection			The Nine Days (light/virtue) that the Jiva attains after having crossed over each Night
1	तमस् <i>Tamas</i> : Spiritual Darkness	अतिनिद्रा: too much sleep; आलस्य: lazyness, indolence; दीर्घसूत्रीत्व: procrastinate; नास्तिकत्व: atheistic; कार्पण्य: mean & constrained; अश्रद्धा: lack of dedication; शोक: grief; भय: fear; प्रमाद: wrong understanding.	<p>आत्मतत्वाय स्वाहा (<i>Ātmatatvāya Svāhā</i>) Adoption to <i>Ātmatatva</i>, the hidden resources existing within oneself.</p> <p>These three Nights a <i>Sādhaka</i> crosses over during the <i>Brahmacarya Avasthā</i> (ब्रह्मचर्य अवस्था), the stage of novice or studentship with self-control and dedication.</p> <p>The <i>Brahmacārīn</i> is called <i>Tamobhid</i> (तमोभिद्). This stage is called <i>Vitamah</i> (वितमः).</p>	स्मृति/निरन्तर स्मरण (<i>Smṛti/Nirantara Smaraṇa</i>) Unbroken thought of the Divine
2	द्वेष <i>Dveṣa</i> : Hatred	मात्सर्य: malice; असूय: jealousy; क्रोध: anger; प्रतिकार: revenge, vengeance; असहनता: intolerance; aversion, dislike etc.		विश्वप्रेम: Universal Love सद्भावना: Good-will समानत्व: Equanimity
3	ममकार/ममत्व <i>Mamakāra</i> : Mine-ness	आसक्ति: attachment; राग: passion; लोभ : greed; अतृप्ति: insatiation; स्वार्थ: selfishness; अभिमान: pride; भेदभाव: separateness, absence of oneness; not willing to part from possessions, miserliness.		सरलता/आर्जव (<i>Saralatā/Ārjava</i>) Simplicity or guilelessness like that of children
After Crossing the first three Nights, there will be Spiritual Awakening.				

Table 1: Nava-Ratri

Night No.	नवरात्रयः	The ways in which The Nine Nights express.	The hold that aids transcendence.		नवदिवसाः	
	The Nine Nights that the Jiva has to cross over to attain Perfection.				The Nine Days (light/virtue) that the Jiva attains after having crossed over each Night.	
4	भोगेच्छा Bhogeccchā	विषयसुखः: craving for worldly enjoyments; आशाः: general desires; कामः: sexual desire; इन्द्रियसुखः: sense pleasures; देहसुखः: bodily comforts & luxuries; स्वार्थपरायण : devotes to selfish ends	विद्यातत्त्वाय स्वाहा (Vidyātātāvāya Svāhā) Adoption to <i>Vidyātātava</i> , the knowledge hidden in Nature which remain as if secret with the realised ones to be imparted to a deserving/qualified aspirant, or to be tapped from the Divine through intuition. These three Nights the aspirant/ <i>Sādhaka</i> crosses during the early part of <i>Sannyāsa Jīvana</i> (the life of a renunciate). This stage is called <i>Virajā</i> , with this the real spiritual life begins.		पवित्रता (<i>Pavitratā</i>) Purity, pristine, untainted stainlessness, free from worldly tendencies	
Transcendence of Bhogeccchā is followed by : Awakening of Medhā (मेधा) Power of comprehension, assimilation, retention and application		Brahmagranthi Vibhedana (ब्रह्मग्रन्थि विभेदन) Breaking up of the knot that was binding the <i>Caitanya</i> (चैतन्य) with the physical body (स्थूलशरीर).			विद्यातत्त्वाय स्वाहा (Vidyātātāvāya Svāhā) Adoption to <i>Vidyātātava</i> , the knowledge hidden in Nature which remain as if secret with the realised ones to be imparted to a deserving/qualified aspirant, or to be tapped from the Divine through intuition. These three Nights the aspirant/ <i>Sādhaka</i> crosses during the early part of <i>Sannyāsa Jīvana</i> (the life of a renunciate). This stage is called <i>Virajā</i> , with this the real spiritual life begins.	विनम्रता (<i>Vinamratā</i>) Saintly humility
5	अहङ्कार Ahankāra	अहन्ता: ego, egotism; दम्भ : hypocrisy; दर्पः: vanity; मदः: arrogance, audacity; गर्वः: false pride; धृष्टता: stubbornness;				
6	अज्ञान Ajñāna	अविवेकः: Absence of the power of discrimination between the eternal and the ephemeral, understanding of the body as the real self, external phenomenal world which is ever changing flux as the everlasting or changeless. That is the fundamental error in <i>Buddhi</i> (intellect) which looks upon the real as the unreal and the unreal as the real and the impermanent as the permanent.			भगवत् सम्बन्ध (<i>Bhagavat Sambandha</i>) Relationship with God शुद्धा भक्ति (<i>Śuddhā Bhakti</i>) Pure love of God based on firm faith	
The individual efforts cease; The next three are the Great Nights of <i>Moha-Rātri</i> , <i>Kāla-Rātri</i> and the <i>Mahā-Rātri</i> from which only the Divine Mother, the Mother of the Universe can grant deliverance.						

Night No.	नवरात्रयः	The ways in which The Nine Nights express.	The hold that aids transcendence.		नवदिवसाः
	The Nine Nights that the Jiva has to cross over to attain Perfection.				The Nine Days (light/virtue) that the Jiva attains after having crossed over each Night.
7	मोहरात्रि <i>Moha-Rātri</i>	Delusion: the mistaken idea that the body to which the <i>Jīva</i> is clinging to (the gross, subtle and causal) as ones own belonging; and the feeling that one can find happiness, peace, love and rest in this world. Covetousness.	शिवत्वाय स्वाहा (Śivatavāya Svāhā) Adoption to <i>Śivatava</i> , the principle/knowledge that originate from God. These three Nights a <i>Jīva</i> can cross over only by the grace and will of the Divine Mother. This stage is called <i>Sarvātīta</i> (सर्वतीत). The unconditional surrender is called for and this stage is also called <i>Śārāṅya</i> (शारङ्य).		ज्ञान (<i>Jñāna</i>) The knowledge that everything belongs to God/Mother and nothing belongs to me, not even the body that I possess.
Transcense of <i>Moha-Rātri</i> is followed by अनाहतस्थिरस्थिति (Anāhatasthirasthiti) Getting firmly established in the heart centre.		सविकल्प समाधि (Savikalpa Samādhi) God vision, with form.			विष्णुग्रन्थिभेदन (Viṣṇugranthibhedana) Breaking of the knot that was binding the <i>Caitanya</i> with the Subtle body (सूक्ष्मशरीर).
8	कारुरात्रि <i>Kāla-Rātri</i>	Not knowing ones own Real Nature because of the veil covering the Self i.e. the darkness created by <i>Avidyā</i> (Individual Ignorance).			From <i>Viśuddha</i> to <i>Ājñā Cakra</i> crossing the limitations of <i>Nāma-Rūpa-Karma</i> .
9	महारात्रि <i>Mahā-Rātri</i>	Not knowing God, the Supreme Spirit because of the veil covering the God i.e. the darkness created by <i>Māyā</i> (cosmic ignorance).	From <i>Ājñā Cakra</i> to <i>Sahasrāra</i> ; रुद्रग्रन्थिभेदन (Rudragranthibhedana) Breaking of the knot that was binding the <i>Caitanya</i> with the Causal body <i>Nirvikalpa Samādhi</i> (निर्विकल्प समाधि); <i>Jīvanmukta-Avasthā</i> (जीवन्मुक्तअवस्था)		पूर्णत्व (Pūrṇatva) Total oneness with God. Union with God.

The natural tendencies and the acquired tendencies in the *Jīva*, the presence of which obscures its vision of the Reality, are called the Nights of the *Jīvās*. They keep the *Jīvā* engrossed in worldly life.

The central principle of Hindu religion in general and *Pūjā* in particular is that through various procedures adopted in it, the *Sādhaka* (साधक) rebuilds his personality in the mould of the object of worship (the Deity/ *Iṣṭa Devatā* इष्टदेवता), gets rid of his animal and human nature completely and manifests his true nature, the Divinity which is within. He first identifies the Deity with the Supreme Reality and then accedes and approaches the Deity as an immediately accessible manifestation of that Reality. The *Sādhaka* (साधक) understands that out of mercy and kindness, the Divine (the Supreme) has manifested in and through that name and form (or through an image) being an appropriate expression (as desired by the *Sādhaka*), so as to help the worshipper (devotee/*Sādhaka*) to be able to love and adore Him. It is as if God descending to be within human reach.

One who strives to cross over *Tamas* (तमस्) is called a *Brahmacarin* and the one who strives to cross over *Rajas* is called *Sannyasin*. [वित्तमो ब्रह्मचारी, विरजः सन्यासी] There is the concept of *Nava-Rātri* (नवरात्रि). A *Jīva* (जीव) is said to transcend the Nine Nights (darkness/defects/imperfections) before it attains the Self-Knowledge and re-union with God. They are like the nine gates; after crossing each gate, each Night, the *Sādhaka* is said to attain the new light of a new-day (a virtue, a merit, an illumination). The first Night the *Jīva* has to pass over is *Tamas* (तमस्), immediately he is said to attain a day – the *Smṛti*, the constant remembrance of God. The preceding table gives clear picture of the Nine Nights. A *Brahmacarin* is called *Tamobhid* (तमोभिद्), i.e. he is expected to crossover the first three Nights – *Tamas* (तमस्), *Dveṣa* (द्वेष) and *Mamakār* (ममकार). Then through a life of renunciation dedicated to God, the *Sannyāsa Jīvana* (सन्यास जीवन, which is to be internalised in case of house holders), the next three Nights [the *Bhogeccā* (भोगेच्छा), *Ahamkār* (अहङ्कार) and *Ajñāna* (अज्ञान)] are to be crossed over. The last three Nights, however, the Divine Mother alone can make the *Jīva* crossover. Through giving oneself entirely to the Divine Mother, i.e. through *Śāraṇya* (शरण्य) one crosses over these three darkest Nights. That is why there is *Pūjā* only on the *Saptamī* (सप्तमी), *Aṣṭamī* (अष्टमी) and *Navamī* (नवमी) during the *Nava-Rātri* (नवरात्रि) and on the *Vijaya-Daśamī* (विजय दशमी) day there is a grand celebration of the day as the ‘day of Victory’. Though symbolically and as a constant reminder Nine Days of *Nava-Rātri* are observed, the actual transcendence may take even a life or more.

Before we enter the three days *Pūjā* details we may have a look at a common question that haunts the mind of most of the people who give a serious thought to spiritual life and its possibilities.

After hearing about metaphysical and spiritual truths, a doubt naturally enters the mind of the listener – ‘Is all this a mere fiction of the mind or is there a real possibility of undergoing such transformations and attaining such states?’. To this the scriptures vouch for in affirmative, and so do those who have achieved those ends.

They only say the worshipper must first live a pious life¹ and undergo preliminary disciplines and attain competency. For example, *Gandharva Tantra* describes competency as follows: ‘The aspirant must be dexterous, be up and doing (*Dakṣa*, दक्ष), with his senses under control (*Jitendriya*, जितेन्द्रिय), abstaining from injury to all beings (*Sarvahimsavinirmukta*, सर्वहिंसविनिमुक्त), ever seeking and doing good to all (*Sarvaprāṇihiterataḥ*, सर्वप्राणिहितेस्तः), pure and clean in thought, word and action (*Śuciḥ*, शुचिः); acceptance in existence of God (*Āstikaḥ*, आस्तिकः), whose faith, proclaim, dedication and refuge are in Brahman [*Brahmaniṣṭha* (ब्रह्मनिष्ठ), *Brahmavādi* (ब्रह्मवादि), *Brāhmī* (ब्राह्मि), *Brahmaparāyaṇa* (ब्रह्मपरायण)] and is indifferent to or has placed all dualities at the feet of God (*Dvaita-hīna*, द्वैतहीन); such a one is competent in this scripture, otherwise he is no *Sādhaka*. [सोस्मिन् शास्त्रे अधिकारी स्यात्, तदन्यत्र न साधकः]. Once these antecedent disciplines are completed, his attitude in worship as in all other matters is essentially a spiritual one, based on a firm faith in the Mother and inspired by a desire to seek Her alone, which in itself, he understands, is *Liberation*.

So, with this we enter the *Kalpārambha* (कल्पासम्भ), the beginning of Pūjā session.

¹ Note: Gautama in his *Grhyasūtrās* (गृह्यसूत्राः) mentions the eight virtues/qualities (*Aṣṭaguṇāḥ*, अष्टगुणाः) as the basis of pious life:

- | | | |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Dayā</i> (दया, mercy) | 2. <i>Tiṭikṣā</i> (तितीक्षा, forbearance) | 3. <i>Śuciḥ</i> (शुचिः, purity) |
| 4. <i>Adveṣa</i> (अद्वेष, freedom from envy) | 5. <i>Prasāntatā</i> (प्रसन्नता, calmness) | 6. <i>Śīla</i> (शील, right behavior) |
| 7. <i>Alobha</i> (अलोभ, freedom from greed) | 8. <i>Aparigraha</i> (अपरिग्रह, freedom from covetousness) | |

ṢAṢṬHĪ PŪJĀ KALPĀRAMBHA, ADHIVĀSA, ĀMANTRAṆA

(षष्ठीपूजा : कल्पारम्भ, अधिवास, आमन्त्रण)

The *Kalpārambha* (कल्पारम्भ) is a simple *Ṣoḍaśopacāra-Pūjā* (षोडशोपचार पूजा, the worship with sixteen items) preceded by *Ghaṭa-Sthāpana* (घटस्थापन, invoking Mother in a water filled earthen-pot). The main purpose of this part of the *Pūjā* is to bring the Divine Mother to uppermost layer of one's own awareness and to awaken love divine so as to centre one's emotions and rest one's being in the Mother. There is a gross aspect (स्थूल) and a subtle aspect (सूक्ष्म) of worship. If love is awakened, it leads the worshipper to brush aside superfluous accretions, and pass within through the crest and the gross aspect and reach the subtle aspect. Entering the subtle aspect, we can churn the ocean of knowledge of Vedānta and the ocean of techniques of *Tantra* (तन्त्र) to discover the Mother of Pearl, the philosophical basis. And assisted by deeper meditations we enter its inner core – to find the Real Supreme Pearl that ever remains shining with the bright yet soft tender light, that is lovely yet intensely loving, that which is uninvolved yet deeply compassionate – The Divine Mother, Durgā.

And so She is worshipped with the *Pūjā Mantra*:

दक्षयज्ञविनाशिन्यै महाघोरायै योगिनीकोटि- *Dakṣayajñavināśinyai Mahāghorāyai Yoginīkoṭi-*
परिवृतायै भद्रकाल्यै ह्रीं ॐ दुर्गायै नमः ॥ *Parivṛtāyai Bhadrakālyai Hrīm Om Durgāyai*
Namaḥ

which is the Mother of Pearl containing the intended pearl securely hidden within it, the Divine Mother Durgā, the one who is enshrined in the heart of the worshipper. By 'worshipper' is meant one who is proficient in *Karma-Yoga* (कर्मयोग) and *Bhakti-Yoga* (भक्तियोग) and *Jñāna Yoga* (ज्ञानयोग) i.e. one who is capable of blending rituals with divine love – and clutch it to meditation. Worship implies duality whereas meditation ultimately lands in unity. From *Bīja Mantra* (बीज मन्त्र, 'the seed mantra') through speech (वाक्) and mind (मनस्) the intended *Devatā* (देवता) arises in ones consciousness and this *Devatā* is pure consciousness, The Brahman. In *Kūrma-Purāṇa* (कूर्म) it is said "Those who think of themselves to be different from the Supreme, will never realise It. All their labour is in vain." Because objective understanding of an object is mere mentation, *Vṛttijñāna* (वृत्तिज्ञान) whereas the total true knowledge of an object can be attained only by subjective understanding of it i.e. by total identification with the object, or ourselves being that object alone, and is called *Vastujñāna* (वस्तुज्ञान). The *Gandharva Tantra* (गन्धर्व तन्त्र) says: "By meditating on anything as oneself, man becomes that." The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (छान्दोग्य उपनिषद्) says: "As a man thinks that he becomes." Such knowledge in the Advaitic sense means 'to be'. To know the Divine Mother is to be the Divine Mother ourselves. Through this process, taking Mother as the Power Supreme we get the true complete knowledge of this universe, the cosmos. When Mother is taken up as the pure consciousness, then we get the true complete knowledge of Brahman. Brahman in Itself is

not an object and is not known as such. Brahman is known only by being Brahman, which a man attains through rituals, forms/images and the Yoga process, of which worship is an inevitable elementary framework, which begins with a wise duality and happily ends with unity. Pūjā, the worship involves all the three units of human existence, the body, mind and speech. The fourth factor is divine love, the personal devotion of the worshipper which empowers the former three, unifies them and directs them to a common Goal. The ultimate object of the rituals is realisation of God – and is effected by the identification of the worshipper with the worshipped. According to Monistic Śāktism or even Advaitic Vedānta, the Pure Spirit or Brahman as it is in Itself or the same what the Śāktās call as the Divine Mother as She is in Herself called *Svarūpa* (स्वरूप), and is *Sat-Cit-Ānanda* (सत्-चित्-आनन्द), the Pure Infinite Being Consciousness Bliss Absolute. This, however, is Spirit viewed from our side and rather in relation to us. What that Spirit or the Divine *Mother Herself is* can only be said by what the Divine *Mother in Herself is*. This is realised in the experience of a perfected *Yogi* (*Siddha*, सिद्ध) who through elimination of Mind and Body which constitute a finite individuality, has attained total identity with Her. What we generally call God [more or less the father in Heaven in Christianity] or the Lord (*Īśvara*, ईश्वर) is the Divine Mother (the Pure Infinite Spirit) in Her aspect relative to the world as Creator, Governor, Maintainer and Ruler. It is just a Power, we may say, but Consciousness as Power in relation to the Creation. “Why God is thought of as Mother?” is always countered by the question “Why is God called as Father?”. God is sex-less. Divinity is spoken as Mother because It is Power, It ‘conceives, bears, gives birth to and nourishes the Universe.’ Just as we say Motherland, mother-tongue, or a river, a country etc. are indicated by ‘she’. In generation among species too, beings are only helpers, Nature/Mother is the Prime Actor. As of all beings, Man is said to be the Spirit – with two expressions Knowledge and Love – and with two vehicles Mind and Body. He is verily that Spirit or Consciousness which in one aspect is immutable and eternal, and in another is finitised by Mind and Matter acquiring individuality. The Nine Nights engulfing him maintains his individuality, transcendence of which establishes his oneness in the non dual state with the Absolute aspect of the Divine Mother, Her own *Svarūpa* (स्वरूप), the *Sat-Cit-Ānanda Svarūpa* (सत्-चित्-आनन्द स्वरूप). Here we need to note that except the Śāktās the Śakti aspect (the Power Aspect) of Consciousness [*Caitanya*, चैतन्य] has not been taken up by any cult including Vedāntins. In front of the *Ghaṭa* (घट) of the *Kalpārambha Pūjā* (कल्पारम्भ पूजा) – Mother as *Cāmunḍā* (चामुण्डा) is worshipped and the *Durgā Saptasatī* (दुर्गा सप्तशती) is chanted on all the three days *Saptamī*, *Aṣṭamī* and *Navamī* (सप्तमी, अष्टमी & नवमी).

The *Kalpārambha Pūjā* (कल्पारम्भ पूजा) is followed by *Bodhana* (बोधन). *Bodhana* (बोधन) means Informing/Waking/Arousing/Pleading. It is a request, a pleading – pleading Divine Mother to manifest Herself to grace the blessed occasion of Her receiving the worship and love of Her beloved children. The *Kalpārambha* (कल्पारम्भ) worship is done in a convenient corner in the same Pandal where the Mother Durgā’s image is placed for worship. Whereas the *Bodhana* (बोधन) is done under a *Bilva* (बिल्व) tree in closed quarters of the Pandal or is done in a small branch cut from a *Bilva* tree and placed in a pot. It is a simple worship of the *Bilva* (बिल्व) tree or branch followed by a prayer for rousing or appraising Mother seeking Her immediate Presence therein.

After *Bodhana* (बोधन), a ritual called *Adhivāsa* (अधिवास) is performed. *Adhivāsa* (अधिवास) means preliminary consecration before commencement of main Pūjā. It is making the Divinity assume Its abode in *Bilva Vṛkṣa* (बिल्व वृक्ष), in *Navapatrikā* (नवपत्रिका) as well as in the Image. Commonly available 24 listed substances are individually and collectively touched to the *Bilva Vṛkṣa* (बिल्व वृक्ष), *Navapatrikā* (नवपत्रिका) and all the Images individually uttering certain *Mantrās* invoking the presence of Divine Mother. Immediately after the *Adhivāsa* (अधिवास) which confirms Mother's dwelling in those three places, a ritual called *Āmantraṇa* (आमन्त्रण) is performed. *Āmantraṇa* (आमन्त्रण) is deliberation and greeting. It is a short worship of the Divine Mother which re-affirms Mother's arrival, and Mother is therein greeted with love and affection. Subsequently the *Saptamī*, *Aṣṭamī* and *Navamī* (सप्तमी, अष्टमी & नवमी) worships follow in order.

To bring a comprehensive understanding of Divine Mother, triple setting is done in the Pandal:

1. The Magnificent Image Unit.
2. The *Navapatrikā* (नवपत्रिका), the nine twigs of different trees bundled together.
3. The *Ghaṭa* (घट, the pot filled with water) placed on *Yantra* (यन्त्र).

The *Bilva Vṛkṣa* (बिल्व वृक्ष) where *Bodhana* (बोधन) is performed being the first place of invocation or the origin of Manifestation is regarded as Absolute Aspect (the Ultimate Reality) and where its branch is carried to worshipped along with images etc. in the *Pūjā* Pandal is regarded as the expression of the Divine Mother.

