

WORSHIP OF THE DIVINE MOTHER

– Its Significance and Importance

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Significance of 'Deepavali' • 'Light' Stands for 'Knowledge' • 'Universal Mother' and the 'Ultimate Reality' • Manifest and the Unmanifest • *Brahman* Alone Appears as the *Shakti* • *Ishwara*, the Father, is Also the Mother • Worshipping *Ishwara* as the Mother • Adoring the Glory of the Universal Mother • No Division between the 'Father' and the 'Mother' • Everything Belongs to the Divine Mother Alone • Mother is *Shakti*, the Universal Power • '*Namah*': Surrendering Everything to the Mother • 'Not mine, O Mother, but Thine' • Offer Everything to the Divine Mother, Saying '*Namah*' • Neutralizing the Sense of Possessiveness • Divine Mother as Consciousness • Doing with Love, and with a Sense of Surrender • Divine Qualities Reflect the Divine Attainment • Divine Mother as *Shanti*, Inner Quietude and Cheerfulness • Divine Mother as '*Kshudha*', Hunger • Divine Mother as '*Buddhi*', the Faculty of Thinking • Divine Mother as '*Bhranti*', Mistake • Divine Mother as *Trupti*, Satiation • See God, the Divine Mother, Everywhere...

Significance of 'Deepavali'

Deepavali message: "*Deepavali is a festival of lights. It is observed in commemoration of the triumph of the Divine Power over the force of darkness. Deepavali must be for us a transmutation of a life under the thralldom of the senses to a life liberated from all bondage born of ignorance*" – SWAMI RAMDAS

'Light' Stands for 'Knowledge'

Symbolically we light the lamps on this occasion. It's a festival, so people want to do something. They want to have something to do because people have lot more enthusiasm to do than to know. They are not very keen to know much but they are keen to do a lot. And therefore they go on lighting the lamps, which is fine. '*Aavali*' means 'series'. 'Deepavali' therefore means 'an array of lamps'. A 'lamp' stands for 'knowledge'. Even when they keep a lamp inside the temple to dispel darkness, it is symbolic – of knowledge dispelling the darkness of ignorance.

'Universal Mother' and the 'Ultimate Reality'

On this day, Maha Lakshmi, the Universal Mother, is worshipped. In the context of the Upanishads, or what we call Vedanta, the Reality, which is the origin of this entire universe, is called *Brahman*. This *Brahman* is understood to be Absolute Existence and It is entirely free from attributes or particularities. It is *nirguna*, and also entirely formless – *nirakara*. Even a mental form is not allowed in *Brahman* – it is *nirupa*. It doesn't have any particular features. People look for certain features because features define a thing;

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they keep a thing in contrast to other things. The Supreme Reality, *Brahman*, being one without a second, does not admit any features; that's why it is called *nirvisesha*. It is also free from any modification, and therefore it is *avikriya*. It is also free from any movement or action, and therefore *nishkriya*. Being *avikriya*, It does not undergo any modification whatsoever, in Itself; that is how *Brahman* is understood. It is not possible to describe *Brahman*. You can only make an effort by way of negation; of what *Brahman* is not – 'this is not (in) *Brahman*', etc. All the above terms are of negation only. If I have to give an example, I would say that it is like the shoreless ocean – in the middle the ocean is shoreless and waveless, in which there are no features – in whichever direction you see it is just the same. That is how *Brahman* is.

Manifest and the Unmanifest

But the same *Brahman* when viewed from a different standpoint, viz. the standpoint of this universe, such as – this universe has originated from *Brahman*, it is sustained by *Brahman*, as and when the universe ends which is called annihilation, the universe will resolve in *Brahman* – then you are looking at *Brahman* as the creator, sustainer and annihilator. Also, now you have given multiple attributes to *Brahman* – that It is the Originator, It is what sustains this universe, and into which the universe resolves. Therefore when you view the same *Brahman* from the standpoint of the universe, it is called *Saguna Brahman*; now It has acquired some attributes. *Gunas* could also be technical viz. creation is *rajoguna*, because lot of activity is involved. Sustaining or maintaining is the *sattvaguna*. You need a lot of understanding and skill and you have to work hard even to maintain a family. Then, the annihilation is the *tamoguna*. Now *Brahman* is *sattva rajas tamo gunatmaka* – *Saguna Brahman*. *Brahman* in Itself is called the Absolute Existence – *Nirguna Brahman*, but from the standpoint of this universe, the same *Brahman* is called the *Saguna Brahman*.

