

The All-Pervading Majesty of the Divine Mother

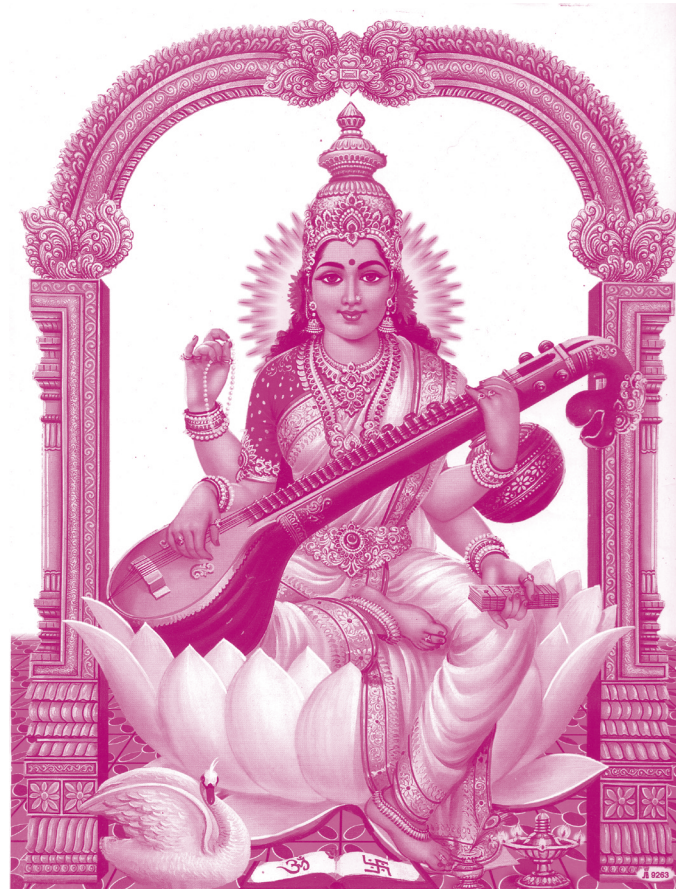
The whole universe is the sportive manifestation of the Divine Being in the Mother-aspect. The Divine Mother permeates the whole world. She is within and around us, functioning in the intellect as *jnana shakti* or the energy of knowledge, in the mind as *ichha shakti* or the energy of desire or will, and in the physical body as *kriya shakti* or the energy of action.

There are many names that are synonymous for the Divine Mother. These include: *Devi* or Goddess; *Mata* or Mother; *Maya* or the principle of Cosmic Illusion, which is inseparable from *Brahman* or the Absolute; *Moola Prakriti* or the balanced state of the three *gunas* (the three modes of nature—*sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*).

Mother Worship is as old as the instinctive human feeling of love for one's mother, as old as life in the human plane. This form of worship enables a spiritual aspirant to feel and experience the compassionate hand of the Mother-aspect of God behind every event of one's life. The Mother presents *bhoga* (the enjoyments of the world) and *moksha* (the infinite bliss of Liberation) to every individual soul.

Devi or the Goddess assumes a deluding aspect to those who are in lesser planes of evolution—those who have not yet been drawn to the higher values of life and are, therefore, entangled in worldly enjoyments. She deludes them in such a way that they ignorantly believe that their impure physical body is the pure Self. They are also deluded into the belief that their transitory life is eternal, that the painful enjoyments of the world are blissful, and that their inert mind and intellect are the conscious Self. This deluding aspect of the Goddess is called *avidya* or ignorance.

The compassionate Mother awaits the return of every one of Her children, or individual souls, from



By Swami Jyotirmayananda

the world-process. Even while Her delusive force has its sway, Her compassion towards every one of Her children is unending. No matter how far you may wander in the forest of the world-process, you are never far away from the Divine Mother. You are ever enfolded in Her arms.

A baby sleeping on the lap of his mother may have unpleasant dreams; yet on waking he sees his mother smiling and realizes that he has been all the time enfolded by her tender care. He does not realize all this, however, until he wakes up. Similarly, every soul is being held in the compassionate hands of the Goddess, and She is closer to us than our very breath, closer than our very heart. This is so because She is the material out of which the intellect, the mind, and the senses have been fashioned. Yet, due to ignorance, one experiences a sense of separation from the Mother through the long dream of *samsara*, the world-process.

Those who are pure in heart and who have turned away from the world-process, the seekers of nectar, the spiritual aspirants seeking Liberation—in them

the Goddess manifests Her *vidya* aspect—the aspect of knowledge that unveils the myriad beauties of the Supreme and reveals the profundity of Divine glory in every object of the world. The patient effort with which Nature strives to awaken every soul from the long dream of *samsara* is indescribable. It is a patience that only a mother could possess!

Mother Worship is also related to *shakti upasana*, or the worship of energy or power. As a worshipper of *shakti* or energy, you realize that without strength there is neither enjoyment nor Liberation. Thus, you pray to the Mother for increasing strength on all levels of your personality. The strength of the body is inferior to the strength of the mind, the strength of the mind is inferior to the strength of the intellect, and the strength of the intellect is inferior to the strength of the soul. By allowing the grace of the Goddess to operate through your entire being, you eventually become endowed with the immense strength of the soul. With this strength, you attain Liberation and merge into the Absolute.

Scriptures such as *Devi Mahatmya* or the *Glory of the Mother*, *Devi Bhagavata*, *Markandeya Purana*, and various *Upanishads* deal with the glory of the Mother. They contain most enchanting and profound stories about the Divine Goddess and the different manifestations that She uses for the destruction of demons, and for the bestowal of boons to devotees.

The demons, whose evil aspects are so colorfully described in the scriptures, represent the forces of darkness hidden in every human being in the form of attachment, hatred, pride, conceit, egoism, jealousy, greed, passion and the many vices that arise out of ignorance. The gods, with their graceful forms moving in aerial cars and sporting in the heavenly gardens, represent the forces of light operating through every being in the form of love, compassion, patience, selflessness, purity, renunciation, fearlessness, detachment, discrimination, and other virtues that spring from wisdom and illumination.

How does the Universal Mother intervene in the battles of the two forces and bring about the victory of light over darkness? This has been most figuratively and mystically described in the stories of the *Devi*. Those who have insight into human

life and into the Divine force that operates through it will marvel at the exquisite intuitional vision of the Sages who, full of compassion, presented to the world these stories of *Devi*—stories garbed in an excellent poetic language and ornamented with mystic imagery that make Her battles with the demons so fascinating for an aspirant.

The Goddess manifests in the external universe as the destroyer in the form of *Durga*, as the granter of prosperity in the form of *Lakshmi*, and as the bestower of talent, creativity and knowledge in the form of *Saraswati*. Similarly, She manifests internally in each individual as the terrible *Durga* for the removal of all obstacles, as the graceful *Lakshmi* for the revival of Divine qualities, and as the luminous *Saraswati* to bring illumination and dispel the darkness of *avidya* or ignorance.

From the spiritual point of view, every event is a wave in the Absolute. The external and internal aspects are forms of the Absolute. To those who have acquired spiritual vision, the world is nothing but *Brahman* or the Absolute. They are free from any battle because they are established in nonduality.

All the marvels of the universe are but little in comparison to what the Divine Mother is doing in every moment of our existence. The world with all its incredible beauty gives only a mere hint of the glory and majesty of the Mother. You can imagine, then, how glorious and how beautiful the Mother must be!

Every soul
is being held in
the compassionate hands
of the Goddess, and
She is closer to us
than our very breath,
closer than our
very heart.