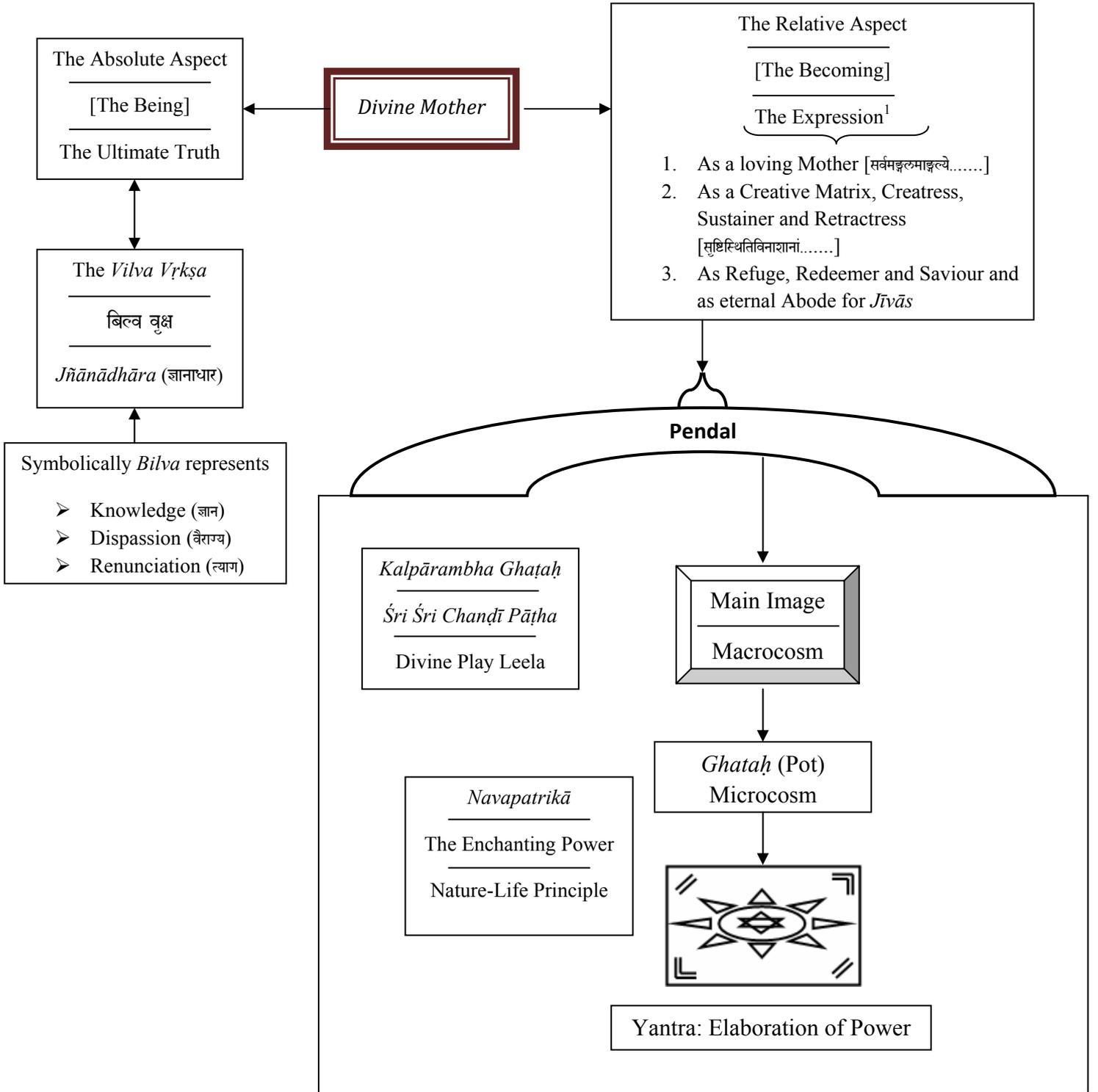


Table 2: The Puja Arrangement

¹ Note: Mother Lakṣmi says:

तिरोभावः तथा सृष्टिः स्थितिः संहृतिरेव च
 अनुग्रह इति प्रोक्तं मदीयं कर्म पञ्चकम् ।

Concealment (The Divine Mother Caitanya, the all pervading consciousness which is the substratum of this universe, and is the true nature of Jīva is totally concealed), the creation, the preservation and destruction of this Universe and also Divine Grace – these are said to be my five acts.

The *Ghaṭa* (घटः) Concept and the *Yantra* (यन्त्र)

In the Hindu Cultural and metaphysical traditions as well as in poetic language the visible physical body of beings is addressed to as pot, *Ghaṭaḥ* (घटः), especially as an earthen pot. It is to indicate on one side, its impermanency, its delicate destructible nature, its worthlessness as matter (mud), and on the other side to point out the fact that though outwardly they all look alike, they contain different stuffs inside – different tendencies and propensities, different urges and drives, different Karmās to workout, in one phrase, stuffed with different natures. This negative approach, the negation is to distinguish the Real Self, the Eternal, the *Ātman* (आत्मन्) from the apparent Self, the transient bodily sheath. So *Ghaṭaḥ* (घटः) represents the Embodied Being, the Microcosm, the Divine Mother existing as the innumerable *Jīvās*. That is why it is placed at the foot of the Image Unit. This *Ghaṭaḥ* (घटः) is placed on the *Yantra* (यन्त्र), diagrammatic representation of Nature called *Sarvatobhadramanḍala* [सर्वतोभद्रमण्डल, meaning – ‘sphere secured from all sides’] or a *Yantra* (यन्त्र) called *Bhūpura* [भूपुर, meaning – ‘the plane of physical existence’]. *Yantra* (यन्त्र) is the representation of the Universe, its Divinities and the Supreme Deity – which are the different aspects of the same Consciousness – Power (चित् शक्ति). The object of the *Yantra* (यन्त्र) is to identify the unity of every *Jīva* with the Divine Mother in their existential aspect as Spiritual Beings as well as in Her forms as Mind, Life and Matter and their *Devatās* (Divinities/Power governing them). Contemplation on this renders the consciousness of the worshipper/*Sādhaka* set to new awareness where world and all beings shine Divinised by the presence and love of the Divine Mother. A *Yantra* (यन्त्र) is composed of minimum three triangles – two large and one small. The large two are placed overlapping each other with vertices in opposite direction. Small triangle is placed in the central space with a point (*Bindu*,

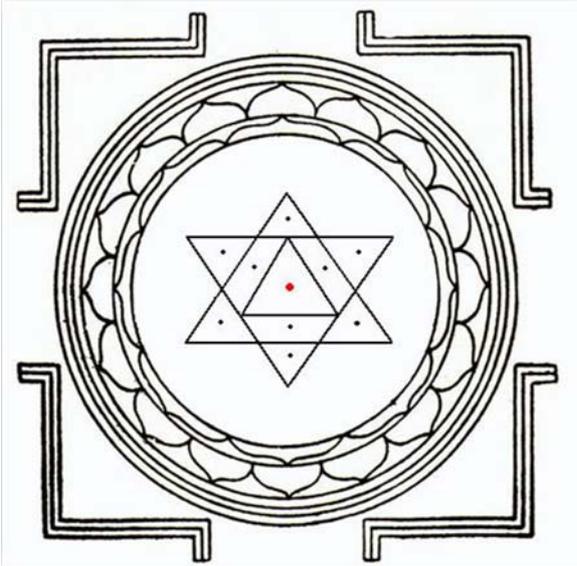


Figure 2: Yantra

bindu) at the Centre. The large triangle with the vertex upward is said to be *Śiva* (शिव) that points to the Pure Consciousness, *Cit* (चित्, also known as the Male Principle¹) and the other with lower vertex is said to be *Śakti* which points to the *Power of the Cit* (चित्शक्ति, also known as the Female Principle).

The overlapping is considered as the *Yajña* (यज्ञ), self-sacrifice for creation (more clearly expressed in the *Puruṣa Sūkta*, पुरुषसूक्त) and is called the Expression of Love, the basis of creation. The intersection of triangles create a number of small triangles which are various Divine Heads assigned with various powers and

¹ Herein Male-Female has no reference to gender but to their Nature, function and mode; like calling a tree male and a creeper female; or a motorcycle as male and a scooty as female; a rude rough-flowing river as male and smooth gracefully flowing river as female.

functions in the universe. The small triangle at the centre represents the Deity – if the Deity be viewed male, then with vertex upward and if the Deity be viewed female, then with vertex downward. The Deity is considered as the embodiment of love. The universe is said to have risen out of love and love is said to be the only factor sustaining the universe. Thus set three triangles, are figured within the eight lotus petals mounted on a circle indicative of the evolving of an enchanting universe by the *Māyā* (माया). The circle is the ever changing flux of Nature and Mother's Glory in Nature. The whole thing is then enclosed within a square surround of line with four gates on four sides which is found in all *Yantrās*, and is called *Bhūpura* (भूपुर).

There is first a red central point or *Bindu* (बिन्दु), the *Cakra* (चक्र) of Bliss. This central point or *Bindu* (बिन्दु) is the Supreme Divinity – the Mother as the Grand Potential whence all the rest, some of which this diagram signifies, proceed. It is in red, for it is the active state, verily representing *Vimarśa Śakti* (विमर्श शक्ति), or the Evolving Power. *Mahā-Tripurasundarī* (महात्रिपुरसुन्दरी) is the name given to the creative aspect of such Consciousness-Power, for such an enchanting universe of beauty and love originates from Her. *Mahākālī* (महाकाली) is that aspect of the same Consciousness-Power which retracts back the creation while *Mahālakṣmī* (महालक्ष्मी) is that aspect of the very same Consciousness-Power which sustains the creation.

The *Yantra* is drawn and various sections are ornamentally filled with five colours made from five natural items – called *Pañcaguḍī* (पञ्चगुडी). The five colours represent the five *Tanmātrās* (तन्मात्राs) – the primary undifferentiated evolutes from which forms the multifarious universe of twenty four cosmic principles.

Rice Powder	<i>Akṣata</i> (अक्षत)	White	<i>Ākāśa Tatva</i> (आकाश तत्व)
<i>Bilva</i> Leaf Powder	<i>Bilvapatra</i> (बिल्वपत्र)	Green	<i>Vāyu Tatva</i> (वायु तत्व)
Vermillion Powder	<i>Sindūra</i> (सिन्दूर)	Red	<i>Agni Tatva</i> (अग्नि तत्व)
Turmeric Powder	<i>Haridrā</i> (हरिद्रा)	Yellow	<i>Jala Tatva</i> (जल तत्व)
Powdered Charred Paddy Husk	<i>Tuṣa Aṅgāra</i> (तुष अंगार)	Black	<i>Prthvī Tatva</i> (पृथ्वी तत्व)

Table 2: Five Colours in a Yantra

Thus forms the *Yantra* (यन्त्र) representing the 'Divine Universe', the Consciousness-Power-Complex filled with Love and Divinity – but concealed by a Divine Power – the *Māyā* (माया). The *Ghaṭa* (घट) placed on it is the *Jīvātman* (जीवात्मन) residing in the world. The *Ghaṭa* (घट) formulation is as follows:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Over the <i>Yantra</i> at its centre a fistful of raw rice (अक्षत) is spread.</p> | <p>Rice (अक्षत, lit. means indestructible) here symbolises ‘Pure Consciousness’. Placing it below the pot is indicative of Pure Consciousness as basis of individual existence.</p> |
| <p>2. <i>Ghaṭaḥ</i> (घटः, pot) filled with water is placed on it.</p> | <p><i>Ghaṭaḥ</i> (घटः) represents Individual Soul/<i>Jīvātman</i> (जीवात्मन्), microcosm.</p> |
| <p>3. <i>Pañca Ratna</i> – (पञ्च रत्न, five different gems) are put inside the pot.</p> | <p><i>Pañca Ratna</i> (पञ्च रत्न) symbolises five sense organs, <i>Pañca Jñānendriya</i> (पञ्च ज्ञानेन्द्रिय).</p> |
| <p>4. <i>Pañca Pallava</i> (पञ्च पल्लव, five shoots with leaves of different plants) are placed at the mouth of the pot, with stalks remaining immersed in water.</p> | <p><i>Pañca Pallava</i> (पञ्च पल्लव) symbolises the five organs of action, <i>Pañca Karmendriya</i> (पञ्च कर्मेन्द्रिय).</p> |
| <p>5. A plate filled with raw rice <i>Tāṇḍūlapūrṇapātra</i> (ताण्डूलपूर्णपात्र) is placed over the pot.</p> | <p>Here rice which symbolises Pure Consciousness, <i>Caitanya</i> (चैतन्य), is the source of new life or progeny which being carried forward in new life that would be born.</p> |
| <p>6. In that rice plate a <i>Saśiṣaḍāba</i> (सशीषडाब), coconut with shell, husk and stalk (which is fit to germinate) is placed.</p> | <p><i>Saśiṣaḍāba</i> (सशीषडाब) represents the seed of life of next generation, the potential power capable of producing new life.</p> |
| <p>7. With vermilion a <i>Svastika</i> (स्वस्तिक) is drawn on the <i>Ghaṭa</i> (घट, pot).</p> | <p><i>Svastika</i> (स्वस्तिक) represents – the wheel of time, <i>Kāla-Cakra</i> (कालचक्र) and the wheel of <i>Dharma/Karma-Cakra</i> (धर्म/कर्म चक्र, righteousness and action-reaction) indicating that <i>Jīvās</i> are subjected to a life cycle that revolves with time and is under the strict law action-reaction and moves in accordance with Nature’s plan of <i>Jīvās</i> evolution-involution – <i>Dharma-Cakra</i> (धर्म चक्र).</p> |
| <p>8. Sandal paste is applied and a pair of clothes is placed on the pot.</p> | <p>This indicates that Man is social-being subjected to social codes.</p> |



Table 3: Gatah Arrangement

The Significance of *Nava-Patrikā* (नवपत्रिका)

Mind is man. Man is what his mind is. And, mind is constantly under the Sway of *Vāsanās* (वासनास), the acquired tendencies. Saint Augustine said that “Mind was not to rest until it found itself in God”. God is One Whole, whereas we live in the world of multiplicity and diversity. How then can mind rest in God, for the life in the world is inevitable. It may be possible in particular state of existence called *Samādhi* (समाधि) wherein a man who can enter that state lives oblivious of external world. Even for him what about at other times?

The *Tantrās* introduce the practice of the Vedantic Truths in daily life in a smooth and natural way. They say – the variety that you see in the universe is nothing but different aspects of the One Great Power, the Divine Mother. The universe is nothing but the Divine Mother manifest in various ways. Even abstract things like pain and pleasures, actions and reactions, sleep or strength, delusion or deceit are verily that Mother. You were seeing with physical eyes, so was it looking otherwise. Now you develop spiritual eyes, you shall see with peace and joy, the ‘One’ existing as many. Still further, if you can yoke forth your heart to that One, you shall by Her grace attain the Everlasting Peace and Freedom.

This whole idea is brought into the Durgā Pūjā as the ‘*Navapatrikā*’ (नवपत्रिका). Nine trees are identified to represent the nine aspects of the Divine Mother. These are the trees that often fall to man’s eyes in Indian soil, at all seasons, at all places like that of a plantain tree. Twigs or branches of these are bundled together and clothed to shape up to a woman’s standing pose. The idea is that the plant-life is something like a common factor between the animal life and matter. So it can represent *Jīva* and *Jagat* together i.e. the whole universe, and having associated with the different aspects of the Divine Mother brings in the Governing Power as well. It is, thus ‘The One’ seen in Many, or seeing Many as ‘The One’ with regards to the entire universe. Worshipper contemplating on this truth soon realises the fact: “We are the children of earth and starry sky, but we know our common origin is the Divine Mother.” Surrendering to that ideal and worshipping it the worshipper finds himself one with the entire universe and all the beings when he views himself with bodily existence, and finds himself one with the Divine Mother when he views himself as purely a spiritual being. It is as if to say “Divine and issued from what is Divine, I come toward Thee”. Our misery and suffering is because we fail to identify ourselves with the Whole but keep our identity with an insignificant part of that Vast Whole. There is a verdict of a Vedic Sage: “Identification with the part/imperfect – that is the *want of Wholeness*, *Apūrṇam* (अपूर्णम्) is *Disease* and the source of every misery”. It is said realising God one regains the *Health* [*Svāस्थ्यam Āpnoti* (स्वास्थ्यम् आप्नोति)]. The Whole is Hale, and is Health. Every bit of want of Wholeness in any form, be it physical, mental or spiritual, is disease and is bound to inflict pain and unhappiness. God alone is the Whole and Complete [*Pūrṇa* (पूर्ण)], that which is without parts or sections [*Akhaṇḍa* (अखण्ड)]. Man, in the secular sense is the reverse of this, though has sprung from the Whole. It is so because of his erroneous identification with bodily existence. So seeking is inherent in Him. He seeks self-completion. Herein ‘*Navapatrikā Vāsinī Durgā*’ (नवपत्रिका वासिनी दुर्गा) is that Whole by surrender to which the worshipper dissolves his ego to find his lost identity of oneness with the Divine Mother.

Holding the world is selling the life,
Minding Mother is mending mind,
Invoking Mother is inviting peace,
Loving Mother is freeing the Soul.

The *Navapatrikās* (नवपत्रिकास) with the corresponding Deities:

Serial No.	Name of the Tree/plant	Deity
1.	<i>Rambha</i> (रंभ), plantain	<i>Brahmāṇī</i> (ब्रह्मणी)
2.	<i>Kacca</i> (कच्च)	<i>Kālikā</i> (कालिका)
3.	<i>Haridrā</i> (हरिद्रा), turmeric	<i>Durgā</i> (दुर्गा)
4.	<i>Jayanti</i> (जयन्ति)	<i>Kārtikī</i> (कार्तिकी)
5.	<i>Bilva</i> (बिल्व)	<i>Śivā</i> (शिवा)
6.	<i>Dāḍimbha</i> (दाडिम्भ), pomegranate	<i>Raktadantikā</i> (रक्तदन्तिका)
7.	<i>Aśoka</i> (अशोक)	<i>Śokarahitā</i> (शोकरहिता)
8.	<i>Mānya</i> (मान्य)	<i>Camuṇḍā</i> (चामुण्डा)
9.	<i>Dhanya</i> (धन्य), rice	<i>Mahālakṣmī</i> (महालक्ष्मी)

Table 4: The Nava Patrika

In the early stages of *Sādhanā* (साधना), for the purpose of contemplation and as protective Divinities, nine aspects of the Divine Mother *Durgā* are given which are sometimes associated with the *Navapatrikā* (not as a part of worship).

प्रथमं शैलपुत्री च etc. upto प्रकीर्तिताः ॥ [3, 4, 5/ दुर्गा सप्तशती कवच]

The *Navapatrikā* (नवपत्रिका) therein refers to the enchanting power of the universe. But for her divinity and her being the working centre of the Divine Mother, a woman is known to be the most enchanting power in the universe for all humans everywhere. Through them the *Māyā* (माया) Power of the Mother enchants, entices and entangles the *Jīva*. Women themselves are enticed through ‘pridely’ awareness of their own ‘womanity’; what then to speak of men who in spite of their raised moustaches are trapped. Every *Jīva* has to transcend this enchanting power, the *Avidyā Māyā* (अविद्या माया) which keeps it away from God. Men must be able to see the Divine in woman at every stage of her life, so should women change their own awareness to become aware of themselves as Divine beings. So the *Nava-Durgā* (नवदुर्गा) are nine different stages of woman in her life of the world – which are connected to the nine Divine forms of the Mother.

Serial No.	Aspects of the Divine Mother	Stages of woman corresponding to Mother's epithets
1.	<i>Śailaputrī</i> (शैलपुत्री)	Infancy.
2.	<i>Brahmacāriṇī</i> (ब्रह्मचारिणी)	Girl under training.
3.	<i>Candraghaṇṭā</i> (चन्द्रघण्टा)	Physically and mentally grown up and ready for a family life.
4.	<i>Kūṣmāṇḍā</i> (कूष्माण्डा)	Woman on her family way.
5.	<i>Skandamātā</i> (स्कन्दमाता)	Mother of a child.
6.	<i>Kātyāyini</i> (कात्यायिनी)	Mistress of a household.
7.	<i>Kālarātrī</i> (कालरात्री)	Aged lady.
8.	<i>Mahāgaurī</i> (महागौरी)	Of Enlightened wisdom.
9.	<i>Siddhidatrī</i> (सिद्धिदात्री)	Blessing and seeking welfare of one and all; Eye opener for others.

Table 5: The Nine Aspects of Divine Mother

These are not something like words with specific meaning. They are various epithets of the Divine Mother associated with a particular act, event or function of Hers, the Divinities or the Divine Power Heads. These names are uttered joyfully relishing Her Divine acts, feeling Her immediate presence that generates love in the heart and imparts peace to the mind. Similarly there is repetition of thousand names of the Divine Mother, the *Lalitā Sahasranāma* (ललिता सहस्रनाम) or of *Viṣṇu* (विष्णु) or other Deities. It is expansion of the finite into the Infinite, of the part into the Whole, of the thinkable and measurable into the Unthinkable and Immeasurable. It is a progressive absorption of all limited and discrete forms of experience that is fact-sections into the Primary Continuum which is the union of the *Cit* (चित्) and *Cit-Śakti* (चित् शक्ति)– the Pure Consciousness and Its Power. When we worship, this process is mentally visualised. This sets in time the Mind and the Body into a condition which renders them fit for a direct spiritual experience, The *Samādhi* (समाधि), which is emerging out of the Spirit sloughing off its limiting vehicles. The worship of *Navapatrikā Vāsinī* (नवपत्रिका वासिनी) serves both these purposes – to witness the Whole being a part in it in Its manifestation, and to experience the whole as non different from ones own Self, in its un-manifest state.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DURGĀ IMAGE UNIT

Durgā Pūjā does not owe allegiance to any particular school of thought. It is universal in nature and treatment because at its base stands the pure transcendental experience of The Supreme Reality. The inner secret has been interpreted according to convenient opinions of the commentators. Interpreters try to rationalise the Pūjā details in their own way. So we see divergent opinions on the same topic. However we find that the ritualistic details follow the standard protocol of worship according to the *Śākta* (शाक्त) tradition. Had these rituals not been the emotional out-pourings of the illumined hearts, they could not have become so potent, so popular and lasting. One thing imperative on us in evaluating their meaning and significance is that we should not be speculative or whimsical. We should first get established in our spiritual base and practice the discipline for a long time. Only then we will be able to get the realistic mental picture of those who believed, practised, found out the underlying truth and utilised the miraculous efficacy of the rituals.