Brahman* Alone Appears as the *Shakti

There is another name for that *Saguna Brahman*. It is '*Shakti*'. It is wrong to suppose that *Shakti* is something else other than *Brahman*. First you divide and then you struggle to unify. It is not some other *Brahman*. *Saguna Brahman* or *Shakti* is not some other entity. It is the same *Brahman* which, when viewed from the standpoint of the universe, apparently acquires the *gunas* in order to create and maintain the universe, and therefore the same *Brahman* that we called *Nirguna Brahman*, is now called *Saguna Brahman*. Recall the example of shore-less ocean. Suppose suddenly an iceberg appears in the ocean. Now, the ocean has acquired a feature; now, you can say, the iceberg is in this direction but not in that direction. Already you are able to create a feature, an attribute, a particularity in the ocean. Between the earlier ocean, utterly featureless and totally free from any particularity, and the present ocean which is connected with the iceberg – what is the difference between that ocean and this ocean? It is the same ocean – it is not a different ocean. Therefore it is the same *Brahman* which is called *Shakti*. You should not be under the impression that *Brahman* is sitting on the right side and *Shakti* is sitting on the left side; it is merely symbolic representation. *Brahman* alone is *Shakti*. This is how Sri Ramakrishna used to explain

in a unique way. The *Purana* stories could be at times misleading, unless the symbolism is properly understood.

***Ishwara*, the Father, is Also the Mother**

Brahman being the Originator of this universe is called the Father. The Father idea is in the Middle-East but even before it came to the Middle-East, it was there in India. *Brahman* is called the Father of the entire universe. That is why in the Vedic *mantras* you see “*Prajapate na tvadetanyanyo vishvaa jataani paritaa babhuva.*” *Prajapati* is the father of all life forms. ‘*na tvad anyah*’ – other than You none else. You alone are’. ‘*Etani vishvaa jaataani pari taa*’ – ‘all these and those (unseen) life forms which are everywhere in the universe – they have arisen from you and they merge in you. You alone are’. This is how the Vedic *mantras* describe God as the Father (*‘Krishna Yajurveda Samhita*, 1-8-14-2). But God is also described as the Mother. We should not think that Father is different and Mother is different; the same *Ishwara* who is described as the Father is also described as the Mother, because the human mind wants to look at the originator of this universe as the Father, and also as the Mother.

Worshipping *Ishwara* as the Mother

All of us know we go to the mother with a lot more confidence and love than to the father. When it comes to the father we are a bit cautious and keep some safe distance. Whereas with the mother you can be free because a mother’s love is a forgiving love. Father’s love is a commanding love. There is a difference but it is the same love. So, now we talk of Mother “*yaa devi sarvabhuteshu matrurupena samsthithaa*” (“*Devi Mahatmyam*”, 5-71, p. 75, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai). Therefore in every devotee’s heart *Ishwara* is worshipped as the Father, and the same *Ishwara* is worshipped as the Mother also. That is the specialty of Vedic *dharma*. The specialty of Hindu *dharma* is that *Ishwara* is worshipped not only as the Father but also as the Mother. You don’t see much of that character in other faiths. In other faiths *Ishwara* is worshipped predominantly as the Father. Of course, in Christianity there is the worship of the Mother Mary. It was not there to begin with but became popular later. It became a denomination within the Christianity and it has its own followers. I am not sure if Vatican approves it entirely. In Hinduism there is a full range of worship in the form of the Mother. That is how on the occasion of Deepavali we worship *Ishwara* as the Mother.

Adoring the Glory of the Universal Mother

Devi Mahatmyam (the glory of Mother) is from the ‘*Markandeya Purana*’. In the context of performing a ritual using those verses, it is also known as ‘*Chandi Saptashati*’, meaning 700 mantras of the Universal Mother. The verses are less than 600 but some verses get divided into two or more mantras thus making 700. Like, “*ya devi sarvabhuteshu matrurupena samsthithaa, namastasyai*” – that is one *mantra*. “*Namastasyai*” is the second *mantra*. “*Namastasyai namo namah*” is the third *mantra*. So, one verse splits into three mantras. Mostly Mother is very loving; but occasionally Mother punishes too; hence the name *Chandi*. “*Chanda*” is anger; therefore *Chandi* is the goddess of anger in the annihilation aspect. In *Chandi Yaga*, these *mantras* are

used. In the *Saptashati* there is one section where all the *devas* like *Agni*, *Vayu*, *Varuna*, *Indra*, etc. worship the Universal Mother. As part of that worship they recite these verses. This is how they praised the glory of the Mother. That is why this is called '*Devi Stuti*'. In the beginning you find "*devaa ucuhu*", the *devas* spoke this way; they are praising the Mother saying, "*namo devyai mahadevyai*" (op. cit. 5-9, p.69).

