

Maa Maha Gauri Pooja on Ashtami in Navratra Festival

Maa Durga is worshiped as Maa Mahagauri on Eighth Navratra. Mahagauri is the eighth form of Goddess Shakti. Her color is white. Whiteners is shown by shell, moon etc. Mahagauri means one clean and bright like a ray of lighting.

This is the form of Goddess Parvati when she did penance to get Lord Shiva as her husband. It is believed that due to the intense Tapas performed by her without moving caused soil and dust to collect on her body. Lord Shiva cleaned her with water from Ganga that's why she got whiteners as shine and got the name as Maha Gauri. Purity is depicted in this form of Durga.

The Goddess is in the form of eight-year old child with complexion as fair as a conch, moon and jasmine. Her clothes and ornaments are white and pure. She has three eyes and four arms. Her right upper hand is in the pose of allaying fear and right lower hand holds a trident in it. The left upper hand holds a tambourine and the lower one is in the pose of blessing. All sins of devotees are washed away due to her worship. Her power is unfailing and instantly fruitful.

The eighth day of Navratra Pooja has much importance. Durga Ashtami Puja is held in many parts of India. If a human worships after fast he/she gets fruits immediately. In front of Portrait of Goddess Mother as in front of Parvati Mata in Lord Shiva Temple one can worship Maa Maha Gauri. She appeared in the form of Maa Ambaji, Maa Kalika, Maa Bahucharaji etc.

She stays in devotees' heart and gives best fruits if we worship any form. Wearing red, saffron, yellow, white, pink color would be auspicious for the devotees on this day. Maa Mahagauri can be seen in a temple at Kankhal near pilgrim center Haridwar.

She is like an eight-year-old girl. She is intelligent and peaceful, possesses three eyes and four arms, and uses the bull as her vehicle. The Eighth swarup of Ma Durga is Ma "Maha Gauri." Her clothes and ornaments are white and clean. She rides on bull. The Ninth Swarup of Maa Durga is Mata Siddhidatri.

There are eight Siddhis or accomplishments, they are- Anima, Mahima, Garima, Laghima, Prapti, Prakamya, Ishitva and Vashitva. Maha Shakti gives all these Siddhis. It is said in 'Devipurana' that the Supreme God Shiv got all these Siddhis by worshipping Maha Shakti.

With her gratitude the half body of Shiv became of Goddess and there fore his name 'Ardhanarishvar' has become famous. This Swarup is depicted as seated on a lion and has four hands. She is the giver of all forms of accomplishments(Siddhis).

As per the Brahmapurana there are 18 types of achievements which are Anima, Mahima, Garima, Ladhima, Prapti, Prakamya, Ishitva, Vashitva, Sarvakaamaal, Saadhita, Sarvagyanatva, DurShravana, Parkaayapraveshan, VakaSiddhi, Kalpavrushtatva, Shrishti, Samharkaransaamarthiya, Amaratva, Sarvanyayakatva, Bhavana and Siddhi.

Seated upon a lotus, most commonly, is the possessor of different Siddhis /accomplishments to grant her devotees. Mata Siddhira's famous pilgrim centre, is located in Nanda Parvat in the Himalayas.



NAVRATRI SPECIAL RECIPE
Halwa Poori Chana



For Chana
Kala Chana (boiled) – 2cups, Oil – 3 tbsp, Cumin seeds – 1 tsp, Green chilli – 1no, Ginger chopped – 2tsp, Turmeric powder – ½ tsp, Chilli powder – 1 tsp, Salt, Ghee – 1 tsp

For poori
Wheat flour – 2 cups, Salt – ½ tsp, Water – as required, Oil

Syrup
Water – 3cups, Sugar – ¾ cup
Cardamom powder – ½ tsp

For Halwa
Ghee, Suji – 1cup, Dry fruits chopped – handful

Method:
For Halwa
In a pan mix together water, cardamom and sugar. Bring to a boil and stir till the sugar dissolves. Turn off the heat and keep aside. In a separate pan heat ghee and add suji. Cook on low heat till golden brown. Add the sugar syrup to the suji. Be careful as the suji will let off a lot of heat & steam when you add the syrup. Stir and cook the suji on medium heat till it thickens. Remove and serve hot.