Now for us to evaluate, we have two strong bases – the infallible scriptures and the shining incidents in the divine life of the Universal Master, Sri Ramakrishna. In fact every incident in the life of Sri Ramakrishna connected with the Durgā Pūjā grants validity to the Durgā Pūjā, breaths life into the image and determines the path leading to the direct experience of The Mother of the universe. If we consolidate all those incidents of the Lord's life, then we get new light, new eyes to view the Durgā Pūjā. There in, during his lifetime, we surprisingly find that Master's involvement, encouragement, participation, revelation of truth and his expressions on those occasions of his own identity with that particular Divine Supremacy, were themselves responsible for Durgā Pūjā to enter the Ramakrishna tradition, though we commonly assign its introduction to Swamiji.

Let us go back to the main topic, the significance of the Durgā Image unit. We know that there are two aspects of existence – The Absolute Existence and The Relative Existence. The Absolute Existence is the uncreated Eternal Existence, the *Para-Brahman* (परब्रह्मन्), the Pure Consciousness – *Sat Cit Ānanda* (सत् चित् आनन्द). The Relative Existence is the whole of the created universe with the 14 *lokās* (लोकस, planes of existence) within the limitations of time, space and causation.

The Absolute is Pure Consciousness (*Śuddha Caitanya*, शुद्ध चैतन्य), as if an infinite expanse of Existence, which is beyond time, space and causation; and is beyond the perceptibility of senses and even beyond mind and the intellect. In it millions and millions, innumerable number of universes appear and disappear every moment. Each of the universes is referred to as Relative Existence. It is the product of time and space. In other words, in timeless – spaceless Existence, time and space appear and disappear. Each universe is like a speck in the infinite timeless spaceless Existence! Just imagine a speck of space appearing in infinite spaceless ocean and after a while merging back in the same spaceless ocean! This is what is called the creation, the sustenance and the dissolution of the universe. The Supreme Power associated with That Absolute Existence is called the *Cit-Śakti* (चित्-

शक्ति). It is this Power that is responsible for the creation, sustenance and retraction of innumerable universes – ‘*Sṛṣṭisthitivināśānām Śaktibhūte Sanātani*’ (सृष्टि-स्थिति-विनाशानां शक्ति-भूते सनातनि).

The Pure Consciousness ‘*Caitanya*’ (चैतन्य) or the Power associated with It ‘*Cit-Śakti* (चित्-शक्ति)’ are one and the same Reality, inseparable. These two views of the Ultimate Divine Reality are presented in the Vedas. They are neither masculine nor feminine or neuter. The Divine Reality is beyond sex distinction. Since the Power, the *Cit-Śakti* (चित्-शक्ति), is indicative of creative and evolutionary energy, it has been given a feminine form and is designated as the Divine Mother of the universe, which rouse the divine sentiments in the hearts of the devotees. This is precisely the **impersonal aspect of the ‘Mother Durgā’**, represented by *Praṇava* ‘ॐ’ (प्रणव). This idea is fully developed in the *Paurāṇic* (पौराणिक) works dealing with the deeds and worship of Durgā. As Pure Consciousness and the Power packed in It, She pervades the whole universe and is called *Nārāyaṇi* (नारायणि).

The created universe has two categories within itself, the sentient (the living creatures/*Jīva*, जीव) and the insentient (*Jagat*, जगत्). Since the Pure Consciousness Para-Brahman, the Absolute is immutable and hence cannot undergo any changes, the change, the effect of creation is attributed to Mother Herself. Mother alone has become all this – the living beings and the universe. This establishes the **immanent aspect of ‘Mother Durgā’**.

Again Mother dwells as the innermost spirit of all creatures. When there is multiplicity and variety of living beings, amidst it there is bound to be a number of species too. The species are called *Gaṇa* (गण). For example: *Deva-Gaṇa* (देव-गण), *Manuṣya-Gaṇa* (मनुष्य-गण), *Rākṣasa-Gaṇa* (राक्षस-गण) etc. Species under a common roof or on a common platform need a leader to supply their different needs and to take care and maintain them. The power that fulfils this need is *Gaṇeśa* (गणेश). The power ***Gaṇeśa* (गणेश) is the wishful presentation of the Mother**. *Purāṇās* (पुराणास) introduce this idea saying Durgā created Him with Her own hands.

It is asserted that though She has become the manifold universe of variety and multiplicity, yet She remains One and Undivided. She is beyond the taint of darkness and sensuous knowledge. She is Light, She is Power. This again is represented by the seed syllable ‘*Hrīm*’ (ह्रीं).

When there is *Jīva* (जीव) and *Jagat* (जगत्) which are but ever changing flux, there is bound to be an unchanging substratum, the *Para-Brahman* (पर-ब्रह्मन्), the Ultimate Reality, the Absolute; and also a definite law governing the change. The unchanging substratum is the ‘*Satyam*’ (सत्यम्) and the law governing the manifest universe, pervading it as the inner substance, is the ‘*Rtam*’ (ऋतम्). The world which we experience at present receives its existence and self-evidence from the Mother as ‘*Rtam*’ (ऋतम्). The various gods and powers functioning in the universe and in man have their glory by delegation from the Mother.

On the other hand, Mother plays a ‘hide and seek’ game with Her enchanting power. She generates a cosmic delusion.

‘*Īśvarah Sarvabhūtānām Hyddeśerjuna Tiṣṭhati
Bhrāmāyan Sarvabhūtāni Yantrāruḍhāni Māyayā*’ [B.G. 18/61]
‘*Ichādveśasamuthena Dvandvamohena Bhārata
Sarvabhutani Sammohaṁ Sarge Yānti Parantapa*’ [B.G. 7/27]

[ईश्वरः सर्वभूतानां हृद्देशेऽर्जुन तिष्ठति ।
भ्रामयन् सर्वभूतानि यन्त्रारूढानि मायया ॥
इच्छा-द्वेष-समुत्थेन द्वन्द्व-मोहेन भारत ।
सर्वभूतानि संमोहं सर्गे यान्ति परंतप ॥]

This aspect of Mother is called The *Mahāmāyā* (महामाया). This great deluding power conceals the Truth by which the *Jīva* neither recognises the Eternal Supreme Reality, the Sat Cit *Ānanda* (सत् चित् आनन्द) existing behind this creation as its substratum, nor its own real nature as the Eternally Pure, Eternally Perfect, the Bliss-Absolute. These two – not knowing God and not knowing Self is called the *Mahā-Rātri* (महारात्रि) and the *Kāla-Rātri* (कालरात्रि) respectively. She does not end with concealing the Truth but presents a glittering world of intense sense attraction (*Śabda Sparśa Rūpa Rasa and Gandha*, शब्द स्पर्श रूप रस गन्ध) before the *Jīva*! [‘*Hiraṇmayena Pātreṇa Satyasyāpihitam Mukham*’ – *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad*, ‘हिरण्मयेन पात्रेन सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखं’ – ईशावास्योपनिषद्] And She provides the *Jīva* with three special powers – the *Ichā-Śakti* (इच्छा-शक्ति), *Jñāna-Śakti* (ज्ञान-शक्ति) and *Kriyā-Śakti* (क्रिया-शक्ति). She grants them the freedom of action. This aspect of Mother’s deluding power with respect to the *Jīva* is called the *Moha-Rātri* (मोहरात्रि) because of which the *Jīvās* though endowed with consciousness, erroneously identify themselves with the internal organs (*Buddhi* and *Manas*, बुद्धि, मनस्), the instruments of knowledge (*Jñānendriya*, ज्ञानेन्द्रिय) and of action (*Karmendriya*, कर्मेन्द्रिय); and think themselves to be the bodies and rush to the world with gusto to enjoy the illusionary external world! Now we clearly understand what is meant by the ‘Divine Play’; what a wonderful play!

It is like blinding the child and leaving it in the deep woods. What will decide its *Gati* (गति), the course of journey! Here the Nature’s plan of the Divine Mother comes into picture. The Eternal Truth manifesting as the infallible cosmic law, the *Ṛtam* (ऋतम्), descends down to govern the *Jīva*’s course. Two important universal laws – **the Dharma** (धर्म) **and the Karma** (कर्म)– emerge. *Dharma* is what is ought to be done and *Karma* is what is actually being done by a *Jīva*.

The sages of the yore discovered this secret and found that any *Jīva* walking on the path of *Dharma* never meets suffering; on the contrary progressively expands, evolves and reaches perfection to experience the Eternal Bliss and the freedom from Nature, that is Immortality. Owing to the freedom given to it and external worldly attractions, a *Jīva* happens to go against the Nature’s plan for the *Jīva*, i.e. against the *Dharma*, in other words it follows the path of *Adharma* (अधर्म). Then the *Jīva* is bound to suffer intense misery and bondage. Mother then takes the rod in Her hand to chasten. Man is bound to reap the fruits of his own actions; good fruit for good action and bad for the bad. This is called the Law of *Karma*.

So we have three orders:

- *Rtam* (ऋत्तं) is the cosmic order governing the universe.
- *Dharma* (धर्म) is the Nature's format for the *Jīva*.
- *Karma* (कर्म) is the individual order governing the *Jīva*.

Mother wants that Her children should play in bliss and joy, but does not want any calamity or misery to befall on them. So, Mother has to assure safety, protection, health, strength, means of sustenance, fearlessness, intelligence, happiness and peace for every *Jīva* provided they walk on the path of Dharma. When we understand the Nature's plan we feel greatly elated to know why the *Rṣi-Munis* (ऋषि-मुनिस) called that Nature as the Mother and the Divine Principle as the Divine Mother; and especially with the sweet name 'Durgā'. This is the aspect of Durgā that is represented by *Lakṣmī* (लक्ष्मी): *Lakṣmī* is also called 'Śrī' (श्री). Śrī (श्री) means everything being in its proper way and everything being conducive and favourable. And as *Mahā-Lakṣmī* (महा लक्ष्मी) – She takes the responsibility of sustaining the universe.

Laws are made only when there are maximum or sufficient chances to be otherwise. Existence of *Dharma* (righteousness, virtue, goodness, nobility, justice etc.) presupposes and confirms the existence of *Adharma*, that what is unrighteousness and evil. When opposite forces coexist there is bound to be clashes, fighting, wars and destructions. Every war anywhere in the universe from the lowest creature to the highest *Devatās* (देवतास) is for justice and is invariably a confrontation and a challenge between the *Dharma* and the *Adharma*. This is the main theme of Durgā Pūjā.

If 'survival of the fittest' be the governing principle of the universe, then within no time Mother Durgā has to wind up Her play. But the truth is otherwise. It is the 'survival of the righteous' and not the 'survival of the fittest'. [*Satyameva Jayate, Dharmo Rakṣati Rakṣitaḥ*] ('सत्यमेव जयते' 'धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः'). There is bound to be Divine interference to maintain the law and order in the universe and to suppress the evil and uphold the righteous. This aspect of Mother Durgā is symbolised as the *Mahīśāsura-mardīnī* (महिशासुर मर्दिनी), Mother wielding arms with ten hands, the *Daśabhujā* (दशभुजा) worshipped during the Durgā Pūjā. The evil in any form is personified as *Mahīśāsura* (महिशासुर). The Power of Mother Durgā which maintains law and order in the universe is the *Kārtikeya* (कार्तिकेय).

Behind such a complex structure of immeasurable dimensions with innumerable *Jīva*'s in the 14 planes of existence embodied in it, there has to be a Cosmic Intelligence to constantly throw the 'Light of Knowledge' on everything and determine the state of affairs and illumine the course of action. The aspect of Mother Durgā which takes care of this function is named the *Saraswatī* (सरस्वती). In the individual *Jīvas*, those who aspire for the spiritual Truth, it is She that manifests as 'Medhā' (मेधा) and as 'Prajñānam' (प्रज्ञानं). Man's passions are his misfortunes. There are internal foes like craving, rage, covetousness and passions apart from external ones. Just as home is protected from thieves and burglars by placing proper guard, this Mother guards him by illumining the lamp of

Viveka (विवेक) in his heart. She is the One who bestows the final beatitude by destroying the *Moha-Rātri* (मोहरात्री) engulfing the *Jīva*. Mother *Saraswatī* (सरस्वती) is the Power that is responsible for the creation of this universe i.e. the *Sṛṣṭi* (सृष्टि). She is the power that is associated with creative part of the birth-cycle within the creation too.

In the centre stands the Grand Image of Mother Durgā with these four of Her functional aspects around Her, viz. *Mahā-Lakṣmī* (महा-लक्ष्मी), *Mahā-Saraswatī* (महा-सरस्वती), *Gaṇeśa* (गणेश) and *Kārtikeya* (कार्तिकेय). Of the two *Gaṇeśa* and *Kārtikeya*, *Gaṇeśa* is of motherly characteristics and *Kārtikeya* is of fatherly characteristics. So their origin is assigned to Mother Durgā and *Śiva* respectively. A number of small and big powers associated with the creation are placed visibly behind Her, above Her head as the *Citrastha Devatās* (चित्रस्थ देवताs, gods/goddesses in painted pictures). And within the Mother rests Her another important aspect as the *Mahā-Kālī* (महा-काली), the retractive power of this creation. Also, She is the minor to the massive destructive power within the creation. With respect to *Jīva*, She is the destroyer of the *Vāsanās* (वासनाs), the acquired tendencies and the *Moha-Rātri* (मोहरात्री) engulfing the *Jīva*. So we must know, *Durgā* is a special manifestation of the Mother of the universe for the sake of Her devotees. So in the Main Durgā Image we see a loving personal Divine Mother. But we must understand that apart from Her side-manifestations as *Lakṣmī* (लक्ष्मी), *Saraswatī* (सरस्वती) etc, She contains within herself the substratum, the deluding power, the retracting power and the redemptive power.

Carriers/Vehicles (वाहनाs)

There are four natural carriers of Energy/Power:

- Knowledge
- Love
- Virtue
- Evil/vices

1. Knowledge as carrier:

Knowledge is the repository of power. In Pure Knowledge, because of its fullness, all aspects of energy find peaceful repose, a consummation. It is something like the strength and energy of an illumined soul, which works only on the spiritual plane to destroy ignorance and to illumine other *Jīva*'s or to light the lamp of wisdom. This Knowledge as enlightening power is symbolised by the Swan, the *Hamsa* (हंस) and is denoted to be the vehicle of *Saraswatī* (सरस्वती). Since the Divine Principle ever effulgent with Knowledge is embodied in every *Jīva* as its real nature, the *Jīvātman* (जीवात्मन्) is also called as *Hamsa* (हंस).

2. Love as carrier:

Energy and power carried by knowledge is usually potential. While the same carried by love is dynamic, is invigorating, lively and pleasant. Power carried by pure, unselfish love is symbolised by **the Lotus** and is designated as the seat of *Mahā-Lakṣmī* (महा-लक्ष्मी). In the Bengal tradition, **the owl** is considered as the vehicle of *Mahā-Lakṣmī* (महा-लक्ष्मी). Contrary to normal animal life, since it hides during the day time and works out its needs during the night, it is used as a symbol of the absence of ego which allows the Divine Will to act freely without offering any resistance and which accepts the Divine Will unconditionally.

3. Virtue/goodness/righteousness as carrier:

A virtuous man is always fearless and confident. He derives strength from Nature, from the environment, from the society and from within himself by the virtue of his being righteous. On the other hand, a man on evil ways though being powerful and boosting up his ego, still deep within himself he remains unconfident and guilty; his own inner voice alarming him of his utter ruin. Evil may support evil, but being against the law of Nature cannot face the truth or stand the test of time.

The valour, the courage, the invincible strength that the virtue and righteousness bring, the defensive and protective force they depict, the dignity and status they project – are symbolically represented by the Lion. Conventionally self-control and celibacy are ascribed to **the lion**. Lion is attributed to be the vehicle of Mother Durgā. Lion can be said to represent the *Daivī Sampat* (दैवि सम्पत्) mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gitā* [भगवद् गीता, 16th Chapter – 1st to 5th *ślokās* (श्लोकास)] as well. Mother is said to ride on the lion. Wherever we find the good, the noble, the virtuous, the righteous – the *Daivī Sampat* (दैवि सम्पत्), and the valour, strength and courage that support and protect them, we can be sure of Mother being there.

4. The Evil and the Vice as the carrier:

Nature's powers are not the exclusive possessions of the good and the virtuous only, the evil and the demonical forces too can be the bearers. But the purpose for which the energy and the power is utilised is against the law of Nature. Therefore they do not get the Nature's sanction. The Power and the Intelligence that sustains the universe revolts to such misuse. The evil and the demonical base carrying this power and the *Āsurī Sampat* (आसुरी सम्पत्) elaborately discussed in the *Bhagavad Gitā* [भगवद् गीता, 16th Chapter – 7th to 21st *ślokās* (श्लोकास)] is symbolically represented by the he-buffalo, '*Mahiṣa*' (महिष). *Mahiṣāsura* (महिषासुर) is the demon who had undoubtedly acquired great power and lordship over the three worlds but was riding over the he-buffalo, '*Mahiṣa*' (महिष) i.e. all that is evil, vice and vulgar.

Mouse/Rat as the vehicle for Gaṇeśa (गणेश):

Mouse/Rat signifies activity, self-effort, dutifulness, purposefulness, sincerity and perseverance etc. These are the qualities that lead man to success. *Gaṇeśa* (गणेश) is said to be there where even a single such quality would be there and He fulfils the blanks to make up the rest.

Peacock as the vehicle for Kārtikeya (कार्तिकेय):

Peacock signifies majesty, vigilance, magnanimity, alertness and swiftness; something that is beautiful, proclaiming, bountiful, calm and thoughtful. They are royal features befitting *Kārtikeya* (कार्तिकेय) who is designated as the chief of the celestial army that maintains the law and order.

We have totally decoded the symbolisation of the Image formulation. The Image formulation was based on symbolisation of philosophical and spiritual truths. The above analysis is an attempt to de-code that symbolisation. The decoded explanation of Image formulation is called *Mūrti Rahasya* (मूर्ति-रहस्य).

If we bring together the whole explanation and extract its essence, it would just mean:

Behind the multifarious creation there is an immutable Eternal Divine Principle. Its Power, the *Śakti* (शक्ति), that creates, sustains and retracts the universe out of Herself. And so, She is called the Divine Mother, the Durgā. She through Her inscrutable power and through many aspects governs and manages this universe containing innumerable *Jīva*'s. Through Her many types of manifestations She maintains perfect law and order. Being the Mother of the universe, she loves Her creation and intensely seeks welfare of Her created beings. She suppresses the evil which is the inevitable by-product of duality and rewards the good and the virtuous. This is in totality the meaning of the whole of the Durgā Pūjā Image-Complex.

If we still simplify, the whole thing can be reduced to represent four segments of the supreme Reality:

- The Mother's Eternal Transcendental aspect as the substratum (*Ādhāra*, आधार).
- The Mother as the manifest universe and all its beings (*Ādheya*, आधेय).
- The Mother as the Law governing the universe.
- The Mother as the Power that determines and directs the destiny of *Jīva*.

In one sentence – it can be said to represent the final verdict: Mother is all that exists; She alone is the bestower of Eternal Freedom and Bliss to the *Jīvās*.

The Durgā Image assemblage is an 'as is depiction' of the Network of imperceptible Universal Energies and Divine Powers functioning in the universe in various ways to maintain its Law and Order. It is so designed that the Mother of the universe should be able to manifest through it to bestow protection, prosperity, supreme knowledge, emancipation and divine love to Her dear children.

THE MAIN WORSHIP

In Durgā Pūjā though there is the religious garb of celebration of triumph of the Righteous over the un-righteous, for a sincere spiritual seeker it is a spiritual striving to rise from his/her base animal-hood to the Perfected state of Divine-hood. Thus, though the worship is rendered only on the last three days, the nine day celebration is divided into three sets of three days each and dedicating them to different aspects of that Supreme Power, the Mother Durgā. The first three days are dedicated to *Mahā-Kālī* (महाकाली), the destructive aspect of the Mother [the *Tāmasik* (तामसिक) aspect]. Because the first phase of *Sādhanā* (साधना) is cleaning, destruction of impurities and imperfections and base tendencies. Next three days are dedicated to *Mahā-Lakṣmī* (महालक्ष्मी), the sustaining aspect of the Divine Mother [the *Rājasik* (राजसिक) aspect]. Because the second phase of *Sādhanā* (साधना), constructive phase, that is getting established in the Divine qualities that generate Divine love and help dedicating oneself to God. The final three days are dedicated to *Mahā-Sarasvatī* (महासरस्वती), the illuminating and creative aspect of the Divine Mother [the *Sātvik* (सत्त्विक) aspect]. Because the *Jīva* get Spiritually Illumined by the Grace of the Mother.

Every *Jīva* is endowed with three powers: the *Jñāna-Śakti* (ज्ञानशक्ति, the power of cognition), the *Icchā-Śakti* (इच्छाशक्ति, the power of volition) and the *Kriyā-Śakti* (क्रियाशक्ति, the power of action). *Sādhaka* (साधना) converts them into *Jñāna-Yoga* (ज्ञानयोग), *Rāja-Yoga* (राजयोग) and *Karma-Yoga* (कर्मयोग) respectively by turning their direction from the world to the God. Apart from these three powers at man's disposal, there is an un-obstructed expression of *Ātman* (आत्मन्, the Spiritual Existence in Man), known as The Love. The three powers directed collectively to God under the auspices of this Divine Love, then, it is termed as *Bhakti Yoga* (भक्तियोग). *Bhakti Yoga* (भक्तियोग) directs all faculties in Man to God. Durgā Pūjā demands this *Love*, this *Bhakti* (भक्ति) from the worshipper.

As for the worship, it is performed on the last three days, the *Saptamī*, *Aṣṭamī* and *Navamī* (सप्तमी, अष्टमी & नवमी) days. It is primarily for the destruction or transcendence of the final three Dark Nights of the *Jīva*, the *Moha-Rātri*, *Kāla-Rātri* and *Mahā-Rātri* (मोहरात्रि, कालरात्रि & महारात्रि).