No Division between the 'Father' and the 'Mother'

'Father' and 'Mother' are not two separate entities; otherwise it becomes duality. Between the Father and the Mother there is no division. The Father is the Mother, and the Mother is the Father, "*tvameva mata ca pita tvameva...*" The word *Devi* means the brilliant one. Generally people worship a photo or a *murti*; they make it brilliant by decorating it with electric bulbs. But then you should not take that literally. You should always look for the significance of the word brilliance. Suppose you say a young student is brilliant; what does it mean? It doesn't mean some glow is coming from him. The 'brilliance' is 'knowledge'. 'Knowledge' is always 'brilliance'. *Ishwara* that we worship – is an embodiment of knowledge. Though you are worshipping in a piece of stone, you are not worshipping an insentient *Ishwara*. The piece of stone stands for a sentient *Ishwara* who is all-knowledge, *sarvajna*; that's why He is called *deva*. In feminine form the same *Ishwara* is called the *Devi*.

Everything Belongs to the Divine Mother Alone

My prostration unto the *Devi* -- *namah*. '*Na me*' or '*na mama*' is *namah*; that is the etymology. When you offer flowers and say '*namah*', you mean, "O Mother, these flowers are not mine". Maybe, hand is mine! How can it be? What is the power that makes the hand move? Is that life-force yours? No, it is Mother's life force only. "*Yaa devi sarvabhuteshu vruttirupena samsthithaa*" (op. cit. 5-59, p.74) – *vrutti* is activity. Suppose you take a flower and offer, it requires life force in the hand. Not just hand, the mind also, because all actions originate in the mind. Thought is also energy, power. Thought resolves to offer a flower and then the power of thought is conveyed to the life force in the hand which comes to operation and the flower is picked up and offered. The flower belongs to the Mother; the power, the life-force that offers the flower, also belongs to the Mother.

Mother is *Shakti*, the Universal Power

What about the knowledge which appears in the form of thought? That also belongs to Mother; "*yaa devi sarvabhuteshu shaktirupena samsthithaa.*" (op. cit. 5-32, p.72). Within us *Shakti* is manifesting in two forms – one is *pranashakti* – power of the vital force, also called *kriyashakti*, and power of knowledge called *vijnanashakti*. Therefore, the *shakti* which makes this offering possible is also the Mother.

'*Namah*': Surrendering Everything to the Mother

The flower belongs to the Mother; Mother created this entire *brahmanda*; we did not create the flowers. We make paper flowers – poor imitations of the real flowers.

Suppose, we put a real flower and paper flower next to each other, the paper will remain as paper without changing for a week but the real flower withers away but still the real flower is supreme. Because it is a real one; the fake or imitation is not valuable. The original is important. Therefore it is the flower created by the Mother that you offer. In this creation and in this worship, everything is Mother's. 'na mama'– nothing is mine. Even children are not our children; they are the Mother's children. This way everything is surrendered to the Mother. That's the meaning of 'namah'.

'Not mine, O Mother, but Thine'

Human mind wants to own and possess; it wants to say 'my house' etc. In the entire house there is not one thing we created – wood, steel, cement, water, none. Everything is created by the Mother. In fact we don't have the right to say 'my body' even. The human mind always tries to say 'my, my, my'. 'My' in English is same as 'me' in Sanskrit. 'Me me me' – who says 'me me me'? The sheep bleats like that. The 'sheep' here stands for the 'ignorance', which is why the sheep has to be herded. One who herds the sheep is called shepherd. Shiva is called *Pashupati*, The Lord of animals. Who are the animals? The *jivas* are the animals. "*Chatushpadaamuta ca dvipadaam*" – *Ishwara* is the *pashupati*; he lords over two kinds of *pasus* – *pasus* which have four legs and those that have two legs. The same ideas prevalent in the Middle-East have come from the shores of India, via the silk route. This human weakness of saying 'me, me, me' is always there, because of which, in the Gita (1-1), Dhritarashtra says 'maamaka'.

