

Maa Brahmacharini — The second manifestation of Maa Durga

Maa Brahmacharini is the second manifestation of Maa Durga who is worshipped on the second day of Navratra. Here word "Brahm" refers to "Tapa". So Brahmacharini means Tapa Charini - The one who performs Tapa or penance. It is said that the "Vedas", "Tatva" and "Tapa" are synonyms of word "Brahm". The form of Brahmacharini is tremendously effulgent and extremely majestic.

Brahmacharini

She holds a rosary in her right hand and Kamandalu in her left. She personifies love and loyalty. Mata Bhrmacharini is store-house of knowledge and wisdom. Rudraksha is her most adorned ornament. When she was incarnated as the daughter of Himalaya, then influenced by the instructions of Devrishi Narada, she practiced very hard penances in order to obtain Lord Shiva as her divine consort. Due to her unearthly penances she was termed as Brahmacharini. She spent one thousand years, only on fruits and beet-roots. One hundred years she spent only by eating leafy vegetables.

For a sufficient period of time observing complete fast she suffered tormenting of nature like torrential rains and scorching sun and biting cold, under the open sky. After such a difficult routine she lived only on dry Bilva Pattaras (leaves) fallen on the ground for three thousand years. She kept herself engrossed for twenty-four hours in worshipping Lord Shiva. After that she gave up eating even these dry leaves. For several thousand years she went on without any food and water. Because she gave up eating dry Bilva leaves so she was known to be Aparna as one of her epithets.

After the hardship of penance for several thousand years her body became extremely lean and thin. She was reduced to skeleton only. Her penance, sharpened as it was, caused great disturbance in all the three worlds. The whole universe was shaken. The Gods, the Rishis, the Siddhas, the Munis all eulogised her penance as an unprecedented virtuous action.

Ultimately Lord Brahma through an oracle addressed her and said to her in a very pleasant manner-O Goddess, so far nobody has ever practiced such an austere penance. Only you could have done it. This wonderful deed is being praised in all the four quarters. Your desire would be fulfilled. You will decidedly get Lord Shiva as your divine consort. Now stop your penance and go home. Your father would be shortly coming to take you back.

Legend states that in a previous birth she was Parvati Hemavati the daughter of Himvan. Once when she was busy in games with her friends, Naradaji came to see her and on reading her hand/palm-lines Narad Muni stated that, "You will get married with a naked-terrible 'Bhole Baba' who was with you in the form of Sati, the daughter of Daksh in previous birth. But now you have to perform penance for him."

There upon Parvati told her mother Menaka that she would marry none except Shambhu, otherwise she would remain unmarried. Saying this she went to observe penance. That is why her name is famous as Tapacharini - Brahmacharini. From that time her name Uma also became familiar. She is the one who practices devout austerity. Filled with bliss and happiness, she is the way to emancipation - Moksha. 'Brahma' here refers to the meditative aspect of Brahmacharini and is always depicted as pious women or Sannyasin.

She is also worshipped as Goddess Tara and is associated with the pious form of Goddess Shakti. She is believed to be that aspect of Mother Goddess, which was present in Sati and Goddess Parvati, when they both did intense austerities to get Lord Shiva as husband.

During the penance Mata Parvati did in order to gain Lord Shivji as her consort for thousands of yrs. without eating even leaves she was called 'Aparna'. Seeing her body her mother uttered U-ma and so she is also called 'Uma'.

Her worship increases sacrifice, good deeds and restraint in humans. Rudraksha is her most adorned ornament. In some regions, Goddess Chamunda Swarup of Durga is worshipped on the second day of Navratra.

In this form she is believed to have killed the demons Chanda and Munda. There is a famous Chamunda Mata Temple at Jodhpur.



NAVRATRA SPECIAL RECIPE

Palak Makhana



Ingredients

- 300 grams Spinach Leaves (Palak)
- 2 Tomatoes, diced
- 1 cup Lotus Seeds
- 1 teaspoon Cumin seeds
- 1 teaspoon Garam masala powder
- 1/2 teaspoon Red chilli powder
- 1/2 teaspoon Turmeric powder (Haldi)
- 1 Cinnamon Stick
- 2 tablespoon Milk
- 1 tablespoon Ghee
- Salt, to taste

Method:

We begin the Palak Makhana by washing the spinach thoroughly under running water. Drain the spinach and cook it in a pressure cooker with little bit of turmeric powder, cumin seeds and green chillies for 2 whistle.

Once the whistle is done let it cool down till the pressure comes out naturally. Blend it into paste and keep it aside.