According to the *Durgā Saptasatī* (दुर्गा सप्तशती) the arrangements are as follows:

Day of Worship	Durgā Saptasatī Section	The Presiding Deity	The Darkness to be destroyed	Prayers of the Soul	The Quenching Principle
<i>Saptamī</i> (सप्तमी)	<i>Prathama Caritra</i> (प्रथम चरित्र)	<i>Mahā-Kālī</i> (महाकाली) [<i>Klīm</i> , (क्लीं)]	<i>Moha-Rātri</i> (मोहरात्रि)	<i>Mṛtyormā Amṛtaṅgamaya</i> (मृत्योर्मा अमृतङ्गमय) Release me from the holdings of the world gripping me to transmigration.	<i>Agni-Tatva</i> (अग्नि तत्व) The burning-down-principle in Nature.
<i>Aṣṭamī</i> (अष्टमी)	<i>Madhyama Caritra</i> (मध्यम चरित्र)	<i>Mahā-Lakṣmī</i> (महालक्ष्मी) [<i>Hrim</i> , (ह्रीं)]	<i>Kāla-Rātri</i> (कालरात्रि)	<i>Tamaso Mā Jyotirgamaya</i> (तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय) Remove the veil covering my soul. Reveal my true Nature.	<i>Vāyu-Tatva</i> (वायु तत्व) The wind that carries away (referring to the veil). The blowing-principle in Nature.
<i>Navamī</i> (नवमी)	<i>Uttama Caritra</i> (उत्तम चरित्र)	<i>Mahā-Sarasvatī</i> (सरस्वती) [<i>Aim</i> , (ऐं)]	<i>Mahā-Rātri</i> (महारात्रि)	<i>Asato Mā Sadgamaya</i> (असतो मा सद्गमय) Remove the veil covering the Truth, the God.	<i>Sūrya Tatva</i> (सूर्य तत्व) The illumining-principle in Nature.

Table 6: The last three days Worship

THE SAPTAMĪ PŪJĀ

(सप्तमी पूजा)

On the *Saptamī* (सप्तमी) day, morning, after the preliminaries the Divine Mother who was invoked in the *Bilva* (बिल्व) tree will be brought to the Pendal. This is done by ceremoniously cutting a branch of the *Bilva* (बिल्व) tree possessing twin fruits (preferably and subjected to availability) a portion of which, containing the fruit, is tucked into the *Navapatrikā* (नवपत्रिका) and other portion of the cut branch is placed in the *Ghaṭa* (घट) in front of the Image.

Subjective Purification and Divinisation of the Consecrator

The process of consecration of an image to make it fit for worship and to achieve the desired purpose involves purification and divinisation of the consecrator subjectively and also of the Image objectively.

As a part of the subjective purification and divinisation of the consecrator, the *Śākta* (शाक्त) School advocates spiritual initiation into the Mantra of the Deity the aspirant is going to worship. [Fulfilling this objective, we find Sri Ramakrishna getting initiated into the *Śakti Mantra* (शक्ति मन्त्र) by Sri Kenārām Bhaṭṭācārya before taking up the worship of Mother *Kālī* in the *Kālī* temple at Dakshineswar.] A person adept in the worship of the Mother officially ordains the aspirant and empowers him with the knowledge and power to perform the worship by giving him a Mantra, the specific form of the Mother (deity) and certain disciplines to follow.

The obligatory disciplines are :

- The practice of *japa* (जप) must go on as an under-current at all times.
- The mind should constantly dwell on the divine form of the Mother and Her divine qualities.
- He should not look down upon other paths or criticize them, while being steadfast in his own.
- He should be fearless and entirely depend on and approach The Mother alone for favours and not other human forms, and on the other hand develop the ability to love and serve all.
- He should worship the Deity without attachment to fruits and perform all duties of life as an offering unto Her.
- He should not acquire wealth and possessions with the motive of selfish enjoyments.

- He should consider nothing as higher in life than realising Her.

[It is similar to the *Brahmacarya Dīkṣā* (ब्रह्मचर्य दीक्षा) of the Ramakrishna Order in which a *Mantra* (मन्त्र) is given to realise and a few commandments to live by, for living a perfect life is as much important as practice of the *Mantra* (मन्त्र).]

Through this initiation the doors of the aspirant's heart are opened for the Divine to enter and occupy the seat. The life's principles are purified and dedicated to Mother's Feet, and the life pledged to the attainment of the accepted Goal. This is the primary pre-requisite of a worshipper being a *Sādhaka* (साधक) and forms the primary purification and divinisation. The secondary purification and divinisation is the part of *Pūjā* procedure. Though the spiritual significance of initiation and its effects cannot be externally demonstrated or evidenced with paper documents, yet the inward spiritual grace, something invisible sanctifying the whole being, cannot be denied. Initiation is precisely a living experience and not a dead formalism. Now, for the worshipper it is a passport to the kingdom of The Divine Mother and the spiritual treasures. With this as the background of life, little by little progressively, if the *Sādhaka* (साधक) were to transcend one by one of the earlier mentioned 'Dark Nights' and finish the sixth Dark Night, then the pure intimate love that is attained as a consequence is bound to make the aspirant surrender unconditionally and plead The Mother for the release from the last three nights – *Moha-Rātri* (मोहरात्रि), *Kāla-Rātri* (कालरात्रि) and *Mahā-Rātri* (महारात्रि).

Objective Purification and Appropriation of the Image

The other half is the objective purification and appropriation of the Image. This process consists of ***Snāna* (स्नान) with the four items.**

The four items that are used –

- Earth (Soil)
- Water
- *Pañcagavya* (पञ्चगव्य - The 5 products from the cow – curd, milk, ghee, cow's urine and cow dung)
- *Pañcāmṛta* (पञ्चामृत - Honey, milk, curd, ghee and sugar)

The four life supporting principles are earth (soil), water, air and sunshine. Of these the first two are accessible and the later two are not. So the bath with earth and water are to recall the life supporting aspect of The Divine Mother. Both items are collected from various parts of the landscape to make the idea clear that it includes all the *Jīvās* everywhere. What wonder if a man is struck by the feeling of reverence when he remembers the earth (soil) as the only source of all nourishment? On the other hand the purifying effects of water and its invigorating influence remain openly

revealed. Till a few decades back, and even now in many places, soil was used in place of soap for cleansing the body while the water from many springs, lakes, wells and rivers had miraculous healing properties and a few possessed the power of removing evil influences too. Few rivers are believed to destroy the guilt of sin. So Mother's aspect as healer of all pains and miseries, and the bestower of physical, mental and spiritual purity are being pronounced here.

Sipping water from the palm (*Ācamana*, आचमन) or sprinkling water (*Prokṣaṇa* or *Abhyukṣaṇa*, प्रोक्षण या अभ्युक्षण) as a part of the religious rite is in fact such a symbolic bath. The earth that is associated with the various holy places, holy waters and treaded upon by holy men is considered particularly holy. In Hinduism, even today as an act of self-purification and as a mark of honouring the Mother Earth, the religious man places a little earth on his head muttering some Mantra when he is about to take his morning bath. In this sense the earth is considered as sanctifying.

There is one more unique quality of earth. Mother Earth is cited as the aptest illustration whenever there is the need of impressing about the necessity of patience. Man transforms the surface of the earth by cutting, digging and levelling with hard implements. Yet she yields him prosperity and enjoyment in turn. She silently bears all the atrocities and blesses him. Philosophically soil represents self-supporting Final Cause. It is indicative of Immanence aspect of Reality since it is tangible and conceivable reality. On the other hand water represents Ultimate Divine principle. It is indicative of the transcendental aspect of Reality owing to its pervasiveness. The water and earth together bear the power of lustration; symbolically they represent spiritual splendour specifically termed as *Brahmavarca*s (ब्रह्मवर्चस्).

Observing the working of Nature in its subtlest way, it was discovered that Nature has its own balancing methods, its own recycling mechanism and its own self-curative process. The primary principle used was that the Nature alone can perfect and compensate man-made errors, omissions and commissions. So every man-made artificial thing was subjected to such a kind of sanctification which assured sanction from Nature, and also freed everyone concerned from obligations, bondages and flaws. Its main intension being thorough purification of the object, the man-made thing, from various defects accrued since the beginning of its formation. For example, there would have been certain defects in the ingredients used for making the Image; while digging the clay for the image hundreds of insects would have been killed, some sacrilegious acts might have accrued during moulding etc.

For this, cow the symbol of Dharma was brought in. Standing as a symbol (*pratīka*, प्रतीक) of Dharma, the cow and all its natural products, be it in any form is always said to be sanctifying and redemptive. The Hindu religion reverences the cow for its matchless capacity to give milk in abundance which supports all lives, with the same feeling which a mother would call in the minds of her children. So the five natural products of the cow – milk, curd, ghee, dung and urine – are taken and individually purified through certain *Mantrās* (मन्त्राः) so that the brilliance of the Supreme Spirit gets invoked in it. They are then used in the purification process. In our Durgā Pūjā we adopt this procedure for purification of the Image and the *Nava-Patrikā* (नवपत्रिका), by sprinkling or bathing them with the *Pañcagavya* (पञ्चगव्य). It was used as one means of removing the contagion and maintaining

hygiene too. The *Pañcagavya* (पञ्चगव्य) is an expression of sinlessness, safety, sacrifice, purity and protection.

Whereas the *Pañcāmṛta Snāna* (पञ्चामृत स्नान) is more of a ceremonial bath than a purificatory rite. When a king, a holy man, a saint, a Guru or a deity is to be specially honoured in a ceremonious way with great respect, then he/she is bathed with these five items – viz. milk, curd, ghee, honey and sugar. These are called the *Pañca-Mādhurya* (पञ्च-माधुर्य) – the five charming items. Bathing Mother with charming items is bathing The Mother in love (something like saying Sri Ramakrishna bathed himself in the ocean of spirituality), the love being in its pristine form. These five items are highly nourishing natural ingredients with natural sweetness and indicative of growth, longevity, health, intellect, beauty and bliss.

Mahā-Snāna (महास्नान): The Great Bath

Mahā-Snāna (महास्नान) is to bathe the Divine Mother with varieties of soil and water collected from various places and sources and a few other ingredients. The whole of the earth on which we live is nothing but a mass of soil and water. When soil and water are procured from various places and offered to the Mother as bath, it is like bathing the Mother with the entire available soil and entire available water on this earth. Again it gives us the feeling that all the people and beings of this earth are sending their humble offerings to the Mother. It is like the entire earth is participating in the worship and as if the Nature in Her entirety has come to participate and pay Her tribute to the Great Mother. One more point here is that whatever be the thing a person happens to give to another, it has its origin from the earth and goes back to the earth. Earth and water are the sources of all that exists on this earth, be it food, clothing or objects of need or of enjoyments, and strikingly it is the end or culmination of those very things. So if soil is offered all things of the world are verily offered. Yet another point is that – what maximum a man on this earth can procure, possess and give away is the entire earth itself. These are the reasons why it is called The Great Bath. Intervening often are other items like the *Pañcāmṛta* (पञ्चामृत) which are purifying, nourishing, soothing and lusturising. Offering earth and water from very many places is to place the entire earth as an offering to the Mother. Bathing Mother with the earth procured from the holy, unholy, good, bad and sacred places is indicative of the fact that the Mother is ever impartial. It is also an impelling message to the worshipper to go beyond all the dualities – the good and the bad, the purity and the impurity, the holy and the unholy – to render oneself fit to have the vision of the Great Mother who belongs to one and all; and everything is acceptable and belongs to Her, yet is beyond all that exists.

It is not only the number of varieties that are offered but with each offering a particular epithet of the Mother is used which points to a particular aspect of the Mother. Through this process the worshipper gets deeply associated with the Mother through Her various aspects. This makes his mind and awareness expand to the cosmic levels. At this juncture there is the *Sahasra-Dhārā* (सहस्र

धारा) Bath, the water for the bath continuously showering down in thin streams from thousands of pores at the bottom of a container. The Vedic *Puruṣa Sūkta* (पुरुष सूक्त) is chanted during this bath. The *Puruṣa Sūkta* (पुरुष सूक्त) deals with the creation of this universe. It explicitly expresses the sacrifice to be the basis of the entire creation. In fact, we have to draw the implied meaning that the Love and Bliss are the causes of this universe and the same Love and Bliss are the material it is made of. Because sacrifice can be there only where there is love and bliss.

Why we call Mother Durgā as *Cit-Śakti* (चित्-शक्ति) or vice-versa is because the Unqualified Absolute has *Sat Cit and Ānanda* (सत् चित् आनन्द) as its intellectually conceivable expressions. The *Śakti* (शक्ति) – Energy/Power can have its presence only in Cit i.e. Consciousness and not in its counterparts – the *Sat* (सत्, the Existence) or the *Ānanda* (आनन्द, the Bliss). There cannot be something called *Sat-Śakti* (सत्-शक्ति) or *Ānanda-Śakti* (आनन्द-शक्ति) because *Sat* (सत्) is Pure Objectless Subjective Existence. In Pure Existence there cannot be any change or modifications or awarenesses. Similarly *Ānanda* (आनन्द) is Pure Subjective Experience of Fullness (*Pūrṇatva*, पूर्णत्व) in Itself. In It too there cannot be any variations or awarenesses. Whereas *Cit* (चित्) is Pure Awareness packed with Knowledge. Awareness verily implies Power, Knowledge too implies Power. For example: ‘I am conscious of myself’ – makes me live, ‘I am conscious of the world’ – makes me act. Here we see consciousness is associated with power, but ‘I exist’ or ‘I am blissful’ does not induce any activity because to exist or to be blissful is not associated with power nor there is any chance of furtherance of action. Therefore though *Cit-Śakti* (चित्-शक्ति) is beyond time, space and causation, yet being Consciousness – Knowledge Absolute, bears the Power that can Will and can project/manifest the world of time and space in the timeless – spaceless Existence. The *Cit-Śakti* (चित्-शक्ति) is the Divine Mother as ‘Cause’ and the manifest world too is the same Divine Mother as the ‘Effect’.

While giving the *Mahā-Snāna* (महास्नान) our awareness extends from rocky mountain ranges to the plain landscapes and to the oceans and the rivers. With so many varieties we see in a subtle way the ever changing base as well. At that moment we are aware of the Mother’s presence which is more intense and more deep. The colours come alive and the play of light and shadows reveal a world beyond the solid physical realm in which we live. At this holiest moment we see inspiring energies flowing into us and around us. We feel as if we are drawing energies from the earth and the sky – so pure, so perfect, so sublime. This reminds us of Swami Vivekananda saying “Truth us my religion and universe is my home”.

With reference to the items offered during the *Mahā-Snāna* (महा स्नान), the mind without any distinction takes flight to different sources and to different places and to different seasons, say for example dew drops reminding of winter and rain water reminding of the rainy season, without any restriction at the same time remaining engrossed in ritualistic details. This is the outward mindfulness. On the other hand, the emotional upsurge created within the worshipper by his own personal relationship, love, intimacy and devotion to Divine Mother on one side, and on the other,

the divine atmosphere that is created by the solemn rituals, elaborate settings¹, *Pūjā* procedures and the Nature's participation as the pleasant autumn, together generate an inexpressible sublime awareness of the Divine Mother within the heart of the worshipper. This is the Inward Awareness.

Mahā-Snāna (महा स्नान) is so designed that it acts as a prolonged but frequent shifting of gears between the above mentioned eternal mindfulness and the pure inward awareness of the Divine Mother. This eventually unifies to bring about a unified awareness of Mother as everything and that nothing exists apart from Her. Beyond doubts he now understands that everything belongs to the Mother. 'What I was thinking belongs to me – be it wealth, power, progress, mind or body – does not really belong to me. It is all Her glory, Her exclusive property.' The worshipper rides the tides of his own breath and sees the Great Mother pervading the whole universe and beyond. Mother has lit in him a lamp of wisdom. As the understanding matures into realisation, Mother gracefully unties the binding knots of the *Moha-Ratri* (मोहरात्रि). Thereafter the worshipper assigns everything to the Mother, with great joy he at once discards all possessions and returns the coveted objects, interests and energies back to the background sustaining them. Mother's they were, Mother's they remain. Thus he dislodges himself from the clutches of the primary *Moha* (मोह), which had made him to clench the mind and senses as mine and acquire *Jīvatva* (जीवत्व). Then he lends and links himself to the only Truth, The Mother.

This self-giving forces the Mother to transport the *Jīva* to pure spiritual realm. It dispels darkness, his consciousness starts smoothly dwelling in the core of his heart, the *Anāhata* (अनाहत). It is the place where the *Jīvas* can have trans-physical experience – the *Savikalpa Samādhi* (सविकल्प समाधि). This is the first direct knowledge of God, the 'day', the 'light', that one gets after the expelling of the night, the *Moha-Ratri* (मोहरात्रि). It is before the Mother removes the veil covering the soul, the

¹ **Note: Elaborate Settings –**

1. Mother as many Powers: In the Main-Image-Unit there are various forms of deities like *Lakṣmi* (लक्ष्मी), *Saraswati* (सरस्वती) etc. [*Sri Sri Chaṇḍī* (श्री श्री चण्डी), 10th Chapter, 5th and 6th *Śloka* (श्लोक), *Ekaivāham* (एकैवाहं)...and *Tatasamastāstā* (ततसमस्तास्ता)...]

It is indicative of the fact that She is One and She manifests as various powers, i.e. wherever and in whatever way the power exists, it is the Mother.

2. Mother in many: In the individuals or in the cosmos – pervading and immanent in everything.

Mother invoked in the *Bilwa-Vṛkṣa* (बिल्व वृक्ष), in the *Nava-Patrikā* (नव-पत्रिका), in the Main-Image, in the *Ghatam* (घट), in the holy body of the Kumārī (कुमारी) and in the *Homā* (होमा) Fire. It is indicative of the fact that the Mother is 'one' and is pervading every object of the universe.

3. Mother as the Indwelling Spirit: In one's own heart invoked and meditated upon by the worshipper. It is indicative of Herself as the Indweller in all beings.

ignorance (*Avidyā*, अविद्या) and gives Self-Knowledge, that She bestows upon the *Jīva* the occasion to see Her and meet Her in Her personal Divine Form in the *Savikalpa Samādhi* (सविकल्प समाधि). She cuts asunder the knot (*Viṣṇu Granthi*) which holds together the Pure-Consciousness and the subtle body (*Sūkṣma Śarīra*, सूक्ष्म शरीर). The *Jīvātman* (जीवात्मन) attains back to its own composure of Bliss and Peace by the direct healing touch of the Mother. The final destruction of the tendencies that are opposed to Knowledge (*Jñāna Viruddha Vāsanā's*, ज्ञान विरुद्ध वासनाs) at their causal (*Kāraṇa*, कारण) level, and the *Viṣṇu Granthi Bhedana* (विष्णु ग्रन्थि भेदन), the destruction of the *Viṣṇu Granthi* (विष्णु ग्रन्थि) are assigned to the *Mahā-Kālī* (महा कालि) aspect of Mother Durgā whose seed syllable of invocation is 'Klīm' (क्ली).

Prāṇa-Pratiṣṭhāpana (प्राण प्रतिष्ठापन)

All Vedanta philosophy is an attempt to solve the problem of 'The One' and 'The Many'. *Kevalādvaita* (केवलाद्वैत) of *Śaṅkara* brings in the doctrine of *Maya* – which maintains that the Non-Dual Being (The One) is the only real existence (*Pāramārthika Satya*, पारमार्थिक सत्य), while 'The Many' are only appearance (*Vyāvahārika Satya*, व्यावहारिक सत्य) of it conjured up by ignorance. Appearance means that the objects experienced are not actually there even while they are being experienced and is termed as *Mithyā* (मिथ्या).

In contrast to this version of *Advaita* (अद्वैत), the *Śākta* (शाक्त) School maintains that the Non-Dual Unitary Existence has internal polarity which is only a distinction without a difference. The Non-Dual Brahman is not only Pure Being but also Pure Will. It is 'Being-Will'. Though these are separately spoken of they are just like fire and its heat, which form one and the same entity. The concept of Being without Will is as good as a Nihil or *Śūnya* (शून्य) and Will without Being is a fictitious assumption. So according to *Śākta* (शाक्त) doctrine the Non-Dual Reality is 'Being-Will'. It can change into multiplicity in a real sense without losing its integrity as a Whole. The change that mutates the causal substance is the law that governs the entities of the limited world. So according to *Śākta* (शाक्त) version of *Advaita* (अद्वैत), the Non-Dual Entity as Will or *Śakti* (शक्ति) changes in a real sense into the world of multiplicity as *Jīvās* and *Jagat*, without however forfeiting Its non-dual status as Being.

In *Kevalādvaita* (केवलाद्वैत) there is no place for the combination of *Karma* (कर्म) and *Jñāna* (ज्ञान). But in the *Śākta* (शाक्त) doctrine, there is no such dichotomy between *Karma* (कर्म) and *Jñāna* (ज्ञान). *Upāsana* (उपासना) and *Jñāna* (ज्ञान) go hand in hand. The *Śākta* (शाक्त) system is simply a system of rituals accompanied with meditations, but it is based on a non-dual interpretation of Reality.

In Durgā Pūjā, as also in our Ramakrishna Tradition, to avoid any philosophical incongruity a third aspect which is purely devotional is brought in. The devotional school adds to 'Being-Will' the 'Consciousness Benign'. With this the 'Supreme Being' is easily assigned with the power of self-manifestation as the 'Blissful Mother' at the request or invocation by Her devotee/votary. This

request or invocation to come and manifest through an image to bless her devotees is called the **Prāṇa Pratiṣṭhā** (प्राण प्रतिष्ठा). The term actually means energizing.

In the *Prāṇa Pratiṣṭhā* (प्राण प्रतिष्ठा) procedure an *Arghya* [(अर्घ्य) a tiny bouquet of *Bilva* (बिल्व), a flower, sandal paste, *Dūrvā* (दुर्वा) grass and *Akṣta* (अक्षत)] is held within the finger tips of the right hand and touched to the heart region of each of the Image, *Navapatrikā* (नवपत्रिका) and *Ghaṭa* (घट) with appropriate *Mantrās* invoking the concerned deities. It is life-giving rite, infusing the Image with life. The inner light of Consciousness, i.e. the *Tejas* [(तेजस्) energy] of the *Brahman* within the worshipper is imported to the Image without, like lighting a fuel heap with a tiny spark, from which there then in the Image bursts the lustre of the Divine Mother who by Herself is verily Consciousness [*Caitanyamayī* (चैतन्यमयी)/*Cinmayī* (चिन्मयी)]. As *Śakti* (शक्ति) She pervades all that exists, but in matter is veiled and seemingly inert. *Caitanya* (चैतन्य) is aroused in the Image by the worshipper through the *Prāṇa Pratiṣṭhā Mantra* (प्राण-प्रतिष्ठा मन्त्र) and its procedure. The act of worship implies that the object of worship is Supreme and Conscious. God being Conscious, nay Consciousness Itself understands the anguish, need and request of the *Sādhaka* (साधक)/worshipper, and manifests in and through the Image. If man with a reflected consciousness can understand the feeling of another, then why not God, the Pure Consciousness Itself. An enlightened soul no doubt sees God everywhere, so every object to him is an object of worship. But till that way of looking at things be attained, the *Sādhaka* (साधक)/worshipper must be aided to see the Divine/Deity in a particular object – the object of worship. This is effected by the *Prāṇa Pratiṣṭhā* (प्राण प्रतिष्ठा) rite by which the worshipper perceives ‘life being established’ in the image of gross matter. It comes with birth to a Hindu, the belief that *Pratimā* (प्रतिमा) or Image thus invoked is alive or is a representation and dwelling place of Deity.

