

Mā Saraswatī Pūjā, মা সরস্বতী পূজা

(for the children in Washington Kali Temple, Burtonsville, MD.)



As we know from history, the older people in India had settled in the Indus valley and were farmers. Gradually they moved east and settled on the banks of another river which was not as massive as the Indus, but had many localized pools of water connected with narrow streams. The pool of water in Sanskrit language is called *saras* (सरस्) and this river came to be known as *Saraswatī* (सरस्वती), “a river of many pools.” The land around *Saraswatī* was very fertile and farming was easy. People had time to reflect on life and they developed the hymns of the Vedic literature that have been the source of Hindu faith.

The River *Saraswatī* became the source of food as well as of inspiration. Poets wrote about her and treated her as a Mother. They offered their prayers praising the river. The poetic literature gradually turned to describe her as the Universal Mother who takes care of life. Our origin might be coming from the distant stars, but our living is nurtured by the Mother. River *Saraswatī* became a symbol of faith and she was conceived as the ever-lasting mother for all living objects. The iconic concept of *Saraswatī* sitting on a swan in a pond with a book, *veena* and prayer beads in her hands has origin from such imagination.

As India became more philosophical, the thinkers conceived of more potent feminine energy than simple food and knowledge. They conceived that the entire universe operates with a feminine energy that they called *shakti* (শক্তি). The sun may have light, but it is the *shakti* that brings the light to earth. I may have life, but it is the *shakti* in me that would enable me to receive sun’s light. The concept developed that the universe is non-functional if there is no *shakti*. In such case there must be a remote *shakti* which would awaken the universe to function. They called it *Parāshakti* (পরশক্তি) which we worship as *Mā Kālī* (মা কালী). As she awakens the universe, she also can put it into sleep. Her doings are unknown to us. We survive through *Mā Kālī*’s blessings.

When we operate in the world with *Mā Kālī*’s blessings we need food, family and happiness. Larger forces like wars, aggressions, fire, earthquakes, volcanos, hurricanes, tsunamis etc. can come and destroy us. The universal mother transforms herself into *Mā Lakṣmī* (মা লক্ষ্মী) to rescue us from these disasters. *Mā Lakṣmī* is a *shakti*, that is the protector of life in the universe. She fights on our behalf when our abilities are much smaller against the calamities we might face. She nurtures the entire universe. She protects us in situations where the fault is not ours.

Finally, the poets conceived of a third *shakti* that we use every day. This *shakti* is the earlier river we spoke about. I must know how to use the river, I must know how to cultivate my land, I must know how

to speak; I must know what is good for me! The *shakti* that gives me intellect was given the name Mā Saraswatī (মা সরস্বতী). Like a river, Mā Saraswatī is never hesitant in her giving. But she knows that knowledge is obtained only by studying hard to gain it. She likes people who have industry and who have patience. She is the entire source of intellect in our life. The intelligence in our brains and the strength in our muscles are caused by her *shakti*. She expects us to be sincere in developing our intelligence or practicing to develop our muscles. She knows that good thoughts live in pure minds, so she expects us to be pure in our mind. Dress simply, but dress clean. Be pleasant in your manners, let your voice be sweet. Let you sing a melody to your waiting friend. She plays her *veena* for her swan in the quiet of the pond. Her conceived image is an example of this purity.

In the nature of life, Mā Saraswatī is our defense in our everyday struggle. We have to go places, do our studies, win competitions, pass tests, make a living, be friendly to people, fight against people who are bad to us, understand nature, make discoveries, cultivate expertise in arts, music and dance, excel in our physical form and health, and finally excel in everything we do! All is done by the grace of Mā Saraswatī. The thought is that all our success is contained in our communication. If one thing we ask Mā Saraswatī to give, it is the purity in our speech. Let our words be clear and be expressed from our heart. Let us not hide behind statements that we do not mean. Mā Saraswatī is called Vak Devī (বাক দেবী), the Goddess of Speech. Once our speech is in control, our life would get its discipline. Let our voice be sweet and soft. Let it please humans, animals, birds and other living beings. Let Mā Saraswatī help us. Let us pray!

*sarasvati mahābhāge vidye kamalalocane |
vidyārūpe viśālākṣi vidyāṁ dehi namo'stu te ||*

*সরস্বতি মহাভাগে বিদ্যে কমললোচনে |
বিদ্যারূপে বিশালাক্ষি বিদ্যাং দেহি নমোহস্ততে ||*

*O' Ma Saraswati, O' Blessed One, O' Knowledge Resource, O' Beauty with Lotus Eyes!
O' Embodiment of Knowledge, the Wide-Eyed One! Please give knowledge! Let prayers ring for you!*

Bijoy Misra
Boston, MA

* * *