Offer Everything to the Divine Mother, Saying 'Namah'

People believe they own and possess things. They not only own physical things, they possess and dominate other people also. Parents try to dominate the children for a few years and then the equation will be reversed, and now the children will start dominating the parents. "Father, I asked you to sit there; why did you move from there?" – The boy tells the father. Father keeps quiet; what can he say? He can see the anomaly, yet he keeps quiet. Therefore this possessive attitude, acquisitive spirit, is wrong. In Vedanta we always say that as long as you retain this possessive spirit, you will not come to know the truth. You will remain as an egoic entity. Because any possession belongs to an ego; it is the ego's possession. You are that ego; it is ignorance. Therefore, we have to work on this ignorance. How to work? Sit before the Mother with devotion and take a flower and offer it saying "namah".

Neutralizing the Sense of Possessiveness

How many times should you say 'namah'? You can say any number of times, because it is required to neutralize the sense of possessiveness. Some of you may have wondered why the repetition "*namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namah*". The idea is you have to stay with the vision. You can use this "*Devi Stuti*" in daily *puja*, daily chant or even daily contemplation. You can take one of these lines of "*Devi Stuti*" and contemplate.

Divine Mother as Consciousness

“*Ya Devi sarvabhuteshu chetanetyabhidheeyate*” (op. cit. 5-17, p.71) – *chetana* is the waking consciousness. You wake up; before you wake up you do not know anything. But the moment you wake up, the waking consciousness is in place, therefore you become conscious of the body. ‘I am here in the bedroom, in the house; now it is early morning and time to get up’. You become conscious of other members of the family, of society, of the jobs you have to perform, etc. So, what you call world is indeed shining in your consciousness. That consciousness, *chetana* – wherefrom has it come? It has originated from the Mother. In fact, the Mother alone is in the form of the waking consciousness in every life form. This is a meditation. You can contemplate. You can sit upright, close your eyes and say “*ya devi sarvabhuteshu chetanetyabhidheeyate*”. The Universal Mother is present in this body and mind as *chetana* due to which the eyes are able to see forms and colors, the ears are able to hear the sounds, taste buds are able to taste different tastes and the skin is able to feel heat, cold and the sense of touch, and mind is able to contemplate, think. This is the power of consciousness. This power has originated from the Universal Mother. I offer the power, *chetana*, waking consciousness, unto the Mother. I say this, three or four times, because what is repeated becomes well established in the heart, “*namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namah*”.

Doing with Love, and with a Sense of Surrender

You should chant the “*Devi Stuti*” with a sense of love, while contemplating upon the vision of the seer presented in the verses. The verses are not meant for hurriedly reciting one after the other and be done with it. You have to stay with each verse, thus converting the recitation into contemplation or meditation. The Rishi repeats the line *namastasyai* again and again for this purpose alone. Otherwise, he would have put it as “*ya devi sarvabhuteshu vishnumaya, chetana, buddhi, nidra, kshudha, ityaadirupena samsthitha – tasyai namah*”. You have to abide in the vision. You are surrendering yourself to the Mother. You have to abide in that love and stay with that idea of self-surrender. Fire ritual (*homa*) is also done with these verses as “*namastasyai svahaa, namastasyai svahaa, namo namah svahaa*” etc. Worship, recitation, or fire worship should be done with a sense of love, with a sense of surrender, and not mechanically. Then the ritual acquires a transformative power. It will transform you; the inner transmutation will happen. That is the idea behind the chanting of all these prayers.

Divine Qualities Reflect the Divine Attainment

People say ‘God, God, God’ so many times every day. You have to understand a very special principle of Vedanta. ‘God’ is not only in the form of a *murti* but ‘God’ is in the very spiritual qualities in you: *sadgunapraptireva Ishwara praptih*. Suppose you travel to a famous temple, such as Kashi. You feel that you arrived at the abode of the Lord; that is fine. But then the Lord abides in the heart too. Suppose there is *shraddha* (earnestness) in you; it is a *sadguna* (divine quality). The Lord alone is in the form of *shraddha*. Therefore, there are two types of focus – in one kind of focus you worship the Mother with flowers in a ritual. Then, there is another focus. You look within; you

observe your interior. In that interior, you see an earnestness called *shraddha*. You see an earnestness to know the Truth, to worship the Mother and to surrender to Her. That earnestness is another form of the Mother: '*shraddharupena samsthita*'. (op. cit. 5-50, p. 73). *Bhagavan* Buddha was once asked to talk about God. He said: 'You first practice *sat-charitram*, the good conduct,' and he gave *ashta-vidhacharitram* – the eight divine qualities. 'You practice them first; get established in these qualities, then, I will talk to you about God', he is reported to have said. Suppose he said, 'God is in this form'. Then, people would worship that form and ignore the divine qualities. Therefore, God is not only in the form of a *murti* but also in the form of some of these great qualities which we should cultivate (in our hearts), such as *shraddha*, earnestness, and *shanti*, quietude (op. cit. 5-47, p. 73).