We must note here that it is a common practice among the Indian philosophers to be faithful to their own philosophy but at the same time be the upholders of cults and systems of personalised worship of the Deity. Śāktism is an important cult of India. It deals with the supremacy of *Śakti* (शक्ति) personified as the Divine Mother. It advocates various ways of worshipping Her.

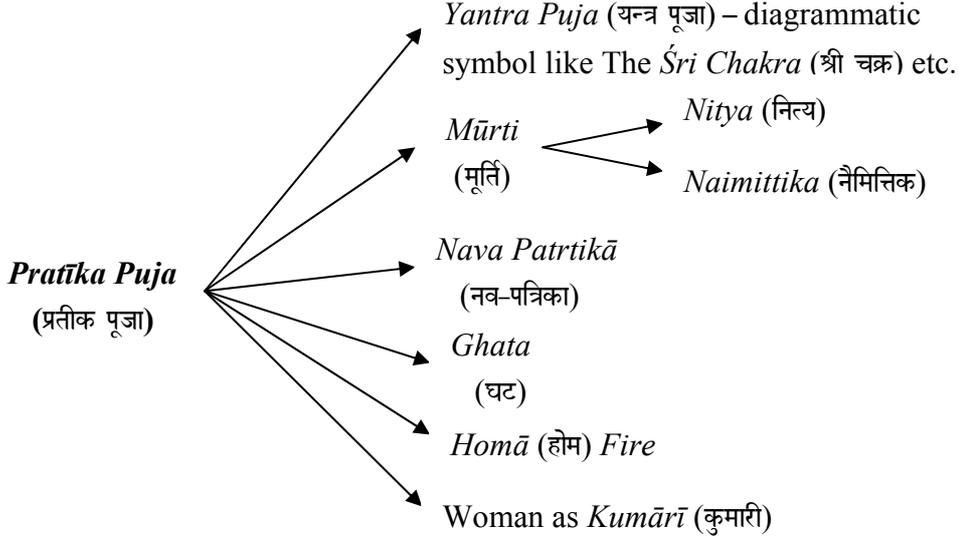
1. Internal Worship:

- *Kuṇḍalini Yoga* (कुण्डलिनि योग) - One way of adoring the Divine Mother by internal worship consists in awakening the sleeping *Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि) at the base of the spinal chord (*Mūlādhāra*, मूलाधार) and raising Her through the six plexus to the centre in the mid-brain called *Sahasrāra* (सहस्रार) and merging in *Śiva* (शिव). This part though outside the scope of the Durgā Pūjā we perform; the process of spiritual unfoldment that the worshipper/*sādhakā* (साधका) undergoes bears witness to the facts and figures of this path.
- *Mantra Yoga* (मन्त्र योग) – The other way of adoring the Divine Mother by internal worship is through Mantra *Japa* (मन्त्र जप) and *Dhyāna* (ध्यान). Various aspects of Mother with various names, forms and functions are classified, and used for

meditation along with the repetition of *Mantra* (मन्त्र) in which certain seed syllables (*Bīja*, बीज) are used for invocation.

2. External Worship:

This is the way of adoring the Divine Mother through external worship.



[Śakti (शक्ति) – Worship : Vāmācāra (वामाचार)

There is also an uncommon path which is not in the open tradition. The Power/Śakti (शक्ति) is the basis of all that exists – good and bad, noble and ignoble, nectar and the poison. And thus the same Śakti (शक्ति) can be derived from the good as well as from the bad. When the extraction of Śakti (शक्ति) is from the darker side of life then it is called *Vāmācara* (वामाचार) or the Left Hand methods.

In this path nature's drives and the connected base materials are transmuted into spiritual energies to manifest inner divinity by the means of elevation of consciousness. The object of temptations, like the *Pañca 'Ma'kārās* (पञ्च 'म'काराः), the transcendence of which is aimed at are also directly or indirectly (according to the stage of the *Sādhaka*, साधक) used as ingredients in the worship of The Mother. It is to transmute the very poison that kills into the elixir of life-immortal. But since it is not fool-proof and chances of fall being maximum, success rate too is very small. However they are said to comprise of unclean practices and therefore do not get the sanction of the wise and the noble minded ones, especially the *Acāryās* (आचार्याः). Sri Ramakrishna contends that to be a back door entry and not the royal one.]

These ways express beliefs, sentiments and knowledge of the ancient Hindus about the human life, the universe and the relation with the supernatural powers that were supposed to control and guide the destiny of man.

Chakṣu-Dāna (चक्षुदान)

The Hindus were of the view that man irrespective of his status requires at all times guidance, protection, consecration and refinement which alone could free him from suffering. For this they had two sources – the perfected human whom he called Guru and the other is the Divine whose power was seen to manifest as gods and goddesses. To a great extent they depended on gods or goddesses whose existence they intensely felt and whose help they sought. At the same time they also helped themselves by the knowledge they possessed of this natural and supernatural world. So we find a mixture of philosophical, spiritual, religious and secular factors in the *Pūjā* procedures, though they all have assumed a religious garb in the long run. This is the part of *Cakṣu-Dāna* (चक्षुदान), the imparting of eyes to The Mother.

In humans, with mere reflected consciousness functioning, the perceptions and cognition is possible only through mind, intellect and senses till he transcends the limitations of mind. Once he transcends these vehicles of Nature and reaches his own Real Nature as Pure Consciousness, then he becomes all-knowing, for there is nothing which is without It. So is God, the Divine Mother, that She knows everything and sees everything beyond what intellect can know or eyes can see. Yet worshipper breaths life into the Image and impart eyes to view. It is total personification and entering into personal relationship. *Prāṇa Pratiṣṭhā* (प्राण प्रतिष्ठा) makes the worshipper feel life in the Image, *Cakṣu-Dāna* (चक्षुदान) helps him to visualise it as a person, a living person like any one of us capable of all functions and feelings. The immediate and apparent object of worship, the Image, is not only a representative of the Invisible Supreme but is Its important aspect that participates in Its personal right in the communion with the worshipper through the mask of matter. It is well said ‘God is Pure Spirit, but the mind cannot seize Pure Spirit anymore than a pair of tongs can seize the air, though verily felt.’ So, the worshipper and the Pure Spirit enter into a contract for the Spirit to manifest through the Image and the worshipper to serve It. In fact as Spirit, the Deity is all-pervading and coming or going is absurd. God is already immanent in it as in everything else. Therefore through the rites of ‘invocation’ (*Āvāhana*, आवाहन) and ‘dismissal’ (*Visarjana*, विसर्जन) by which the Deity is invoked ‘to be present’ and bid ‘to depart’, the worshipper recognises the immanence of the Deity in a concentrated way and keeps it present through out the worship, and finally releases from the mind which was intently visualising it. *Prāṇa Pratiṣṭhā*, *Cakṣu-Dāna*, *Āvāhana* and *Visarjana* (प्राण प्रतिष्ठा, चक्षुदान, आवाहन, विसर्जन) are all, mind as well as one’s whole being is being precisely tuned to Divine Existence in the Image to commune with, adore and then released, returned to normal perception.

After *Cakṣu-Dāna* (चक्षुदान) the normal protocol worship procedure follows. The *Saptamī Pūjā* is intended to transcend the Seventh Dark Night of the Jīva.

THE AṢṬAMĪ PŪJĀ

(अष्टमी पूजा)

The enlightenment that ‘Mother is everything and nothing exists apart from Her’ was the result of the *Saptamī Pūjā* (सप्तमी पूजा) and was responsible for the destruction of the *Moha-Ratri* (मोहरात्रि). It was the objective identification of the universe with Mother. Next, in the *Aṣṭamī Pūjā* (अष्टमी पूजा) it is the subjective identification of the worshipper with the Divine Mother that is going to be achieved by the worshipper for dispelling the *Kāla-Ratri* (कालरात्रि).

So, as a part of the *Aṣṭamī Pūjā* (अष्टमी पूजा), the material aspect of the creation is overlooked and the energy packed in every bit of it and their functional aspects are taken up and worshipped. Accordingly we have three segments of the One Inseparable Whole.

- The Immutable Divine Principle, the uninvolved Witness, *Nīlakaṇṭha Śiva* (नीलकण्ठ शिव) as the substratum.
- The cosmic setup as the playground [*Brahmāṇḍa*, ब्रह्माण्ड].
- The individual souls as the players [*Piṇḍāṇḍa*, पिण्डाण्ड].

Apart from these we have the *Kumārī Pūjā* (कुमारी पूजा) proclaiming the glory of the Divine Mother.

1. The Nīlakaṇṭha Śiva (नीलकण्ठ शिव):

The creative process upheld by all Vedāntic sects, as also by the Buddhists and Jains, is cyclic and evolutionary. There is no first creation and a final destruction. Creation is only an unfoldment or projection of the universe out of the state of involution to which it had undergone at the end of previous cycle. The periods of manifestation and dissolution are called *Kalpa* (कल्प) and *Pralaya* (प्रलय) respectively, each lasting for billions of human years. In most of the systems generally, all the elements that go to make up the universe dissolve in the *Prakṛti* (प्रकृति) and it is the *Prakṛti* (प्रकृति) that begins to evolve the categories again. In *Śakti* (शक्ति) cult however, *Śakti* (शक्ति) is differentiated from *Prakṛti* (प्रकृति) and made the ultimate principle in the creative cycle. Similarly *Śiva* (शिव) bears an apparent differentiation from the Absolute to give a contrast background to that Supreme Power, the *Śakti* (शक्ति). The *Śakti* (शक्ति) is known to be the Supreme Power usually termed as *Devi* of whom the *Prakṛti* (प्रकृति) is one of Her aspects, or is the first and primary effect. *Prakṛti* (प्रकृति) dissolves in *Śiva* (शिव) or *Sadā-Śiva* (सदा-शिव) who is again distinguished from *Maheśwara* (महेश्वर) or *Rudra* (रुद्र), the destroyer. After the *Prakṛti* (प्रकृति) dissolves, *Śiva* (शिव) and *Śakti* (शक्ति) alone remain losing their polarity (Subject – Object trend) to re-unite into One Undifferentiated

Truth which is one with the Absolute Existence. Here *Śiva* (शिव) bearing the reflection of the Divine Mother apparently remains differentiated from the Absolute only to make that Great Power merge back in the Absolute. This is the *Śiva* (शिव) that is worshipped in the Durgā Pūjā as the *Nīlakaṇṭha Śiva* (नीलकण्ठ शिव). [The term *Nīlakaṇṭha* (नीलकण्ठ) has its reference to the *Paurāṇic* episode in which *Śiva* (शिव) consumes the *Hālāhala* (हालाहल) poison which was one of the products of the churning of the ocean of milk by the gods and the demons, to save them and the life in the creation from total destruction.] In *Durgā Pūjā* the epithet *Nīlakaṇṭha* (नीलकण्ठ) attached to *Śiva* (शिव) is indicative of His possessing such love and compassion that is ever ready to sacrifice everything, even ones own life for others. In his *Śivastotra* (शिवस्तोत्र), Swami Vivekananda extols this exceptional quality of *Śiva* (शिव) with the same epithet ‘*Nīlakaṇṭha*’ (नीलकण्ठ) and ends the inundation with a surrender – ‘*Parahita-karaṇāya Prāṇa-praccheda-prītam, Natanayana-niyuktaṁ Nīlakaṇṭhaṁ Namāmaḥ*’ [परहित करणाय प्राण-प्रच्छेद-प्रीतं, नतनयन-नियुक्तं नीलकण्ठं नमामः]. *Śiva* (शिव) who has been decked with this quality is the Immutable Reality, the Pure Consciousness. These qualities that exist in Him are like smell in the air or sound in the sky which do not affect or taint their substratums. These are the qualities of the Divine Mother too. The epithet *Nīlakaṇṭha* (नीलकण्ठ) has been inserted to bring a qualitative identity with the Mother Durgā. Stepping down to the language of common understanding, this radical matching and equality in status and glory as well as their inseparability is eulogised etymologically as the Divine Consort of the Great Mother.

2. The Cosmic Setup :

There are two parallel creations – the cosmic or the macrocosm and the individual or the microcosm. They are identical and are based on the same principle. For the individual souls to ‘live and play’ a playground is first created. The playground is the one *Brahmāṇḍa* (ब्रह्माण्ड) and the playing individual souls are the innumerable *Pinḍāṇḍās* (पिण्डाण्डाः). Each individual soul is an independent entity with its everlasting oneness with the substratum whether in play or otherwise. It can at any time discard the playfield, transcend its play-ship and attain Freedom.

Now, the building up of such a playground wherein millions and millions of *Jīvās* shall play in an unailing system through eternity, the structure of it is bound to be highly complicated. Look at the massive Power that is going to plan and build up; the intricate ways in which it is put into and made to function; the designing of the laws and regulations to govern and manage; the various Power-Heads to implement the law and order and to enforce discipline; the cosmic Intelligence to survey and plan measures; the realm of *Vidyā Māyā* (विद्या माया), the realm of *Avidyā Māyā* (अविद्या माया); the special invitees – the Incarnations, the management of the released souls, the *Mukti* (मुक्ति) giving commission!!! And what not!!! These are the Powers that are specially worshipped on the *Aṣṭamī* (अष्टमी) Day. Let us not forget that there is the winding up process following all this, retracting the path back to the Truth.

The universe is an inscrutably interwoven structure involving three levels of existence – the gross, the subtle and the causal. The three *Guṇās* (गुणाः) – *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* (सत्त्व, रजस्, तमस्) evolve the categories. Categories breaking down into the elements form the twenty four cosmic

principles. Huge flux is created with the Energy and Power working to the minutest level. The whole thing settles down into the 14 planes of existence with provision for the *Jīvās* to take varieties of bodies, suitable sources of energy to maintain life etc. Now, imagine if you can, how the Mother has spread Herself and at what levels She is functioning even before the *Jīvās* can appear! The real part of the play is when the *Jīvās* land into the creation. Then the real Mother comes out. The needs and demands, supplies and service, laughter and tears, shouts and wailing, singing and dancing!! Mother!! Busy all the time!! Yet merged in Her own bliss!! She has not only become every atom of the universe, but also exists as energy in each of them and acts. She exists as the quality, as the action, as relation. It is asserted that in spite of the fact that Mother Herself has become all this, She still remains greater than the greatest, subtler than the subtlest and grander than the grandest. She is beyond all that exists. It is because of this that She is able to reach every *Jīvā* in Her personal aspect as the ‘Mother’ – the Mother Durgā. Billions of cycles are cycling through infinity, so came and went the *Jīvās*, yet She is the same loving Mother of every child of this universe! Therefore She is called the *Sanātānī* (सनातनि), the Ancient One.

In worship, however, the principle and the personality should go together. The philosophy and the devotional aspect should go together. The former leads to the meditation and the later leads to the loving service of the Mother in worship. This combination of meditation and worship contains the seed of realisation. It is a beautiful combination of knowledge and divine love, of head and heart. Thus, on the *Aṣṭamī* (अष्टमी) Day we worship practically every aspect of Mother – the *Nava-Śakti*, *Nava-Durgā*, *Catuṣaṣṭi Yoginī*, *Koṭi Yoginī*, *Jayantyādi Pūjā*, *Astra Pūjā*, *Sarvāyudhadhāriṇī Pūjā* [नव शक्ति, नव दुर्गा, चतुषष्टि योगिनी, जयन्त्यादि पूजा, अस्त्र पूजा, सर्वायुधधारिणी पूजा] etc. Taking up the individual meaning is out of the scope of this article, neither it is essential.

3. The Individual Souls :

The cosmic and the individual are built on the same principle. Once the universe is ready for the dwelling, in that vast ocean of time and space, tiny spaceless-timeless-spots of consciousness, looking as if golden spangles freely floating about within a transparent fluid, appear here and there. It is said to originate in accordance with the closing phase of the previous cycle. They are the living beings, the *Jīvās*. Anything that is beyond space and beyond time is Infinite and Eternal. But being in association with the time-space-bound universe, it apparently puts on a limitation of finiteness. The limitation being the cause of all further developments is called the causal body. *Vedānta* (वेदान्त) terms this as ‘*Avidyā*’ (अविद्या). This limitation creates self-awareness. In it manifests the three powers – *Jñāna Śakti* (ज्ञान शक्ति, the power of cognition), *Ichhā Śakti* (इच्छा शक्ति, the power of volition) and *Kriyā Śakti* (क्रिया शक्ति, the power of action). This centre of consciousness is called the ‘*Sahasrāra*’ (सहस्रार), the ‘thousand petalled’. It remains ever united and inwardly expanded into the Absolute. In other words it means that the moment the *Jīva* lands into it, it would have left the Relative Existence and entered the Absolute Existence. It is therefore identified with the pre-creation state wherein the *Cit-Śakti* (चित् शक्ति) is merged in Consciousness and is said to be the seat of *Śiva* or to be more specific *Śiva-Śakti* (शिव-शक्ति) united. This is the causal and the primary base from where evolutions at the individual level begin.

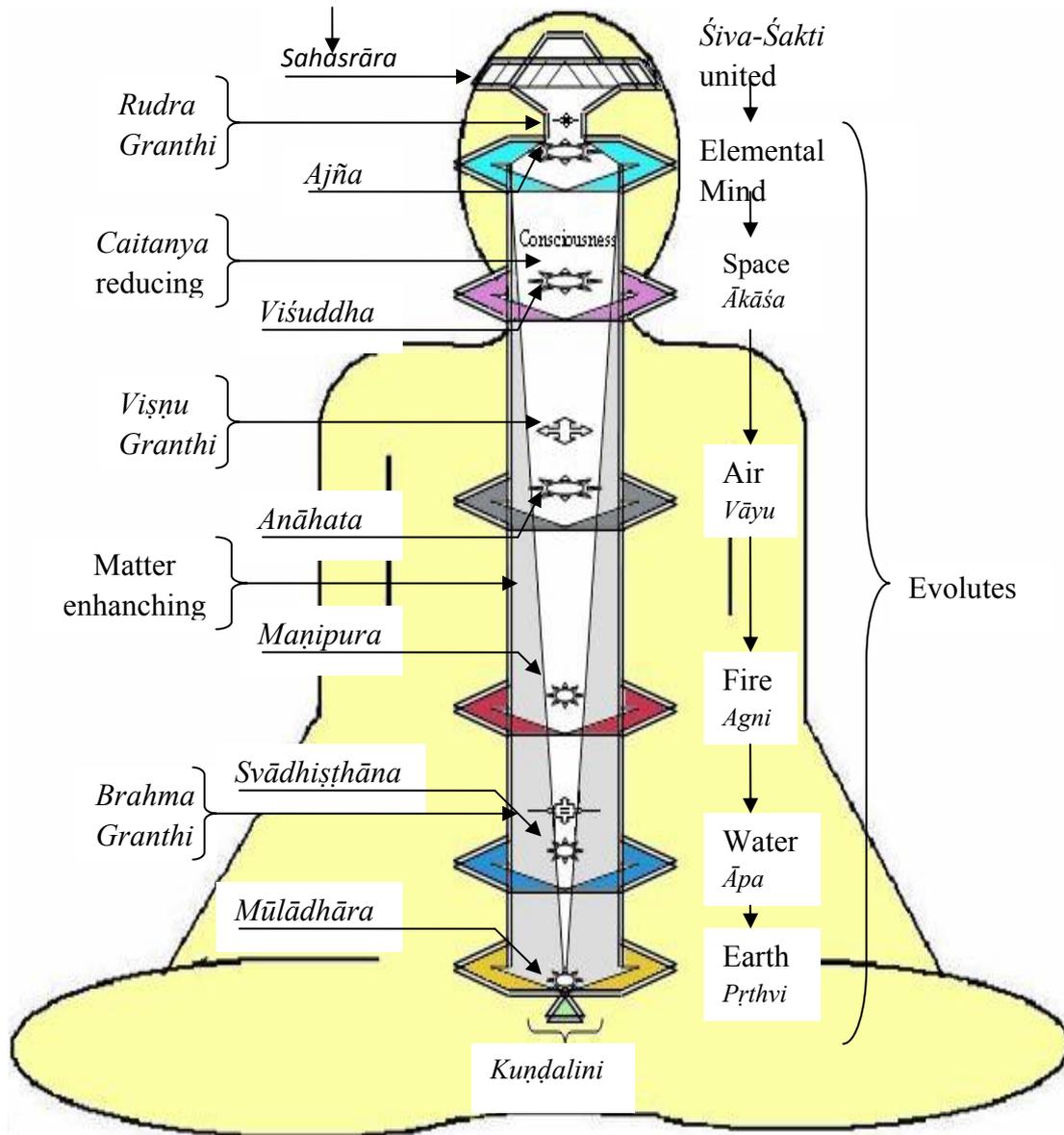


Figure 3: The Cakras

The first evolute from this is the Elemental *Manas* (मनस्). From this *Manas* (मनस्) the other evolutes *Ākāśa* (आकाश, space), *Vāyu* (वायु, air), *Agni* (अग्नि, fire), *Āpa* (आप, water) and *Pṛthvi* (पृथ्वि, earth) emerge. These six basic categories still at their nascent stage unaltered are called the *Tanmātrās* (तन्मात्रास) or the *Tatvās* (तत्त्वास), meaning ‘possessing thatness’. It means that the evolutes are formed but are yet remaining in an undifferentiated state from its cause, the Consciousness. Whereas, with the manifestation of these material evolutes, the degree of manifestation of Consciousness gets reduced. Thus we see the six evolutes hanging down one behind the other following the order of evolution, and with each evolute the Consciousness tapering down and ultimately reaching nil when the last evolute the *Pṛthvi* (पृथ्वि), the elemental earth appears. The six evolutes together with the root cause look like a tapering garland of *Caitanya* (चैतन्य). (See the

picture, but remember that Consciousness has no dimensions and therefore can neither be picturised nor be conceived by the mind or the intellect, the picture is just to form a conviction).

