

Baudhik Yojana for Oct-Nov-Dec 2006
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Format	Topics for Oct	Page
Baudhik	The Tradition of Goddess Worship in Hindus	2
Charcha	KBRE – Analysis and What Next	4
Baudhik	What sustains Sangh	5
Baudhik	Budhism – PPT	

Geet: Chala Chala Purato ... 8

The Tradition of Goddess Worship in Hindus

Sri Sanatani Ma, the Eternal Goddess

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The Sun god Ra was having a bad day. He was so disgusted with the selfish, aggressive behavior of the demons wreaking havoc on Earth that he sent the lion-headed goddess Sekhmet to attack them. A massive bloodbath ensued as the wrathful goddess ripped these evil beings to pieces. Eventually Ra decided the demons must have learned their lesson, and tried to put an end to Sekhmet's rampage. But she was in such a frenzy, nothing could stop her.

Realizing something had to be done, Ra began sprinkling the ground with beer mixed with pomegranate juice. The bright red liquid looked like blood, and Sekhmet eagerly licked it up. She quickly became so intoxicated that she sat back and relaxed, and was instantly transformed back into the beautiful, benign goddess Hathor, her true form.

In ancient times this remarkable episode was commemorated annually in Egypt. During Sekhmet's festival, the Egyptians held a celebration that involved drinking beer mixed with pomegranate juice. Needless to say, for any anthropologist familiar with Hinduism, this is startling information. It appears the *Chandi*, in this unexpected form, was celebrated in Egypt too!

Perhaps we shouldn't be so surprised. At one point in history, the worship of Durga extended from Rome to Bengal. You may remember that a general from North Africa named Hannibal posed a serious threat to early Rome. At one point he led his army over the Alps to decimate the Roman legions. In 204 B.C.E. a delegation of Roman citizens visited the Oracle at Delphi, the most sacred temple in the Graeco-Roman world, to ask how they could save themselves from Hannibal. They were instructed to travel to Asia Minor to find a *murti* of the goddess Cybele, also known as Turka, and bring it back to Rome. They dutifully installed the goddess in Rome where she quickly gave them victory over the general from Carthage. This West Asian goddess served as the matron deity of Rome till the rise of Christianity.

Turka, or Magna Mater ("Great Mother") as the Romans called her, was usually shown sitting or standing alongside a lion. Roman images show her dressed in typical southern European garb, but if she had been wearing a sari you could hardly have distinguished her from Durga. Scholars admit that those few details about her worship that have survived, are virtually identical to Durga's tradition in northwestern India. (Early Roman priests called *flamens*, incidently, followed exactly the same purity laws brahmins do in India. As is well attested, the chief Roman deity Jupiter, pronounced *dyu-piter* in Old Latin, was none other than the Dyaus Pitar of the Rig Veda. Even the patron deity of the Roman army, Mithras, is related to Mitra of the Rig Veda.)

The surprises keep coming. No scholar today denies that there is a link between the Celtic people who dominated Britain, Ireland and France from 500 B.C.E. to 500 C.E., and the Aryans of India. The Celts used the same nakshatra-based calendar, followed a code of law virtually identical to the *Manu Smriti*, spoke a language related to Sanskrit, practiced the horse sacrifice, and called their priests Druids, meaning “knowers of the tree” (Sanskrit *druh vid*), referring specifically to the *asvattha* or cosmic tree.

Fascinatingly, some of the earliest Celts called themselves Tuatha de Danaan, “the children of Dana.” Dana was the primordial Mother Goddess of the ancient northern Europeans. You can still have her darshan today: step outside on a cloudless night and note the constellation Cassiopeia (the large “W” at the summit of the sky). It was supposed to represent her breasts, and the Milky Way the milk that oozed from them. (Note also that in Sanskrit *kashi piyusha* means “breast milk of light.”)

The Puranas also speak of a people called the Danavas, “the children of Danu,” Danu was the wife of the sage Kashyapa (so she would have been called Kashyapi—“Cassiopeia”?) and the daughter of Diti. The Danavas were apparently uncouth tribes who harassed the Hindus in the post-Vedic period. Is there a possibility these are our earliest references to the Tuatha de Danaan, long before they made their way to the British Isles? Archeologists have discovered the well-preserved remains of a light skinned, red-haired people who wove plaid cloth in the area north of India, where they flourished as far back as at least 2000 B.C.E. More than one expert has speculated these mysterious people may indeed have been related to the Celts. If this identification is correct, these people worshipped Danu/Dana, a goddess the Hindus recognized as related through the Vedic sage Kashyapa to their own divine pantheon.

A Vanished Tradition

Sad to say, in Europe no one worships Danu any more. The Celtic colleges have been closed, the numerous precious manuscripts of the Druids burned. The Romans’ statues of Magna Mater have been smashed, and in Muslim Egypt today, Sekhmet, Hathor and even the great Isis herself survive only as dimming memories.

