

THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD

by

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The worship of God as Mother, which has its roots in the Vedas, is one of the unique features of the Hindu religion. Unlike the Semitic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – where ‘Father’ is the supreme word for God, in Indian culture and religious tradition the worship of the Divine Mother is but natural and deeply rooted in the Indian religious ethos.

Whereas the Semitic religions tried to destroy any evidence of Mother-worship (which is found in the Mediterranean region and all over the globe) from the face of the world, in Hindu religious traditions, we find a very high place of Mother-worship and the Motherhood of God.

There are religions which will never accept Motherhood of God, as if God can appear only as Father and not as Mother! It sounds, however, narrow, dogmatic and illogical to restrict the omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent Supreme Reality only

to the Fatherhood aspect.

But thanks to the Almighty, in India, the original Mother cult gradually developed into a fully-fledged religion, having a wonderful blending of Mother cult and Father cult right from the pre-historic time to the modern time. In Indian religious ethos, this Mother aspect represents the *Shakti* aspect of *Brahman* and it has been given a very strong philosophical base by many of our Advaitic sages, philosophers and Avatāras, such as Shakarāchārya, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Our great sages realised the Supreme Truth as the combination of *Brahman* (Supreme Reality in its inaction) and *Shakti* (Supreme Reality in action).

Fatherhood and Motherhood of the Supreme Reality is also placed in a neuter form indicating the Supreme Reality as ‘It’, not as ‘He’ or ‘She’. Upon realization of It, the ordinary human transcends the idea of masculinity and femininity, which is related to our physical body and realizes that the Absolute Self is genderless. Thus, being free from all physical bondage, one becomes pure and enjoys the bliss of freedom even while remaining in the physical body, which is called the ‘*Jivanmukti*’.

In modern times, Sri Ramakrishna, who was the ‘latest and the most perfect of all avatāras’, as proclaimed by Swami Vivekananda, pointed out that worshipping the Supreme Reality as the embodiment of the Divine Mother, or in a Mother Form, is one of the highest forms of worship. He said, “to look upon God as Mother is the highest and purest form of *Sādhanā*.”

In this modern age, when generally the psychosomatic tendencies of the common people are at a physical level, it is comparatively easy to become physiologically and intellectually elevated through the concept of Mother-worship and experience the sublime spiritual goal! Also, it is very natural for a human being to perform and follow this intimate and purest form of relationship with the Ultimate Reality, because, instinctively we inherit a sense of pure love and devotion to our biological mothers.

In ancient India, nearly 5000 years ago, the worship of the Divine Mother was prevalent in Harappa and Mohenjo-daro cities of the present Punjab and Sind provinces. Mention is made of the allpowerful Devi (the Divine Mother) in the *Devīsuktam* and *Rātrisuktam* of the *Rig Veda* and *Sāma Veda*. The Devi proclaims Herself as the Queen of the Universe who controls everything – “whomsoever I wish, I make mighty – a Brahmā, a Seer, a Sage...” (*Rig Veda 10:125*)

The Devi has been stated by various names in the Hindu scriptures viz. Vishwa Durgā, Sindhu Durgā, Agni Durgā, Umā Haimavati, Bhadra Kāli, Bhavāni Ambikā, Chandi, etc. We find that the Devi is worshipped all over the Indian sub-continent, from Kashmir (*Kshirbhavāni*) to Kanyākumari (Devī Kumāri) and from Assam (Devī Kāmākyā) to Balochistan (Hinglā Mātā).

Worship of *Shakti* (the Divine Mother) is found in Buddhism also and according to some scholars, *Kāli*, *Tārā*, *Shodashi*, etc. – all these names of the Divine Mother have been taken from the Buddhist Tantras. In Japan, a Buddhist Goddess is worshipped – her name is Chanasti Devi, which is equivalent to the Sanskrit name ‘Chandi’. Between both sects of the Jains, the worship of Mother Saraswati and other devis are found. In the *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*, the worship of the Divine Mother is mentioned. Sri Ramachandra and the Pandavas worshipped the Divine Mother for fulfilment of their goals.

In modern times, we find that Sri Ramakrishna worshipped the Divine Mother and he mentioned the different names of the Divine Mother whose various forms he experienced in his visions. Even though the Divine Mother is omnipresent in the Hindu tradition, Mother’s special presence is more manifested in the female body as described in the eleventh chapter of the Chandi (*Devi Māhātmyam*). Each and every female, in whatsoever form, is verily the manifestation of the Divine Mother. That is why, just to set an example, Sri Ramakrishna worshipped his wife Sri Sarada Devi as *Shodashi* (a form of the Divine Mother), and finally lying prostrate, surrendered at the feet of the Goddess the fruits of all his *Sadhanā*. We know that Swami Vivekananda worshipped the Divine Mother in the form of ‘*Kumari*’ during his Durga Puja in Belur Math and also in Kashmir he worshipped even the small daughter of his Muslim boatman.

According to Vedanta this universe is seen as the divine play (*līla*) of the Divine Mother and behind this manifested universe, full of good and evil, violence and non-violence, right and wrong, virtues and vices, there is one ‘mother-heart’ full of love and compassion. Human beings have the power to transcend these limitations and go beyond these dualistic experiences, and have the knowledge of the Supreme Reality by worshipping the various forms of the same Divine Mother as Luxmi, Saraswati, Durga, and Kali and so on.