Each evolute, with respect to *Jīva*, acts as an independent ‘*Centre of Consciousness*’. Thus, we have in all, six centres of Consciousness. They are called the *Cakrās* (चक्राः) and possess specific names. The first evolute, the elemental *Manas* (मनस्) is named ‘*Ājñā*’ (आज्ञा). The next in order are *Ākāśa*, *Vāyu*, *Agni*, *Āpa* and *Pṛthvi* (आकाश, वायु, अग्नि, आप, पृथ्वि) and are respectively named *Viśuddha*, *Anāhata*, *Maṇipura*, *Svādhiṣṭhāna* and *Mūlādhāra* (विशुद्ध, अनाहत, मणिपुर, स्वाधिष्ठान, मूलाधार). As a matter of coincidence or otherwise, within the human structure, they exactly correspond to the core of the brain and the six plexuses along the spinal column. This hanging down column of Consciousness in itself is the ‘*spiritual essence*’ in every being. We can imagine it to look like a tapering down stick of Pure Consciousness. In the *Tantrās* (तन्त्राः), it is known as the ‘*Suṣumnā-Nāḍī*’ (सुषुम्ना नाडि). It is also called ‘the path of *Kula*’, *Kula* meaning descendance or lineage, the descendance of the evolutes. What caused this was the power of the Consciousness, the *Cit-Śakti* (चित् शक्ति). *Caitanya* (चैतन्य, the Pure Consciousness) and the *Cit-Śakti* (चित् शक्ति, the Great Power of Consciousness) are indivisible (*Akhaṇḍa*, अखण्ड). In case of the *Jīvās*, they assume or put on the mask of limitation. The term ‘limitless’ implies that it can manifest or act from the minutest to the greatest levels. The power that is responsible for the creation of these evolutes, after finishing the process resides at the last evolute as a potential or static power, which when awakened retraces its path to wind up the creation. The last evolute being the elemental earth at the *Mūlādhāra Cakra* (मूलाधार चक्र), the power that created the individual *Jīva*/soul finally resides there as that imperceptible mighty Power in every living being whether in embodied or in un-embodied state. This mighty Power dormant in every *Jīva* and residing at the *Mūlādhāra* (मूलाधार) is called the ‘*Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि)’, the ‘coiled Power’, meaning the Energy/Power that lies in a dormant (potential/static) state. The six evolutes being Her own *Kula* (कुल), She is also called the ‘*Kula-Kuṇḍalini*’ (कुल-कुण्डलिनि).

We must note here that the evolutes continue to remain un-differentiated from the consciousness for ever throughout its existence. This state equips it with the unique capacity to bridge the external material world with its in-lying pure spiritual existence. Each evolute remains itself in tune with its cosmic counterpart, by which the individual existence remains logged and linked to the cosmic existence at every level. The ‘un-differentiated state’ of the evolutes gives the *Jīva* an independent status in the creation; but for which it would not have had its individuality at all, being one with the Absolute. It now enjoys the esteem and exclusivity in the material world. Further, it receives the fitness to be the base mount for building up a system of organised body-complex. Now, the inner power [*Jñāna*, *Ichhā* and *Kriyā Śaktis*; ज्ञान, इच्छा, क्रिया शक्ति] function to augment the external bodies – the subtle and the gross bodies, to participate in the playground of the world.

At the cosmic level there are three dimensions – the causal, the subtle and the gross. Matching with them, the individual soul from its causal state, extends itself into the two other dimensions, by acquiring the subtle and the gross bodies. The three dimensions are not independent of each other. They stand in the relation of the cause and effect. The gross is an evolute of the subtle and the subtle is the evolute of the causal. The causal pervades the subtle. The causal and the subtle

together pervade the gross. Subtle can penetrate and pervade the gross, like a light passing through a block of glass penetrates and pervades it. [In the example glass and light belong to one and the same dimension of sense perception; whereas the causal, subtle and gross belong to entirely different dimensions]. As in the macrocosm, in the microcosm the three bodies are interwoven. The subtle body consists of the five sense organs, the five organs of action, the five vital forces (*Prāṇas*, प्राणास), *Buddhi* and *Manas* (बुद्धि & मनस) – altogether seventeen parts; and the gross body is made of five basic elements.

Once the subtle body and subsequent gross bodies are formed they get bound to the Consciousness (*Caitanya*, चैतन्य) by what are called *Granthis* (ग्रन्थिs, knots). There are three knots – the knot that binds the causal body with the *Caitanya* (चैतन्य) called the *Rudra-Granthi* (रुद्र-ग्रन्थि), the knot that binds the subtle body with the *Caitanya* (चैतन्य) called the *Viṣṇu-Granthi* (विष्णु-ग्रन्थि) and the knot that binds the gross body to the *Caitanya* (चैतन्य) known as the *Brahma-Granthi* (ब्रह्म-ग्रन्थि). They all lie along the *Suṣumnā* (सुषुम्ना); *Rudra-Granthi* (रुद्र-ग्रन्थि) above the *Ajñā Cakra* (आज्ञा चक्र), *Viṣṇu-Granthi* (विष्णु-ग्रन्थि) above the *Anāhata* (अनाहत) and *Brahma-Granthi* (ब्रह्म-ग्रन्थि) above the *Svādhiṣṭhana* (स्वाधिष्ठान).

At the individual level the Pure Consciousness which is the substratum permeates the three bodies giving life and extended self-awareness. In this state the *Jīva* remains in the waking state (*Jāgrata*, जाग्रत). When the consciousness is partially withdrawn the life continues but the self-awareness shifts to the subtle body and the *Jīva* enters into the dream state (*Svapna*, स्वप्न). Further withdrawn, the awareness dissolves in the causal body and the *Jīva* remains without any external or internal awareness. *Jīva* is then said to have entered ‘deep-sleep’ (*Suṣupti*, सुषुप्ति). *Jīva* undergoes this cycle everyday directed and controlled by Nature. Beyond the three bodies is the Real Nature of the man. This is the general picture of the individual soul.

The *Aṣṭamī* (अष्टमी) worship consists of innumerable aspects of Mother, the multiple Power-heads with innumerable branches. When viewed carefully it reveals a matchless mysterious Power deeply engaged in destroying the sufferings, annihilating the evil, dispelling the darkness on a very large scale. Her wielding of several weapons like the sword, discus, trident etc., aspects like *Kālī* (कालि), the terrible with garlands of human skulls round Her neck, and other awe-inspiring descriptions reveal Her to have vowed to fulfil some great purpose. To a person of matured understanding of the cosmic ways or to an illumined intellect the truth immediately flashes that peace, love, sacrifice and bliss are the basic principles on which the world stands. When any force goes against it, the Great Power that creates, sustains and retracts the universe, revolts. The *Guru* who trains and initiates the disciple for the worship enlightens him with these secrets that are not apparent in the *Pūjā* procedures. Accordingly he gives those instructions that maintain the worshipper’s mental state in an appealing emotional setting. The *Guru* also gives a set of meditations that should go hand in hand with the external procedures.

Now, behind each terrible form, behind that horror and slaughter, the worshipper sees an embodiment of all encompassing selfless love and of all sacrificing mother-hood. Behind the

bloodshed he sees the face of a compassionate Mother of exquisite beauty with a divine smile, radiating peace and bliss, and assuring freedom from fear. It is this Mother that the worshipper enshrines in his heart, as his only treasure, his goal and his end. Externally he might be worshipping any form or any aspect, within his heart he will be viewing the same blissful Mother who has gracefully occupied the throne of his heart. He has seen Her, time and again, not only destroying his external enemies but also his own internal enemies like passion and impulses acting enigmatically on his path to the Truth. He has known Her to be the bestower of peace and prosperity, wealth and spiritual wisdom. And in his heart of hearts he knows for certain that She is all-knowing, all-capable and nothing exists apart from Her. She is the Supreme Power and the Ultimate Reality. She is his only saviour and goal of life.

To such a devoted child the Mother reveals the secret of the individual *Jīvās* for whose sake this universe was shaped out. He sees his beloved Mother extending through all the *Jīvās* as their very life and life-supporting principle. He sees Her as the Supreme Truth shining forth as the Consciousness, as the inmost storehouse of Power, as Nature, Nature's impulses, as the tendencies [see *Śrī Śrī Caṇḍī* (श्री श्री चण्डी), 5th Chapter, 14th to 27th *Ślokās* (श्लोकस)] and even the elements that make up the body. It is all in all the Mother.

With this awareness the worshipper proceeds to the *Kumārī Pūjā* (कुमारी पूजा) which proclaims the glory of the Divine Mother in the most appealing, refined and sublime way.

Kumārī Pūjā (कुमारी पूजा)

Both living and non-living objects can be used as the emblem of Divine Mother. Even abstract things like a Mantra can be used to denote the Divine Mother. As a medium for worship, in case of non-living objects we have specific procedure of invocation. In case of the living beings, though they undoubtedly carry the Divine Mother in their hearts, animals fail to portray divinity outwardly, instead they express their own animal-hood. So they are not used to symbolise or represent Divine Mother for *Pūjā* purposes. The next and the only option is humans. Humans display maximum consciousness. Among them those who have overcome their animal nature and are expressing Divinity are rendered fit to represent the Divine Mother. Mother is said to receive worship through such pure mediums.

Two classes of people bear these characteristics and expressively manifest Divinity:

- The Realised Souls.
- The children.

Both are worthy of worship. The realised souls because of their fullness of the Supreme Knowledge remain as silent witnesses and do not participate in the world. So they cannot be the *Pratīka* (प्रतीक, symbol) of *Śakti* (शक्ति), they cannot be the emblems representing the Divine mother. Full of playful activity, the children intensely participate and yet remain uninvolved in the world. Any child can hence be an expression of Divinity and an emblem of the Divine Mother for Her

worship. It is difficult to associate the creative aspect, motherhood and the beauty aspect of the Divine Mother to the boys, whereas they are naturally found in the girls. So girls are chosen as the perfect match and the fittest emblem for the worship of the Divine Mother.

A girl in whom the awareness of her womanhood has not yet set in is called a ‘*Kumārī*’. It is the non-sex narcissistic stage when children remain engrossed in their own bliss. They radiate moral purity and induce pure delight in the minds of the on-lookers. They are unstained and are free from guilt. Innocence, guilelessness, moral purity and bliss are their special features. They are the pointers to Divinity. They are worshipped as Divine Mother not just because they are pure, but more because they radiate purity; not just because they are divine, but more because they emanate divine splendour; not just because they are sex-free, but more because they embellish sex-less beauty; not just because they are blissful, but more because they impart delight to others. These are some of the great qualities of the Divine Mother. They compel the aspirant to heartily accept and yield to the personalised conception in which what is generally called the ‘Power’ is actually visualised as the Divine Mother, the *Tripura-Sundarī* (त्रिपुर-सुन्दरी). There are three projections of the Divine Mother like the three vertices of the triangle, which represents the *Kumārī* (कुमारी).

➤ *Lalitā* (ललिता)

The Mother who remains in Her Own Glory and in Her Own Bliss. She is called *Lalitā* (ललिता), the ‘Playful One’.

➤ *Durgā* (दुर्गा)

The Great Power that is responsible for creation, sustenance and retraction of the universe.

➤ *Tripura-Sundarī* (त्रिपुर-सुन्दरी)

The wholesome Mother. What all *Jīvās* seek, cherish and relish is found in Her. She is the source and storehouse of Ultimate Goodness, Ultimate Bliss, Ultimate Beauty and Ultimate Compassion.

The *Kumārī* (कुमारी) is said to include these three projections.

External ritualistic worships always have their internal counterparts, the inwardly done worship in the ‘*Dahara Ākāśa*’ (दहर आकाश) or the *Cidākāśa* (चिदाकाश), the spiritual space. They form the part of the meditations. Meditations properly done with deep concern, feelings and dedication bring out from within oneself those very divine qualities of the Great Mother. Then, being rid of those *Vāsanās* (वासनाs) that drive the *Jīvā* to the world of senses, the worshipper is able to ascend to higher dimensions of the *Cidākāśa* (चिदाकाश) and adore the Supreme *Śakti* (शक्ति), the Divine Mother. This is the real worship, the worship of the Spirit by the Spirit; the Individual Spirit worshipping the Cosmic Spirit. The *Jīva* can enter the *Cidākāśa* (चिदाकाश) and get such a direct vision of the Mother and play with Her intimately only when every bit of the awareness associated with its bodily existence disappears. That presupposes the destruction of the *Vāsanās* (वासनाs), the acquired tendencies that bind him to the bodily existence and are detrimental to knowledge and devotion.

The *Kumārī* (कुमारी) is in fact a potential mother. She is the mother in the seed form. In *Kumārī Pūjā* (कुमारी पूजा), She is identified as the Divine Mother and worshipped. The *Kumārī* (कुमारी) represents the Divine Mother in Her causal stage of creation. She is then the initial pulsing forth of the massive power [*Ghanībhūta-Śakti* (घनीभूत-शक्ति)] with the potentiality of the universe within Herself. That is the Divine Mother in Her active *Avyaktā* (अव्यक्ता) state prior to the creation of this universe we are living in. This is the most important part of the meditation wherein the evolutes of the creation (*Ākāśa, Vāyu, Agni, Jala, Pṛthvi*; आकाश, वायु, अग्नि, जल, पृथिवि) have not yet manifest. The Great Mother is yet a Primordial Energy with a desire to create, which the *Vedās* hint at as ‘May I be many’.

In the pre-creative state, the *Caitanya* (चैतन्य) and the *Cit-Śakti* (चित्-शक्ति) i.e. the Pure Consciousness and Its Power [the *Śiva* (शिव) and the *Śakti* (शक्ति)] remain in undifferentiated state preparatory to the separation as the Subject and the Object [*Prakāśa* (प्रकाश) and *Vimarśa* (विमर्श) according to the *Śakta* (शाक्त) philosophy]. ‘*Kumārī*’ (कुमारी) represents the Subject-Objectless Reality ready to polarize into the Subject and the Object. This is the position where the Divine mother is on the threshold between the manifest and the unmanifest. She is neither *Saguṇa Sākārā* (सगुण साकारा) nor the *Nirguṇa Nirākārā* (निर्गुण निराकारा). The purpose of the *Aṣṭamī Pūjā* (अष्टमी पूजा) is to find oneness with this Mother in *Samādhi* (समाधि) through meditation. It is in this identity that the veil covering the Soul drops off by the grace of the Mother. It is dispelling of the *Kāla-Rātri* (कालरात्रि). The *Jīva* gets the knowledge of his Real Self as Blissful Eternal Immutable Being.

Being the source of all the evolutes and categories, the *Kumārī* (कुमारी) is called the *Kula-Kumārī* (कुल कुमारी). ‘*Kula*’ (कुल) means lineage; all evolutes and categories that manifest one after the other in series during the process of creation are lineage of the Divine Mother. Therefore the universe and all its beings are called the *Kula* (कुल) – lineage of the Divine Mother. Thus the term *Kula-Kumārī* (कुल कुमारी).

[See *Kumārī’s Ṣaḍaṅga Pūjā* (कुमारी षडङ्ग पूजा): ‘*Kula-Kumārīke*’, ‘*Kula-Vāgīśvarī*’, ‘*Kuleśvarī*’ (कुल-कुमारिके, कुल-वागीश्वरी, कुलेश्वरी) etc. *Pranāma Mantra* (प्रणाम-मन्त्र)– ‘*Kula-Kāminī*’ (कुल कामिनी)]

Creation begins when there is disturbance in the equilibrium of the three *Guṇās* (गुणाः). At the end of the process of creation, the three *Guṇās* (गुणाः) attain stability. The whole process is the play of the Power. The *Cit-Śakti* (चित्-शक्ति) is the Infinite Inexhaustible Store House. As evolutes evolve and split, Power too splits and carries the process further. Having evolved the complex apparatus of every object, the Power responsible for its creation coils Herself up at the centre of the apparatus and remains at the static nuclear basis and as its magazine of Power to draw and fall back upon. This Power is called the *Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि). *Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि) is a universal principle, an embodied Power in each object, not limited to living beings or humans alone. It is present in every atom of the universe. But in case of physical objects and lives other than humans the skill, the will and the

capacity to draw the energy or awaken Her does not exist. It is reserved for humans alone. One must help oneself by awakening and drawing this Power to transcend Nature and become free from the bonds that are keeping the one bound and owing to which one groans^a.

To associate the *Kumārī* (कुमारी) to chastity is the common canon prevalent among the people. It is the unconscious psychic element in man that covets this ideal secretly within. One cannot but recognise in it the expression of deep human conviction that man can enter the spiritual kingdom only through chastity. *Brahmacarya* (ब्रह्मचर्य) has been honoured and looked upon with great reverence through out the period of human existence everywhere. For the attainment of *Brahmavidyā* (ब्रह्मविद्या), the God-Realisation, it was considered as the inevitable and final resort. For most of the people including the renunciates, this factor is what makes them place the *Kumārī* (कुमारी) on the pedestal of the Divine Mother and worship her feet with faith and love. It is believed that the Mother worshipped in this way would act as the Protectress of human against sexual imprecation. She would grant freedom from sensuality, wash down moral and spiritual impurities; She would give vigour, health, longevity and spiritual beatitude. The *Kumārī Pūjā* creates an impressive atmosphere. Under the royal canopy of the Divine Mother, when the *Sannyāsins* and the *Brahmacārīs* (ब्रह्मचरिis) of the Order are seen placing their heads on the feet of the *Kumārī*, the atmosphere becomes fragrant with devotional fervour. Every heart present there hears the whisper of the spiritual significance and surrenders with a deep sigh of relief. The worshipper himself feels exalted, elevated and sanctified.

The whole *Pūjā* pattern, the states and understandings that are unfolding from within the worshipper, the heart filled with devotional fervour, all round pure divine atmosphere charged with Mother's presence and above all the grace of the Divine Mother to whose feet the worshipper has offered his all – once for all without any reserve, builds up an inner awareness that is oblivious of the external existence, in which the Mother's all-pervading existence and all-engulfing love shines forth. This in turn rises his consciousness to the ultimate levels of Mother's supremacy, as the One without a second, in which the worshipper finds his oneness. This removes the veil that was covering his soul since the time he had entered the creation! The *Kāla-Rātri* (कालरात्रि) dissolves. Forth with, the light dawns – *The Prajñā* (प्रज्ञा).

^a **Note:-**

In our Ramakrishna Order this path, the path of *Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि) Yoga, is not being encouraged because it demands strong will and determination to rouse the sleeping Power. In other practices 'will' receives its strength and backing from knowledge or devotion but here the 'will' receives its strength and backing from one's own ego. In this process there will be feedback boosting up the ego. Boosted ego is very dangerous. It not only defeats the purpose of the *Sādhana* (साधना) but also makes the life miserable. Apart from it, this path requires one pointed devotion and total involvement because of which the *Sādhaka* (साधक) cannot attend to any external activities. External activity is one of the four feet on which the Ramakrishna Order is standing upon – the four feet being knowledge, devotion, renunciation and service, the last involving external activities.

The awakening of the *Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि) is like igniting a nuclear reactor which needs constant personal vigilance and monitoring by the *Guru*. The pupil has to live and do the *Sādhanā* (साधना) directly under the nose of the *Guru*. One more relevant cause to refrain from this path is the fear of uncertain consequences. There are both gods and demons in every man. The *Kuṇḍalini Sādhanā* (कुण्डलिनि साधना) is supposed to release energies in huge quantum. The gods (good tendencies in man) receiving it help release the *Sādhakā* (साधका) from all bondages while the demons (bad tendencies in man) receiving it would ditch him in the mire of worldliness. So purity at every level including the purity of purpose is deemed essential. Attainment of purity may take a few months or even a life or more. Then, how to certify the degree of purity, to introduce one to practice. Worse of all, it at once creates ‘low and high’ difference among the members disturbing the integration and destroying their integrity.

To our credit however, we have the assurance of our Lord Sri Ramakrishna: ‘Even if one does not consciously or deliberately set oneself to the task of rousing the *Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि), She will be roused by the power of *Bhakti* (भक्ति) or *Jñāna* (ज्ञान) and the disciplines of *Upāsana* (उपासना) one practises, if one follows them with faith.’ Sri Ramakrishna dissuades practicing meditation on the lower three *Cakrās* (चक्राः) because it can kindle and flare up the latent base tendencies. [*Mūlādhāra* (मूलाधार) to *Svādhiṣṭhāna* (स्वाधिष्ठान) and *Svādhiṣṭhāna* (स्वाधिष्ठान) to *Maṇipura* (मणीपुर) are called the two dark regions. Above *Maṇipura* (मणीपुर) it is called the luminous region and *Sahasrāra* (सहस्रार) is called the self-effulgent region.] He says “*Yogā* is not possible if mind dwells on *Kāmini-Kāñcana* (कामिनि काञ्चन, lust and gold). The mind of a worldly man generally moves among the lower three centres – those at the navel, at the sexual organ and the organ of evacuation. After great effort and spiritual practice the *Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि) is awakened.” (Gospel Vol.1 – p. 499) But nothing much to worry. God incarnates to set new paths for the new age. The only thing is that we must not lose sight of what this greatest of the *Avatārās* (अवताराः) has contributed to the universal body of humans at large. Placing himself on the sacrificial altar of this world of mortals, he has proclaimed to the world that God exists and the human life is only for attaining Him. By this he has passively awakened the human spiritual consciousness, i.e. the universal *Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि). No more awakening is necessary, no more meditations on the lower centres. He said “I have prepared the mould, you have only to cast”. And again “I have done 16 annas, your doing one anna will do”. What is needed is just activating, that too by meditation in the heart centre. One can begin meditations straight away from the *Anāhata* (अनाहत), the heart centre. With a little sincere effort, the passively awakened *Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि) gets activated, and breaking the *Brahma-Granthi* (ब्रह्म ग्रन्थि) She reaches the heart centre merging the *Jīva* in *Samādhi* (समाधि). After the advent of the Great Master, meditating on the lower three *Cakrās* (चक्राः) and struggle for awakening the *Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि) are but superficial and mere time wasting. So, eschewing all the unwanted and the non-essential elements, at the same time maintaining the traditional view and approach, giving validity to all the paths, scriptures and customs, the Ramakrishna Mission is towering up to radiate Divine Love, Supreme Knowledge and Service to Mankind.