Divine Mother as *Shanti*, Inner Quietude and Cheerfulness

'*Shanti*' includes not only inner quietude but also cheerfulness. Cheerfulness doesn't mean jumping and shouting; it means being naturally joyous. You should not be bogged down by the burdens of *samsara*. The burdens of *samsara* are all your imaginations; they are not real. You should not get bogged down by them. You should keep them aside; when the mind stops thinking, *samsara* will end. *Samsara* will be there only when the mind is working feverishly. When the mind becomes quiet, there is no burden of *samsara*. The natural joy wells up; that is *shanti*.

Divine Mother as '*Kshudha*', Hunger

Another interesting thing – I am sure we are all hungry and sumptuous food is waiting for us. There is hunger in us. Now, did you create this hunger? No. What does the hunger signify? Hunger signifies the power of life; which is the Mother, the '*prana shakti*': "*ya devi sarvabhuteshu kshudharupena samsthitha*" (op. cit. 5-26, p. 72).

Divine Mother as '*Buddhi*', the Faculty of Thinking

Not only good qualities, but also faculties – the faculty of thinking: "*ya devi sarvabhuteshu buddhirupuna samsthitha*" (op. cit. 5-20, p. 71); the power of thinking is given to us. In fact, it is not someone sitting above giving to us. The Mother has manifested that way. For example, this light (before us) is given by the electricity. Now, how did electricity give it? Is electricity sitting in the power house and from there by a miracle did it give? No, electricity has arrived here, entered the bulb and made it glow. The Universal Mother has entered this body-mind and is reflecting in it in the form of the faculty of thinking.

Divine Mother as '*Bhranti*', Mistake

Sometimes people commit errors. Suppose you look at a rope and assume it to be a snake. How did you manage that? You could not see the rope due to the inadequate light. But, how did you bring this snake? Firstly, the rope is 'covered up' and you cannot see it clearly; that is *tamoguna*. But you do see something thick and long. If it is pitch-dark you won't see a snake. You should be able to see something. That is *sattvaguna*.

Then, you project a snake. That is *rajoguna*. So the three *gunas* should come together for you to mistake a rope for a snake. You should see something – *sattvaguna*, fail to see the rope as a rope because of the darkness – *tamoguna*, then project a snake – that is *rajoguna*. Thus Mother is the cause of *bhranti* (mistake) in every person's head: '*ya devi sarvabhuteshu bhrantirupena samsthitha*' (op. cit. 5-74, p. 75). Even to make a mistake you need the blessing of the Mother. So many errors and mistakes we have committed; so many false notions we have entertained; that's why we are where we are. Even the mistakes are because of the Mother's power. All our intellectual accomplishments are also because of Her grace. Therefore, I surrender both, the mistakes as well as the accomplishments, unto You: *namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namah*.

The three *gunas* are manifesting at the macro level also. Creation is *rajas*, sustenance is *sattva*, and annihilation is *tamas*. The three *gunas* together constitute the fundamental principle of the universe. Therefore, Mother is the Originator, Sustainer and Annihilator of creation.

Divine Mother as *Trupti*, Satiation

Suppose we enjoy some nice food. At the end of it, how do we feel? You may not say it because of politeness but how do you feel? You feel a sense of satiation, called *trupti*. That sense of satiation – "I had a good dinner" – you get that sense because of the Mother. You must be hale and healthy to eat well and feel satiated. That health, that hunger, that food, that feeling of *trupti* – the feeling of satiation that you experience – all are the manifestations of the Universal Mother's power.

See God, the Divine Mother, Everywhere...

Not just among human beings. The text says: "*bhutanam chakhileshu ya*", who abides in all life forms (op. cit. 5-77, p. 75). The Mother is not sitting at one place; she is *vyaptidevi*, all-pervading light of awareness (op. cit. 5-77, p. 75). She is like this electric light which is not merely confined to the dome; it is spreading everywhere. *Devi* means the power of effulgence. Look all around: a dog, a cat, a mosquito, a fly, an elephant, a tiger, a deer, a bird, a fish – in all these life forms the power of life and power of sentience is the Mother alone; even in plants. Therefore you should see God, the Mother, everywhere. It is all, the one Universal Mother, no different from the Father. That is the spirit with which you should worship the Universal Mother: '*namastasyai namastasyai namastasyai namo namah*'.

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