Roast the makhana with ghee on a flat bottomed non-stick pan. Remove the makhana and in the same pan add little bit of oil and temper the cumin seeds and add the tomatoes. Cook until they loose all the liquids and add all the spice powders.

Add little water and simmer it for 2 minutes. Add the blended spinach mixture along with milk and simmer it for 3 minutes again.

Finally, add the makhana and bring it to a boil. You can serve your creamy Palak makhana with Ajwain puri or Jeera pulao to make a complete wholesome meal.

Maa Chandraghanta – Third form of Maa Durga

Maa Chandraghanta is one who establishes justice and wears crescent moon on her head. Because of this bell shaped mark of moon which is present on the forehead of Maa Chandraghanta, Maa is known as Chandraghanta. The colour of her body is golden; she rides on lion who describes "Dharma", possesses ten hands and three eyes, eight of Her hands display weapons while the remaining two are respectively in the Mudras of gestures of boon giving and stopping harm. Devi Maa is posed as to be ready for war. "Chandra Ghanta" meaning supreme bliss and knowledge, showering peace and serenity, like cool breeze in a moonlit night. By her blessings all the hindrances coming in way of a person are removed. Her pleasant looks clears all sorrows and sadness of her devotees. Her roaring voice alerts and makes the demons to tremble.

In Durga Pooja the third day of Navratra is very important in Navaratra. This day the mind of the Sadhak enters Manipura lakra. At this stage by the grace of Maa Chandraghanta he becomes capable of seeing unearthly and divine things. He smells the divine fragrance and many types of divine sound become audible to him. On this day and in this stage of discipline the Sadhak is required to be most careful.

By the grace of Mother Chandraghanta all sins of the Sadhak (striver) are burnt up and obstacles removed. Her worship is instantly fruitful. She is always in a gesture as if ready to proceed for the battlefield and thus she removes the difficulties of devotees very promptly. Her vehicle is lion and so her worshiper becomes valorous and fearless like a lion. The sound of her bell always protects her devotees from evil spirits. As soon as the Sadhak invokes her, her bell immediately becomes active and starts ringing to protect the devotee under her shelter.

Even though she keeps her always busy in killing and suppressing the wicked, yet to her devotees and worshipers she looks most serene, gentle and peaceful. A very good quality that is developed in her devotees who worship her, is-the striver cultivates bravery and fearlessness accompanied by serenity and humility. His face, eyes and the entire body gets effulgent. His voice becomes divinely sweet.

Wherever the devotee worshiper of mother Chandraghanta go, they disperse peace and blessings among the people. From the body of such a striver there always takes place an invisible radiation of divinely lighted atoms.

This divine action is beyond the perceiving capacity of physical eyes but the striver himself and his associates go on experiencing this fact every now and then. By purifying his mind, words, deeds and body through prescribed manner we should worship the mother Chandraghanta and take shelter under her feet. Through worshipping her we can get rid of all worldly sorrows, and attain the supreme goal spontaneously. We should always try to advance on the path of spiritual discipline by contemplating on the sacred image of the mother. Contemplating on her, we can attain the mundane perfection and ultimate good in the other world.

Devi Chandraghanta Maa is known and named Chandraghanta or Chandra-Khanda for the semi-circular moon (Chandra) which appears like a bell (Ghanta) on her forehead. Durga is also worshipped as Ashtamukhi and Shorashi in different parts of India on this day. She is depicted as having three eyes and ten hands holding with ten types of swords - weapons and arrows etc. and is seated on a lion (in some photos on a tiger) and shown as ready for going to war. She is the image of bravery.

The frightful sound of her bell terrifies all villains and demonic incarnations. She is also the giver of supreme knowledge and bliss and is depicted as having golden skin with the half circular moon on her forehead, glowing. Her ten hands hold..... She is worshipped in this form in Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu) India.



NAVRATRA SPECIAL RECIPE

Sabudana Pudding



Ingredients

- 1/2 cup sago
- 3/4 cup jaggery
- 3/4 cup palm sugar
- 2 1/2 cup coconut milk
- 1/2 cup pumpkin seeds
- 1/4 cup water
- For Garnishing
- dry rose petals as required

Method:

To prepare this amazing dessert, wash and soak sago or sabudana in 1 cup coconut milk for an hour to soften and bloom.