“It¹ is truly astounding how radio, television, internet, telephone and other communication systems can carry information around the globe within a few seconds. Human beings can travel from one part of the world to another in a very short time. The world is now very small. The lives and messages of the previous *Avatārs* were limited to small geographical areas during their lifetimes and for a couple of centuries afterwards. We find that Rama’s influence extended only from Ayodhya to Sri Lanka, Krishna’s from Mathura-Vrindavan to Dwaraka-Parbhas, Buddha’s from Kapilavastu to Gaya-Varanasi, Christ’s from Judea to Samaria-Galilee and Chaitanya’s from Navadwip to Puri-Vrindavan. It was not possible for Ramakrishna to go to distant places to spread his message because he was in Samadhi most of the time. But as he sat in the village of Dakshineswar, he shook the Cosmic- *Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि) so vigorously that his message encircled the globe within a short time of his passing. This Cosmic- *Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि) is the Divine Mother *Kālī* (काली). Swami Shivananda said: “The Master was after all none other than Mother *Kālī* (काली), who in the form of the Master is saving the world even now.”

“Swami Shivananda continued: “Swami Vivekananda once said: ‘In this age the *Brahma-Kuṇḍalini* (ब्रह्मकुण्डलिनि) – the Mother who is responsible for the creation, preservation and destruction of the universe – has been awakened by the fervent prayers of Sri Ramakrishna. No wonder the individual *Kuṇḍalini* (कुण्डलिनि) will be awakened now!’ ”

¹ Extract from “How to live with God”, by Sw. Chetanananda (Pg. 484)

The Sandhi Pūjā (सन्धि-पूजा)

‘Sandhi’ (सन्धि) means ‘joining’. Wherever there is more than one thing lying in close proximity there is *Sandhi* (सन्धि)/joining. *Sandhi Pūjā* (सन्धि-पूजा) may mean Pūjā *during* the *Sandhi* (सन्धि) or it may mean Pūjā *of the* *Sandhi* (सन्धि). The former is the general view and the later is a deeper view. The ultimate creative principle, the Great Power is personified and is personalised as the Divine Mother. This is necessary because Its (Her) own chip bearing individuality is approaching It (Her), the block. So scientifically we may call It ‘The Power’ but in religious and spiritual sense it is bound to be the ‘Divine Mother’. The modern minds and the westernised ones may like and prefer the term ‘Power’, but to the religious and spiritual personalities the term Divine Mother is always appealing. Both mean the same Truth.

This Great Power is ever engaged in the welfare and safety of beings. It maintains the law and order. With Her wide network She controls and manages every bit of the variations. At times when the demonical power tries to dominate and oppress the good and the virtuous, higher destructive Power Heads are invoked to take care of the situation. It is like calling for the army when there are chances of the alien forces overpowering the police force. *Sandhi Pūjā* (सन्धि-पूजा) is attributed to such a rare and uncommon situation when the Divine Mother in an angry tone manifests from within Herself the mighty destructive Power, the *Kālī* (काली). This moment is considered as the most auspicious one because such a mighty destructive force is coming as a boon for the virtuous. *Kālī* (काली) is generally assigned to the all-destroying aspect of the Great Time, *Mahā-Kāla* (महाकाल). Here She is coming with the same destructive power and force to devour the evil forces for the sake of the virtuous, like a lioness pouncing upon a prey to feed her cubs. It is akin to the *Viśvarūpa Darśana* (विश्वरूप-दर्शन) of the *Bhagavad Gītā* (भगवद् गीता) wherein Lord *Kṛṣṇa* (कृष्ण) revealing His *Viśvarūpa* (विश्वरूप), His terrible form, says ‘I am the mighty world-destroying Time, here made manifest for the purpose of infolding the world’. Similarly in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (रामायण), *Rāmā*’s fury invokes the destroying power to dry up the ocean when *Varuṇa Devatā* (वरुण देवता) does not reply to the appeals and requests of *Rāma* (राम) to provide means to traverse to *Lankā* (लङ्का). These moments are considered as most auspicious moments when the destructive power flows out as love, war turns out to be peace, torture and suffering turns out to be bliss. It is known that when a mother fights for her child against a danger, disease or enemy, her mother-instinct and motherhood is supposed to reach its acme. *Sandhi Pūjā* (सन्धि पूजा) is the Pūjā of the Mother in Her fullness as the Mother. This is the Love-Mother, the embodiment of Love. With this as the basis Sw. Yatiswarananda used to keep Holy Mother’s picture in place of Durgā Image and worship. He would say Mother is Love and Love is Mother; the Holy Mother is Love incarnate. This is the inner vision of the worshipper during the *Sandhi Pūjā* (सन्धि पूजा). Again, in this there is the passive acceptance of the fact that destruction is an inevitable part of the play, as much relevant and important as the sustenance. The one and the same Power, the Divine, the Auspicious is behind the creation, sustenance and dissolution. The worshipper advances a step further and sees that the same One Divinity is manifesting as the sweet smile as well as the dark frown of Nature. Divine Mother is not only the Power that creates but also the Power that

destroys. Her divine hand is everywhere, in birth as well as in death, in health as well as in disease, in peace as well as in warfare. Though unpleasant and harsh, he accepts the Truth in its totality.

The deity worshipped is one of the aspects of Divine Mother Durgā known as *Cāmuṇḍā* (चामुण्डा). It is in alliance with the Divine Play, *Durgā-Saptaśatī* (दुर्गा-सप्तशती), that *Kālī* (काली) emanated from the forehead of Durgā and killed the two demons *Caṇḍa* (चण्ड) and *Muṇḍa* (मुण्ड) who were the generals of the demon king *Śumbha* (शुम्भ). Mother Durgā pleased with that act, awarded her the name *Cāmuṇḍā* (चामुण्डा). This incident is said to have taken place at the *Sandhi* (सन्धि)/joining between the *Aṣṭamī* (अष्टमी) and *Navamī* (नवमी) days. A Pūjā is offered to Mother *Cāmuṇḍā* (चामुण्डा) at that very juncture and is therefore called the *Sandhi Pūjā* (सन्धि पूजा), and deemed the most important ritual. This Pūjā is considered the paramount of the Durga Pūjā, the highest point.

In *Śakta* tradition, *Lakṣmīdhara* (लक्ष्मीधर) is an authoritative commentator and upholder of the *Samaya* (समय) branch of Śaktism. In his commentary on the forty first verse of the *Soundaryalahari* (सौन्दर्यलहरी) of *Śri Śaṅkara* he states “The aspiring and devoted disciple in the disciplinary stage receives the great *Vidyā* (विद्या), along with instructions on *Rṣi* (ऋषि), *Chandas* (छन्दस्), *Devatā* (देवता) etc. from the *Guru* and then strictly following *Guru*’s instructions, performs *Śuṣka* (शुष्क, routine type) *Japa* of the Mantra. Afterwards on the 8th Day (*Aṣṭamī*) of the bright fortnight of the *Āśvayuja* (आश्वयुज) month [Sep-Oct], he approaches the *Guru* in the night [which is regarded as the *Sandhi* (सन्धि) – the joining of *Aṣṭamī* (अष्टमी) and *Navamī* (नवमी)] and prostrates before him holding his feet. Pleased with the disciple surrendering at his feet thus, the *Guru* by the way of blessing him places his hand on his head. By the power of this blessing, and by the imparting of the *Mantra* and of the way of worship in the six *Cakrās* (चक्रास) and other instructions – all together bring about in the disciple the *Śiva Mahāvedhi Siddhi* [शिवमहावेधि सिद्धि, “attainment of great-divine-breakthrough”]. As a consequence of this the *Bhagavatī* (भगवती) all of a sudden reveals Herself in the *Maṇipura Cakra* (मणिपुर चक्र). She is then worshipped mentally and led to the higher *Anāhata* (अनाहत), *Viśuddha* (विशुद्ध) and *Ajñā* (आज्ञा); from the last of which She very soon ascends to the thousand petalled lotus, the *Sahasrāra* (सहस्रार), to unite with *Śiva* (शिव).”

So, for the *Śaktās* (शक्तas), this *Sandhi* (सन्धि) wherein the *Aṣṭamī* (अष्टमी) passes into *Navamī* (नवमी) has great importance, in the sense, they believe Mother blesses the *Jīva* through a *Guru* or otherwise by bestowing the highest good – the immortality. This individual ‘Illumination’ of the *Jīvās*, and their attainment of immortality is represented by the offering of a series of lamps (*Dīpamālā*, दीपमाला) usually 108 in number.

After the veil of *Kāla-Rātri* (कालरात्रि) falls off, the worshipper lives with new light in new awareness. As long as we are bodies, we see only bodies in others. When our understanding changes with realisation, when we know ourselves to be spirits and not bodies, we no more see others as bodies but as spirits, as numerous tiny mobile consciousness. The worshipper now understands that the biggest and sustained lie that a man has ever felt, thought or told is – ‘I am a body’. He sees the same ‘Light’ in every being, like many lamps moving about. This knowledge he dedicates with

gratitude at the feet of his Beloved Mother by whose grace he had attained it – in the form of 108 lamps.

108 represents one complete creative cycle – the universe originating from the *Brahman* and at the end of the cycle merging back into the *Brahman*. In *Japamālā* (जपमाला) also we use 108 beads and then comes a big distinct bead called the *Meru* (मेरु), meaning the ultimate which cannot be crossed over. Hence, each time the *Meru* (मेरु) is reached after 108 counts, the direction of counting is reversed without crossing over the *Meru* (मेरु). The number 108 is accounted this way: Whatever exists within the creation – action, movement or material can be expressed in language. Sanskrit language contains 50 alphabets. The whole of the creation and everything in it can be expressed through these 50 letters. The number 50 is doubled to indicate the *Anuloma* (अनुलोम, the process of creation) and the *Viloma* (विलोम, the process of retraction) which together make up one cycle. Thus the number 50 shows the whole creation while the number 100 shows a whole cycle. To that is added 8 which makes it 108. The number 8 refers to the eight entities that cannot be expressed through language. Of them four entities belong to creation and four prior to emergence of the universe. They are:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Māyā</i> (माया) ➤ <i>Avidyā</i> (अविद्या) ➤ <i>Jīva</i> (जीव) ➤ <i>Īśwara</i> (ईश्वर) | } | which exist within the universe |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Nāda</i> (नाद) ➤ <i>Bindu</i> (बिन्दु) ➤ <i>Kalā</i> (कला) ➤ <i>Avyakta</i> (अव्यक्त) | } | part of the creative process prior to creation of the universe. |

Thus 108 lamps represent all *Jīvās* since the beginning of the cosmic cycle to the end of the cosmic cycle. Every *Jīva* is divine, self-luminous and eternal. Placing them at the feet of the Mother the worshipper sees Mother pervading all the *Jīvās*.

The lamp is indicative of the *Ātman* (आत्मन्) shining within the embodied *Jīva*. The qualities pointing to the *Ātman* (आत्मन्) are tallied with the qualities of the lamp: ever new, ever awake, ever fresh, free from all blemish, giving heat and light (sustenance and knowledge that are the basics of life).

The Pūjā procedure followed is a general protocol. Two special features in it are the above mentioned *Dīpamālā* (दीपमाला, 108 lamps offering) and the *Bali* (बलि, animal sacrifice). In the Ramakrishna tradition on the behest of the Holy Mother the animal sacrifice is replaced by the sacrifice of ashgourd, sugarcane and plantain.

There are two *Bali*'s offered during the Durgā Pūjā – one during the *Sandhi Pūjā* (सन्धि पूजा) and the other on the *Navamī* (नवमी) Day. *Bali* means sacrifice. It can be cooked rice stained red or a living animal sacrificed. In south Indian temples to please *Gaṇās* (गणास) of the deities or to appease the spirits cooked rice is commonly used as the *Bali* (बलि). *Vaiṣṇava* (वैष्णव) and *Śaiva* (शैव) temples do not entertain animal sacrifice. In most of the *Śakti* temples it is customary to perform *Bali* (बलि) or animal sacrifice.

The principle behind *Bali* (बलि) is to offer that which every *Jīva* considers most precious and never wants to part with, for attainment of a higher ideal. Life is considered by every *Jīva* as the most precious thing and never wants to part from it. Thus the vow to sacrifice one's own life for a higher ideal is symbolised by the animal sacrifice. But this way of understanding was prevalent in only among the higher classes of the Āryan race. While the people belonging to the lower strata who never had higher ideals to pursue, would observe animal sacrifice in exchange for fulfilling some personal wants or desires. If the sacrifice is for the fulfilment of a higher ideal which is free from worldly desires, then the traditional codes declare – 'A person of outstanding moral and spiritual merits by giving such animal sacrifice does remain without damage to his spiritual vitality, because he has already vowed his life to the Ideal, to God'. Moreover, a valid question does stand – if a man can kill an animal for filling his worthless stomach, why not for a higher ideal, or for God? Pointing to the tepid gore that flowed from the decapitated trunks of goats at *Kālī* (काली) temple of *Kālīghāt* (कालीघाट), Calcutta, a western lady disciple asked Sw.Vivekananda – "Well, Swami, why so much blood?" Swamiji gravely replied: "Is not a little blood necessary to complete the picture?"

Since ages the monarchs of the Mysore State in their royal costumes and their royal paraphernalia have been in the tradition of ceremoniously chopping a branch of the *Śamī*¹ tree (शमी)

¹ **Note: Śamī (शमी, that which brings peace)**

In ancient days fire was produced from sparks emanated by striking stone with stone or by rubbing wood against wood. The former was used for all common purposes and the later was specifically used for sacrificial fire by *Vedic R̥sis* (ऋषिः). Sacrificial fire was produced by frictional attrition by churning of a thick round wooden rod [called the upper *Araṇi* (अरणि)] pressed against a rectangular wooden block [called the lower *Araṇi* (अरणि)] with an indentation for positioning the churning rod. The upper wood (churning rod) was made of *Śamī* (शमी) wood. Thus *Śamī* (शमी, Acacia Suma) received honour and was considered a holy tree since ages.

वृक्ष) on the *Navamī* (नवमी) Day taking the vow to look after every subject as his own child and to dedicate his life for the country. Similarly, the dacoits of the Chambal valley in India sacrificing a goat to the Divine Mother on the *Navamī* (नवमी) Day take a vow to not raise arms against women and children, not to touch the body of women during looting or encounter and to abstain from alcohol at all times, throughout the life. I met these people personally. When asked as to why cant they take a vow without animal sacrifice they said – “The scar in the heart because of animal sacrifice lingers all the time in the mind. On erring the guilt expands a hundred fold.” During my boyhood days it was a common scene to see in Karnataka wet-clay-images of animals being sacrificed after invoking the animal in it. When I was in the Himalayas, I was given to know, a particular cultured Himalayan tribe offer seven live fishes into the fire or burry them in earth identifying them with ego and the six inner enemies.

The *Bali* (बलि) of the *Sandhi Pūjā* (सन्धि पूजा) is a pledge to sacrifice one’s own life for the welfare and in service of others, while the *Navamī Bali* (नवमी बलि) is a pledge to sacrifice one’s own life for reaching the Highest, to realise God. The former is the worshipper’s present state and later is his culmination and the goal to be attained. Actually as a part of the internal *Kuṇḍalini Yoga* (कुण्डलिनि योग), at this juncture the worshipper is moving towards the *Ajñā Cakra* (आज्ञा चक्र) from the *Viśuddha* (विशुद्ध) crossing the limitations of *Nāma* (नाम) and *Rūpa* (रूप). In the early stages of *Sādhanā* (साधना), *Bali* (बलि) is indicative of destruction of *Paśubhāva* (पशुभाव, animal-hood) within one’s own being. In a way, its need is felt because a little toughness and mercilessness is needed to conquer inner enemies. In advanced stages, however, they become pledges and vows. When one attains freedom from the clutches of external world and thus attains inner calmness, then it can be replaced by some *Sāttvika* (सात्त्विक) rites or can be totally eliminated. Honouring the then prevailing tradition, the Holy Mother replaced the animal in sacrifice with plantain or sugarcane and ashgourd. Apart from all this *Bali* (बलि) is always considered as something sacred.

The sequel of the *Durgā Pūjā* leads to the understanding of the *Sandhi Pūjā* (सन्धि-पूजा) in a different perspective. As mentioned earlier, a deeper view wherein *Sandhi Pūjā* (सन्धि-पूजा) would mean Pūjā ‘of the’ *Sandhi* (सन्धि), Mother Herself being that *Sandhi* (सन्धि). There is the phenomenal world around us. It is flux, it is a flow. At any point in that flow, we can enter the stream, and therein realise the changeless Reality. The later is everywhere and in all things, but hidden to our normal

(contd. from previous page.....)

The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* [तैत्तिरीय आरण्यक (6.9.2)] contains a prayer addressed to the *Śamī* (शमी) tree for the removal of sins and enmities. The plant or even a branch is supposed to have the power to appease the terrible and angry aspects of the deities [*Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* तैत्तिरीय ब्राह्मण (1.1.3.11)] like *Agni* (अग्नि).

When a *Kṣatriya* (क्षत्रिय) king intends to go on a victory expedition to subdue or destroy sinners and evil persons, he is expected to worship the *Śamī* (शमी) tree before starting.

This is performed as a ritual also during the *Navamī/Daśamī* (नवमी/दशमी) day of *Daśahara* (दशहर) [*Durgā Pūjā*] by *Kṣatriya* (क्षत्रिय) kings even today.

Its leaves are sent to friends and relatives as a sign of good will on the *Vijaya-Daśamī* (विजय दशमी) day.

perception. Every object is manifesting It secretly, which we fail to perceive. Any form (everything that is not The Formless is said to be with form) can be pierced by awakened intellect, and one can find union with the *Devatā* (देवता) who is at its core. It does not matter what that form is. All is the *Śakti* (शक्ति). All is verily consciousness, the *Cit* (चित्) as well. Their transcendence is possible because there is a link that connects them together. The Mother, who acts as the principle which connects the objects to each other, and binds each one to the *Caitanya* (चैतन्य) is called the ‘*Sandhi*’ (सन्धि). The Mother who holds the two sides together and engages in the universal play is the *Sandhi* (सन्धि). Interpenetrating the whole universe as its *Sūtrātmā* (सूत्रात्मा, inner connecting threads) She stands holding the entire universe as one complete whole; that She is the *Sandhi* (सन्धि). Mother, spreading Herself through all the *Jīvās* is interconnecting all the *Jīvās* internally, is the *Sandhi* (सन्धि).

Bhūteṣu Satataṁ Tasyai Vyāptidevyai Namō Namaḥ [भूतेषु सततं तस्यै व्याप्तिदेव्यै नमो नमः; *Durgā Saptaśatī* (दुर्गा-सप्तशती), 5th Chapter, 77th *Śloka* (श्लोक)]

‘The pervasive Devi who is pervading everything, to Her I bow down.’ The worship of this all pervading Mother linking to whom a *Jīva* can transcend the material existence and reach the transcendental Truth, is called *Sandhi*. During the *Aṣṭamī* – *Navamī* (अष्टमी-नवमी) junction Her motherhood is supposed to break all bonds and reach limitless dimension to flood all quarters. Those who receive its warmth and grace through pure love or through self-surrender can then attain the desired end be it *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* or even *Mokṣa* (धर्म, अर्थ, काम or even मोक्ष).

Before ending this topic it is nice to share a sparkling explanation of an aged monk of the Order. When asked “what *Sandhi Pūjā* (सन्धि-पूजा) is?” in a firm voice beaming with joy he said: “You are now a *Brahmacāri* (ब्रह्मचारि) – being introduced to the life of perfect and stern discipline. Within a few years you will understand you are but a traveller waiting in a Railway Station intensely desirous of starting for the boundless realm of knowledge. To reach the unknown destination, being firm and steadfast, like a stone, you are calling on the Divine Mother with firm faith and determination. This is *Sandhi Pūjā* (सन्धि-पूजा)! In your divine mission you get an assurance of help from the Mother which brings peace, light and harmony in your life and in *Sadhanā* (साधना) – those are the lamps you offer to the Mother. The ideals before your eyes are the direct disciples and others, the most brilliant and eminent all renouncing monks. Looking at them your chest swells up and you stand up with a vow to sacrifice your life for its attainment and that is the *Bali* (बलि). Go ahead, my boy, may Mother be with you!”

THE NAVAMĪ PŪJĀ

(नवमी पूजा)

As a casual onlooker, a devotee witnessing Durgā Pūjā no doubt wonders with all reverence but remains satisfied with the dictum : ‘Truth is Beauty, Beauty is Truth’, with a vague understanding of the terms ‘Beauty’ and ‘Truth’. Whereas, the one who is chasing the Truth pledging his life for its attainment takes an interrogative leap beyond it, and says “I want a genuine experience and nothing short of it.’ What is described in the *Upaniṣads* (उपनिषद्) as ‘*Śāntam Śivam Advaitam*’ (शान्तं शिवम् अद्वैतम्) he wants to see and experience in its most intimate personal aspect as the Divine Mother. To such souls, Durgā Pūjā is a revelation of the Ultimate Divine Principle - The Divine Mother, manifesting highest perfection of beauty, grandeur and power, as well as expressing the tender love and deep concern of an intimate mother.

Crossing over the *Aṣṭamī* (अष्टमी) Night, the *Kāla-Rātri* (कालरात्रि) disappears. The *Sādhaka* (साधक) feels himself expanded into Eternity. He lives in a state of divine inebriation out of gratitude and love for the Mother enshrined in his heart, at the same time experiencing an intense bliss with an unbroken awareness of his own Divinity free from *Jīvatva* (जीवत्व), which bears “the stamp of Immortality.” This is the *Prajñā* (प्रज्ञा), the Awareness filled with Light and Bliss. Yet tiny patch of shadow lurks behind in that vast expanse of Bliss. As *Cit-Śakti* (चित्-शक्ति, Power of Consciousness) Mother pervades every *Jīva* (जीव); a vast network She is! How can a single *Jīva* alone remain in supreme bliss entirely unaffected when all other *Jīvas* of the same network are experiencing dualities like *Sukha-Dukha* (सुखदुःख) in a bound state? It creates a strain of disparity. If the two ends of a metal rod are maintained at different temperatures, the rod registers a constant flow of electricity from one end to the other through it. Similarly this strain of disparity generates a feeling of compassion for other beings. It finds a place as a limited tiny stress in the Unlimited *Prajñā* (प्रज्ञा) without affecting the status of the latter. In fact, many of the prayers that we commonly use for the welfare of all beings are the tears of such illumined hearts. Mother makes the illumined souls weep for others but with a universal touch to embrace one and all beings. So that, the change lies in the Changeless and Changeless lies in the change: the state of the *Sādhaka* (साधक) remains unaffected. So, from the lighted *Prajñā* (प्रज्ञा), the ocean of wisdom, flows out the pain stricken prayer.