For Poori
Mix together atta, salt and water and knead a stiff dough. Apply oil on top of the dough and give it rest for 10mins.
Divide into small pedas. Flatten them and roll out thin and deep fry in hot oil till it puffs and gets cooked. Remove and serve hot.

For Chana
In a pan heat oil and add cumin, green chilli slit, ginger and saute them. Add turmeric, coriander and chilli powder; stir and add a dash of water from the boiled chana. Now add chana along with all the water cook them till water evaporates and oil surfaces. At this stage add a dollop of ghee and mix. Remove and serve hot.

Why is Ashtami the most important day of Navratri?

Durga Puja, also known as Navratri, stands as one of India's major festivals, dedicated to celebrating the triumph of Goddess Durga over the formidable buffalo demon, Mahishasura. Among the various significant days of this festivity, Mahashtami, the eighth day, holds a place of profound sanctity and is observed with great reverence across the country. Elaborate ceremonies, encompassing special prayers and offerings, are meticulously conducted on this day to invoke the blessings of Goddess Maha Gauri, beseeching for strength, courage, and protection. It's a time when spiritual fervor soars, and communities come together to showcase the rich tapestry of their cultural and religious heritage during this nine-day extravaganza.

Durga Ashtami: History
In certain regions, it is believed that on this day, the goddess Chamunda emerged from Mother Durga's forehead and vanquished Chanda, Munda, and Raktabhija, who were the demons allied with Mahishasura. The Durga Puja rituals on Mahashtami include the veneration of the 64 Yoginis and the Ashta Shakti or Matrikas, which are the eight fierce forms of Goddess Durga. These Ashta Shakti, also known as the Eight Shaktis, hold various interpretations in different parts of India, but they all ultimately represent different manifestations of the powerful Divine Feminine energy.

The Ashta Shakti revered during Durga Puja are Brahmani, Maheswari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, Narasinghi, Indrani, and Chamunda.

Durga Ashtami: Rituals
On Mahashtami, nine small pots are conse-



Durga Navratri, but it is particularly emphasized on Mahashtami.

Significance of Ashtami Puja
Mahashtami holds profound significance within Hindu culture. It's believed to be the day when the energy and power of Goddess Durga peak, commemorating her fierce battle and ultimate victory over the buffalo demon, Mahishasura. Devotees pay homage to the goddess in her formidable warrior form on this day.

Conducting rituals and prayers on Mahashtami is seen as a means to invoke the strength, courage, and blessings of Goddess Durga, while seeking protection from malevolent forces and life's obstacles. Many choose to fast on this day and participate in special pujas, offering symbolic items such as flowers, fruits, and other sacred offerings to the deity.

Significance of the Number 108
The lighting of over 108 diyas or lamps symbolizes the arrival of light triumphing over darkness. Devotees also produce ulu dhoni, a loud-pitched sound made by rolling tongues, as a protective measure against negativity and the evil eye. Additionally, 108 lotus flowers are offered to Maa, symbolizing beauty and the essence of life. The number 108 bears immense significance as it corresponds to the 108 names of Durga Maa, and as such, it is woven into the intricate fabric of this sacred observance.

erated, and the nine forms of Durga, representing her various powers, are invoked into them. All nine manifestations of Goddess Durga are venerated during the Mahashtami Puja. Young unmarried girls, regarded as embodiments of Goddess Durga, are also worshipped on this day, a practice known as Kumari Puja. In many regions, Kumari Puja is observed throughout the nine days of

the 108 names of Durga Maa, and as such, it is woven into the intricate fabric of this sacred observance.



Devotees throng Bawe Wali Mata Temple on the auspicious occasion of Navratras, offering prayers and seeking blessings. (Pic by Ashok Anand)