Take the soaked sago, remaining coconut milk and jaggery in a large saucepan, and put it over medium heat. Then reduce the heat and let it cook for 15 more minutes until the sabudana is cooked and it has all thickened. Keep stirring occasionally to prevent it from sticking to the bottom. If you wish to have it much thinner, add another cup of coconut milk. Pour into bowls or ramekins to the top and let cool in the refrigerator.

Toast the pumpkin seeds on a pan for 3-4 minutes and place it on a silicon mat.

Put some water and palm sugar in a saucepan and place it over medium flame, and stir slowly with a metal fork, until it gets melted and golden. Cook caramel without stirring, until it turns deep golden. Immediately spread it all over the pumpkin seeds placed on the silicon mat so it hardens. Let it cool down and set at room temperature for about 15 minutes. Then break shards of the praline and add that on the tapioca pudding. Garnish with dry rose petals and serve.

Chaitra Navratra Akhand Jyoti rules and its significance



Devotees of Maa Durga shall observe a nine-day-long fast to pay ode to the nine forms of the Mother Goddess during the auspicious occasion of Chaitra Navratra. This festival which celebrates feminine power commences on the Pratipada Tithi (first day) of Chaitra, Shukla Paksha (waxing phase of the Moon) and concludes with Ram Navami (the birth anniversary of Shri Rama). Interestingly, Chaitra Navratra concurs with the first day of the Hindu New Year as per the Lunar calendar. And during these nine days, devotees light the Akhand Jyoti or the eternal lamp to seek the Goddess' blessings and invite auspiciousness to their homes.

Significance of Akhand Jyoti

Devotees light the Akhand Jyoti (eternal lamp) and offer it to Mother Goddess Durga during Navratra. A Diya or Jyoti is a symbol of knowledge, purity, good luck, prosperity. In other words, it represents the absence of darkness/ignorance. And the lamp that remains ignited for several days is referred to as Akhand Jyoti.

Chaitra Navratra Akhand Jyoti Rules

Use brass/silver or earthen lamp. If you use an earthen lamp, make sure you keep it soaked in water overnight on the previous day to prevent it from absorbing all the oil while igniting.

Make an Ashtadal (a pattern of an eight-petalled lotus) with gulal or raw rice on a chowki/platform.

Fill the lamp with oil and use a good cotton wick (Use a long and thick baati/wick made of mauli so that it remains lighted until the end of the ninth day. Make use of pure sesame oil, mustard oil or ghee for fuelling the Akhand Jyoti).

You may then place the Akhand Jyoti in the centre of the Ashtadal and ignite it. (The lamp must be kept to the right of the Mother Goddess in the temple of your house). Keep the Akhand Jyoti away from the direction of the breeze/window/door etc. Ensure that it doesn't get stifled because of a sudden breeze. (You may use a glass box with an open top or a glass cylinder with an open-top to guard it against the breeze).

Keep checking the quantity of oil in the lamp. Gently add oil to the Akhand Jyoti so that the ignited end of the wick doesn't get dampened.

Over a few days, the wick starts accumulating carbon. Therefore, add a new wick to the Akhand Jyoti, light it, and then gently remove the ignited old wick's overburnt end with a slender stick.

A need may arise to follow this procedure to prevent the Akhand Jyoti from extinguishing before the vrat ends.

Mantras dedicated to each of the nine forms of Durga

Navratra, a festival dedicated to Goddess Durga is spread over nine days. The festival is celebrated four times a year but the Sharadiya (autumn - sometime in the months of September and October) and the Chaitra (spring - sometime in the months of March and April) are other most famous. The other two are Ashadha and Magha Gupta.

This year Chaitra Navratra begins on April 9th and culminates on April 17th.

Each of the nine days is dedicated to one of the nine forms of Durga. Each avatar of the Goddess has a specific significance, form and appearance. You can worship each of the nine Goddesses by chanting these simple Mantras this festive season. Check out specific mantras for each of the nine days:

Day 1 – Maa Shailputri



Om Devi Shailputriyai Namah
Day 2 – Maa Brahmacharini
Om Devi Brahmachariniyai Namah
Day 3 – Maa Chandraghanta
Om Devi Chandraghantayai Namah
Day 4 – Maa Kushmanda

Om Devi Kushmandayai Namah
Day 5 – Maa Skandamata
Om Devi Skandamatayai Namah
Day 6 – Maa Katyayani
Om Devi Katyayanayai Namah
Day 7 – Maa Kalratri
Om Devi Kalaratryai Namah
Day 8 – Maa Mahagauri
Om Devi Mahagaurayai Namah
Day 9 – Maa Siddhidatri
Om Devi Siddhidatryai Namah