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः	}	May all be happy.
सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ।		May all beings remain healed.
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु		May all beings witness the beauty and bliss, the glory and greatness of their own true nature.
मा कश्चित् दुःखमाग्न भवेत् ॥		May all beings be ever free from suffering.

With these prayers and the worshipper being in that state, the *Navamī Pūjā* (नवमी पूजा) begins. Deep within that firmament of Knowledge and Bliss, within that Divine awareness flows the element of pure love for Mother enshrined in the heart. It is like a beautiful river flowing amidst torrents of rain. An important feature that comes to our notice here is that the *Śakti* (शक्ति) worship closely follows Vedantic monism but is then, thoroughly symbolized to give it the fitness to be dipped in chromatic sentiments of love and objectify it for the purpose of worship without losing its sublimity. It adds Benign to the Being. The Benign heals every wound the heart has received through lives, and the Being fills the Great Void that has been lying within, which can never be filled by any amount of external affluence. All these ways are valid, possible and true because God is a Conscious Entity, nay Consciousness itself. So It understands as to what genuine feelings and convictions lie deep within the heart of the votary. God too responds actualizing Himself in the same fashion to fulfil the need, desires and conceptions; which is possible for Him since He has no limitations. Drawing our attention to this fact Sri Ramakrishna says - “How can one limit by saying that ‘God is this and not that’, He can be anything, He can manifest in any way He wants. Who can limit Him? He is with form, He is without form and many more things.”

Till *Aṣṭamī Puja* (अष्टमी पूजा) the propelling engine was love for and surrender to the Divine Mother, which were responsible for transporting the worshipper to the various higher states. With the fall of the veil covering the self, the knowledge too joined the love and surrender. It leads to the state wherein the expression of love and knowledge alternate. Often he totally identifies with the Mother and finds the intense bliss of being one with the Mother. At other times, when separateness is felt the upsurge of divine love overpowers him. It is at this stage Thakur started losing track of scriptural injunctions. Sometimes he would offer flowers to the Mother, sometimes to himself. In this state, there is neither individual ego because the veil covering the self is removed nor any *Vāsanās* (वासना) to function. It is pure spiritual urge in man expressing itself to have final repose in the Ultimate Truth, from where there is no return to duality. It is the final struggle of the effect to go back to The Great Cause to rest through eternity. The whole episode is splashes of the spiritual eminence. This is when the mind crosses the fifth plane, the *Viśuddha Cakra* (विशुद्ध चक्र). Sri Ramakrishna says “From this state there is no more fall back to the world of sense enjoyment again.” Further he says “The sixth plane (the *Ajñā*, आज्ञा) is at the forehead. When the mind reaches it the aspirant sees the form of God day and night. But even then a little trace of ego [the spiritual ego being the product of apparent distinction between the individual spirit and the Supreme Spirit] remains. At the sight of that incomparable beauty of God’s form, one becomes intoxicated and rushes forth to touch and embrace it.” (p.151 Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna) In this state there is not even a slightest trace of attachment to the world and therefore there is no return thereto but is on the verge of eternal unity with the Supreme, The Brahman. Outstripping this state emerge twin vehemence that overpower the *Sādhaka* (साधक) - the fire of knowledge and the sacrifice of love. In this realm of pure Spiritual Awareness bereft of the world, the blend of knowledge and love finds its uniqueness and blessedness. Each backing the other, each mixing with other, each influencing the other they generate various hues and designs that enhance the bliss with a high degree of fulfilment. Along with it, they independently work as an escalator to transport the *Sādhaka* (साधक) to his Ultimate Goal. Like an all consuming blazing fire, this knowledge eats away every bit of action from the *Sādhaka* (साधक) in any of states,

without leaving behind any residue whatsoever. This leaves him clean, fresh and unstained. On the other hand the sublime and purest love, the Love Supreme, which is the natural expression and outpour of the Self remains intolerant of any gap between the Self, and the Supreme. It is expressive of Its determination for the total annihilation of any such gap or any possible difference. The former one i.e. the all consuming fire of knowledge represents *Homa* (होम) or the fire sacrifice done on the Navamī (नवमी) Day, and the latter one i.e. the Supreme Love expressive of self-sacrifice, represents the *Bali* (बलि) or the sacrifice offered on the *Navamī* (नवमी) Day.

Fire has been a constant companion of man wherever he lives or wherever he goes. By virtue of its services *Agni* (अग्नि) received importance. Even from the pre-Vedic period *Agni* (अग्नि) received religious greetings. Later in the Vedic period *Agni* (अग्नि) took the prominent role of religious and spiritual significance. Fire has received honour everywhere. We can find equivalents for *Agni* (अग्नि) of the Aryan religion in Latin: ignis and Luthianian: ugni. Consequently it became the chief domestic deity that was a constant source of energy (the practically helping Divine support) in secular as well as sacred life of the Indians. But on attaching spiritual significance to it, *Agni* became a perpetual source of inspiration. The divine-hood attributed to it converted the fire as a source of energy into fire as a 'Conscious Power'. This gave it the status of being itself a god and a messenger and a carrier of offerings to the God. Identification of *Agni* (अग्नि) with the Supreme Spirit imparted it a prestigious position of being an Eternal unerring Witness of actions, vows and promises. *Agni* (अग्नि) was regarded as the guardian of morality. Vows and promises, bonds and contracts executed in its presence were accepted as valid and permanent. In our Ramakrishna Order, *Sannyāsa* (सन्न्यास) and *Brahmacarya* (ब्रह्मचर्य) vows are taken in the presence of sacred fire, following the ancient tradition. *Tantrās* (तन्त्रास), extending its method and the technique of invocation, and identification of any specific deity with fire, could witness the oblations being received and consumed by the deity in the form of *Agni*. Durga Puja *Homa* (होम) is based on this principle with a tinge of Vedic blend. It also carries a deep spiritual significance and strong devotional element.

Those to whom monism does no appeal, the *Śāktās* (शाक्तस) present a pleasant way. They say by adopting its spirit, as far as their belief and worship allow, men will surely experience the highest joy and strength a man could ever experience, because they worship Her who is Eternal Life - the Mother who is the Being, the Consciousness and the Bliss. Every *Jīva* (जीव), according to them, come from Eternity and by offering itself to the Divine Mother attains the eternal life in Her. The *Bali* (बलि, animal sacrifice) concept has this understanding backing it. Throughout the world, everywhere in millions animals are slaughtered every day for food. But a few animals that are sacrificed in name of God before being cooked and eaten, face questioning - "why animal sacrifice? are gods blood thirsty?" and so on! *Tantrās* (तन्त्रास) have an entirely different view. It says spiritualise and divinise everything, every action and every thought and transcend the nature and its ways. It says if killing is inevitable, if it is a must, say for your food then let it be a sacrifice for the Divine; for the poor helpless animal is sacrificing its very life for your sake. By that not only man remains free from guilt and blemish, but learns to honour life. *Vaikṛtikarahasya* (वैकृत्तिकरहस्य) which follows the *Durgā*

Saptśatī (दुर्गा सप्तशती) text, prohibits the Brahmins and other higher classes (विप्र) to give animal sacrifice.

*Bali Mamsādipūjeyam Vipravarjyā Mayerita |
Teṣām Kilasurāmāmsairnuktā Nṛpa Kvacit ||*

बलि मांसादिपूजेयं विप्रवर्ज्या मयेरित ।

तेषां किल सुरामांसैर्नोक्ता नृप क्वचित् ॥ (28th Śloka)

Tantrās (तन्त्रास) provide a definite scheme for the sacrifice. In it apart from the worshipper's spiritual advancement, the *Gati* (गति) or the consequent destiny of the sacrificed animal is also accounted for. Accordingly, the goat (commonly sacrificed) is selected in conformity with the scriptural injunctions. In honour of womanhood female animals are never sacrificed, it is the reverence shown to Motherhood as well. The animal should be un-hurt, free from disease and should be healthy and youthful. Usually on the *Ṣaṣṭhī* (षष्ठी) Day itself it will be brought. In worship gods are the centre of religious activities, but in sacrifice most of the religious activities are centred round the animal to be sacrificed. So, its bodily sanctification is effected. On *Ṣaṣṭhī*, *Saptamī* and *Aṣṭamī* (षष्ठी. सप्तमी. अष्टमी) days it is bathed daily, worshipped and fed with Mother's *Prasad* (प्रसाद). On the *Bali* Day (the *Navamī* नवमी Day) it is given a ceremonial bath, worshipped and in its right ear the Holy *Mantra* (मन्त्र) is uttered by the worshipper. This is the final purificatory rite which is believed to give it spiritual fitness to reach the Mother's Lotus Feet. It is believed to get spiritual awakening by which its bodily existence is a mere husk covering the Inner Reality. The Inner Self which has previously been offered to the Mother through the offering *Mantras*, would actually reach Her with its decapitation. From Eternity it came, to Eternal Life it went back! Thus we may say sacrifices serve the purpose of spiritual regeneration in man. The animal which he would have otherwise slaughtered and eaten is now connected to the Divine; he has learnt to honour life, seek its *Mukti* (मुक्ति), and has learnt to see something beyond its bodily existence. More than anything, making it an occasion, he could think and offer his love to the Mother. In this sense alone we can be sure that sacrifices are of purificatory nature. The general trend and commonly accepted view in offering *Bali* (बलि) is to propitiate the gods, if it is backed up by worldly desires. No doubt, the question haunts our minds as to how many people know or think this way, even having known how many do sincerely practise it out?

“The¹ *Śākta* (शाक्त) doctrine is thus one which has not only grandeur but is generally pragmatic and of excelling worth. It has always been to me a surprise that its value should not have been rightly appreciated. I can only suppose that its neglect is due to the lack that it is the doctrine of *Śākta Tantras* (शाक्त तन्त्र). That fact has been enough to warrant its rejection, or at least a refusal to examine it. Like all practical doctrines it is also intensely positive. There are none of those negations which weaken and which annoy those who, as the vital western minds does, feel themselves to be strong and living in an atmosphere of might and power. For power is glorious thing. What is wanted is only the sense that all power is of God and is God, and the *Bhāva* (भाव) or feeling which interprets all

¹ Sir John Woodroffe, “Sakti & Sakta”, Pg. 214

thoughts and acts and their objects in terms of the Divine, and which sees God in and as all things. Those who truly do so will exercise power not only without wrong, but with that compassion (*Karuṇā*, करुणा) for all beings which is so beautiful a feature of the Buddha and *Tāntrik* (तान्त्रिक) Buddhism.”

If we can observe the whole Durgā Pūjā collectively, we find in and through the entire procedure, within the worshipper is flowing an unseen incessant surge of divine love. Since the beginning of *Sādhanā* (साधना) in the first night it passed through various stages of purification to reach a state of being ‘pure love’, which is bereft of worldly desires, at the end of the sixth night. As the seventh night ends, the whole multifarious world was seen dissolving in the one seamless Whole, the Divine Mother. This live experience eliminates the *Moha-Rātri* (मोहरात्रि) and finds its confluence in the inner stream of divine love thereby increasing its potency and also becoming a constant source of slender inner bliss. Love always seeks fulfilment and is also an embodiment of sacrifice. Mother is the one underlying unity of all diversities as well as an All-enveloping Harmony lying within the diversities. So She is called the ‘*Parā*’ (परा). It is *Bhedabuddhi* (भेदबुद्धि), the sense of difference (caused by the veil covering the self), that forces the man to see the world, and all the things and persons therein, as different from himself, and different from Mother, when in reality he, they and the Mother are One Undivided Reality. This dualism inherent in all phenomenal experience is being caused by this *Bhedabuddhi* (भेदबुद्धि) that establishes dichotomy in that which would otherwise be a unitary experience. The coherence of knowledge and love expels this *Bhedabuddhi* (भेदबुद्धि) and a new vision dawns. Love finds the Divine Mother unfolding into ever-increasing light and beauty, ever expanding love, ever renewing sweetness and harmony; and in Her the worshipper himself gets dissolved and loses his personal identity. This is the ‘experience-whole’ in which as the *Upaniṣad* say ‘The Self knows and loves the Self’. This is precisely ‘resting in the Self’. The veil which was covering the Self, the *Kāla-Rātri* (कालरात्रि), since its coming into the Nature ages before, disappears for ever. The soul emerges out of the eighth night ripped of its *Jīvatva* (जीवत्व, the transmigratory individuality) altogether. The worshipper enters into an ever-awakened state in which there is unbroken Awareness of one’s own pure Spiritual Existence. This is body-less existence (विदेह) as Pure Spirit yet being within the realm of creation remains as if to say “I am individual *Spirit*”. It is something like the impersonal aspect of an individual soul wherein the term ‘impersonal’ is indicative of the absence of the world (name, form and action), worldliness and *Jīvatva* (*Karma + Vāsanā*, कर्म + वासना). We may say it is a kind of impersonal ego which bears an ‘Awareness’ of itself being a pure Spiritual Being with a sense of having landed in eternity and with its infinitude gradually fading into Absoluteness. In spite of remaining in pure Spiritual Awareness of one’s own Self, the sense of individuality continues. It is because this Awareness includes within itself an awareness of the Divine Mother, as also there is a reflection of the cosmic existence in it. Any awareness in consciousness acts as a centrifugal force to induce or throw out a series of active notes of symphony. The upheaval caused by these awarenesses are: Divine Love in an uncommon accent [*Parāśraddhā* (पराश्रद्धा) + *Yuktatama* (युक्ततम), *Bhagavad Gita*, 12th Chapter, 2nd *Śloka*] and compassion for all beings [*Sarvabhūtahitertāḥ* (सर्वभूतहितेस्ताः), *Bhagavad Gita*, 12th Chapter, 4th *Śloka*]. Owing to the absence of personality based individual ego (कर्तृत्व, भोक्तृत्व = doer-ship, enjoyer-ship) with respect to the world of

relative existence, these actions dissolve in Nature (प्रकृति) without a counter-reaction (i.e. without *Karmaphala*, कर्मफल). They neither gain momentum to become *Samskāra* (संस्कार) or *Vāsanā* (वासना), instead they motivate the final release and mergence in non-dual experience with the Absolute. Here the divine love that functions is beyond human understanding. For, it is the love that functions beyond bodily existence. Loving some one without a body is unimaginable, as much as to think of oneself not possessing a body. Whereas in that elevated state, the awareness that is grasping the Divine Mother oscillates between Her personal and impersonal aspects, between the benign form which is coveted all through and was gloriously illuminating the heart, and the Pure Consciousness, the formless aspect. Even the form so observed is free from associations with any of Her qualities. Existence of Her Divine Form alone is gripped without quality; no judgement, no thinking. It is like a new born baby looking at the world - Existence of the world alone is seen without a single impression, it is a blank seeing, there is neither link nor a thought preceding or following it. Awareness of quality binds us to its form and love too, however intense be it, however pure, it does flood and flow but with a patch of shadow in it, the shadow of 'awareness of quality'.

The worshipper's love flows independent of the Divine Mother's greatness, virtues, goodness and all Her qualities, even Her being the Great Power and the cause of the universe. The worshipper is aware of Her existence alone; who She is, what and how much is totally out of notice. It is precisely impersonal loving the impersonal. When we are bodies, we see others as bodies and the love limits to bodily levels. When spiritually awakened we understand we are the *Jīvatmans* (the transmigratory souls) living in the body. So we see in the others some higher existence apart from their bodies. Our love too shifts from bodily level to something beyond the body. We happen to love an unknown abstract 'reality' in and through the body. Worldliness, worldly talk and worldly people inflict pain and the mind seeks the divine. In this feeling lies the seed of transcendence of all dualities and advancement to the impersonal. But when the veil covering the Self falls off: all beings, the world, the Divine Mother, the deities and God we see with an impersonal touch. Either the 'many' merge in the 'One' or we see 'One' appearing in 'many'. The love and compassion for all beings take a universal and impersonal form which eventually leads to the experience of the One underlying Reality, through the experience of the presence of God in every being. So is the case of the outpour of love to the Mother. As in the *Navamī Pūjā* (नवमी पूजा), when the *Jīva*'s love transcends all limitations and torrents of love flood forth enveloping the Mother in Her essence (the *Jīva* unaware, unconcerned and indifferent to Her qualities or nature), then, it is the love that is incessantly flowing towards the Pure Consciousness, the Ultimate Reality, for the Divine Mother in essence, free from all qualities, is the Pure Consciousness, what the Vedantins call as the Absolute. In this impersonal love the worshipper's awareness that holds the infinitude and eternity of himself, establishes perfect matching and perfect divine harmony that it falls into the loving embrace of the Divine Mother, the Sweet Absolute! Its magnitude is of unimaginable power and strength that the worshipper's consciousness and awareness, his very existence is sucked into the Absolute without any trace of remainder. The *Mahā-Rātri* (महारात्रि) disappears for ever. What remains, remains. The *Jīva* is said to have attained the ultimate victory (विजय) by losing his very existence in the Absolute.

THE VIJAYA DAŚAMĪ

(विजय दशमी)

Worship is an expression of aspiration and ideals. It is in itself a perfect path to reach the Ultimate Goal of human life, the Freedom. Therefore the spiritual significance behind various steps in worship gains importance. They aim at securing spiritual welfare as also development of personality and life established in harmony. Worship being a spiritual practice, is consistent, logical and has practical utility and a definite intention. Besides being a landmark in the Hindu traditions and customs, it presents a specific pattern of life of devotion coupled with high philosophical truths meant to reach a state of absolute perfection. Herein, ethical and humanistic values are set on the spiritual foundation with predominance on pure love of God; the God as the Divine Mother.

The common dictum runs thus: 'God created man in his own image'. When we observe the development of religious thought in our own individual lives, we find that depending on some information, hints and suggestions, certain conceptions and convictions form within us. With these conceptions and convictions, adding our feelings and faith to it, we create or shape out a 'God'; we put life into it, offer our love, adoration and worship of the heart, identifying it with what we understand as the Supreme. And that very God, the Omnipotent, remoulds us into the Real God! We may otherwise say - Man creates God in his own image, and the created God converts back the man into God i.e. He reinstates his lost identity.

The *Vijaya Daśamī* (विजय दशमी), for the ardent spiritual seeker who has finished the conquest of the nine nights inflicting the Soul, and has attained Absolute Freedom, Bliss and Peace, is the day of offering of gratitude to his beloved Mother who out of compassion has made him succeed in his venture and has given him the Final Deliverance. This expression of gratitude and love is beyond the range of words, speech and even intellect. It is an expression of overflowing inner bliss owing to which he offers himself unconditionally to the Mother's will, for the present EGO too is a gift of the Mother and belongs to the Mother at all times. Performing the *Visarjana* [विसर्जन, releasing the Divine Mother from Her spiritual manifestation in the Image, the reversal of *Prāṇa-Pratiṣṭhā* (प्राणप्रतिष्ठा)] he lives ever united with the Mother as the *Jīvan-Mukta* (जीवन मुक्त).

All this we have discussed so far is from the highest standpoint, from the standpoint of the spiritual seeker. When we come down to the most common person of the lowest rung, on attending the Durgā Pūjā, he acquires new tendencies (*Samskāras*, संस्काराः) and there is bound to be some awakening of innate divine nature and latent devotional element lying within him. What man lacks today is this *Samskāra* (संस्कार). The origin of these noble *Samskāras* (संस्काराः) are from the realisation of the Truth and the Wisdom. Human beliefs, sentiments, aspirations, hopes and fears carry the traditions and the *Samskāras* forward. They cater to the human needs. We are seeing from day to day the very conception of life is undergoing drastic changes. Through scientific discoveries mysteries of life have received light of understanding, and man's control of environment has immensely increased, though the Nature is revolting in other newer ways! Material resources of life are getting

multiplied. His dependence on matter and settings too is increasing. So naturally, the awe and reverence or love and dedication with which the religious ceremonies were performed are diminishing day by day. But in spite of materialistic upturn, the central mysteries of life and the fundamental need of human existence (joy, peace and freedom) will remain blank. So much studies, analysis and research are going on regarding life and its evolutionary process, yet, everything regarding life is puzzling the human intellect. There is no possibility of solving the central problem of life satisfactorily. That is why God incarnates to give the solution. Thakur seems to be the only hope for the modern world. At all times even today man is experiencing the mystic touch of the invisible at the source of life. Awareness of this reality will keep alive the religious sentiments in man and direct him to spiritual seeking. Every field of Indian life is associated with the Divine or religion. In some fields the magic hold of religion may loosen, but the human heart shall by no means part with the sanctity imparted by the religious heritage. The self-oblation and self-immolation for living the Highest Ideal shall ever shine in bright colours. The consecration of life will never cease. The traditions and customs may change their old garments and assume new shapes. But the flag of Truth shall always be flying high on the mount.

The whole scheme ends with the Grand Self Discovery and the Supreme Knowledge of Its identity with the Ultimate Truth. It was all Mother -- the path and the goal. It was a warm and wonderful relationship in which the spiritual infant grew up to fullness of Pure Spiritual Absolute. It is a long haul, a series of death and birth. Just as our infant-hood dies giving birth to childhood and our child self dies to achieve adulthood. Spiritual evolution is a series of deaths and re-births till finally we emerge out as Perfect Beings to the deepest ability to give that love of the Divine Mother to one and all; not the love as a noun, but the love as a verb.

So follows the prayer, rather the blessing of the Blessed Soul :-

May peace suffuse the earth
 May the hearts of all people open up to
 the Divine Mother,
 thus to themselves and to each other,
 May all people awaken to
 the Supreme Light
 and to their own inner Divinity within
 May this lovely creation be
 blessed for ever and be a blessing to
All that Is

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॥ हरिः ॐ तत् सत् ॥

॥ श्री रामकृष्णार्पणमस्तु ॥