Only in India has the tradition of the Great Goddess, Maha Devi, been lovingly preserved. On the subcontinent Lakshmi is still revered, and Lalita is honored still today. There Sarasvati has even eclipsed her husband Brahma in the affections of the people. In fact, the subcontinent itself is the very body of the Goddess, Bharata Mata.

As I wander through the streets of India, and visit Hindu temples here in the United States, I see how devotedly and unselfconsciously Hindus worship the Divine Mother. It makes me profoundly sad: I realize how much we Westerners lost when the Mother of the Universe was banished from the Judeo-Christian-Islamic religions. The lack of respect for the feminine aspect of the divine has created a terrible distortion in the Western and Middle Eastern traditions, it seems to me. There is a lack of tolerance for one another, and a contempt for nature that might perhaps have been avoided if we had continued to honor the Mother.

In 1992 when I was exploring Bengal, I stumbled across a Bipatarini temple in a small village sheltered within lush forest. The *baba* there had had a vision of Ma Durga during his meditation, and commissioned an artist to create a *murti* embodying the vision. The statue was over nineteen feet tall, overwhelming the pilgrim with its power and grandeur. Durga calmly, the hint of a smile on her face, was piercing the heart of Mahesha with her trident. My knees nearly gave way as I looked at the image. I could feel Ma attacking everything in me that was less than divine too! It was a tremendous act of divine love, but it was painful nonetheless, a child being disciplined by her mother. The sages say that demons are destroyed by God or Goddess are immediately released to heaven. That is the Mother's purpose in sending difficulties into our lives: to transform us from *asuras* into *devas* and *devis*, illumined beings.

The *Chandi* tells us Mahesha, however, kept changing form in a fruitless effort to avoid Durga's grace. He shape-shifted from a water buffalo to a man to a lion to an elephant, and back into a buffalo. This symbolism confused me for years till I noted the symbols on several ancient Indus Valley seals. These four creatures represented the astronomical colures of that era: the buffalo is our Taurus, the man our Aquarius, the lion our Leo, and the elephant our Scorpio. (To the ancients the upturned tail of the celestial scorpion looked like the upraised trunk of an elephant. Antares, the eye of the elephant, gazed directly at Aldebaran, the eye of the bull, 180 degrees across from itself on the ecliptic.) This episode in the *Chandi* tells us that for the sake of her devotees, the Mother destroys the wheel of *samsara*, slaying time and space (represented by the ever spinning wheel of the ecliptic) to grant us freedom from the bondage of karma and the ultimate release of *moksha*.

I love the Hindu tradition and hope you won't mind if I borrow your goddesses for my puja, since as a child of the West I have lost my own. May Maha Devi bless Hindus everywhere, who have so lovingly kept her tradition alive, and continue now as from the beginning to bow devotedly at the feet of the Mother of the Universe.

Linda Johnsen, M.S. is author of eight books related to the Sanatana Dharma, including *The Living Goddess: Reclaiming the Tradition of the Mother of the Universe* and *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Hinduism*.

KBRE – Analysis and What Next

- Analyze the KBRE in the group and list out the suggestive points.
- List out different perspectives of KBRE felt and seen by swayamsevaks.
- Collect the ideas on what should be conducted next?
- Karyawah/mukhya shikshak to send the points to the balagokulam team.

What sustains Sangh

Apart from the points elaborated below, please refer to the booklet by Swargiya Dattopant Thengadiji with the same title. Soft copy is available at <http://www.hindubooks.org/dynamic/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=1595>

Aatmeeyata

Manya Aabaji Thatte ji* had one word answer – “**Aatmeeyata**” (Per him, the bond, the affection one swayamsevak has had for other flourished, sustained, served the purpose of Sangh).

There was a 8 year old girl Radha who lived in a village down the hill. She had one year old brother Sudama. There was a temple of Shiva up the hill. Almost everyday, Radha would take a fist full of grains, lift little Sudama and rush up the hill, to the temple. On reaching there, she would scatter grains on the floor and then clank the bell often, jump and clap. Soon, there would be many sparrows and other tiny birds to take those grains. They would spend about an hour jumping, laughing with joys, clapping, playing, watching the birds. One day an elderly neighbor said to Radha, “Aren’t you tired doing that everyday ? You can just play with him in the backyard, too. It won’t be so tiring.” She, at once replied, “ Tired ? He is my own little brother. He is so excited and happy there up the hill. It won’t be the same in the backyard.”.

An elderly neighbor sees the same task as tiring affair. However, the bond of “Aatmeeyata” encourages little 8 year old girl make her little brother happy everyday, no matter what.

Conception and Integrity

If a toe is hurt, tears roll down the eyes. It is this “**Ekatmata**” (oneness) that makes a living body. Likewise, if that spirit runs through the hearts of folks in the society, Sangh work would be but, natural. What led to the birth of Sangh sustains it. Dr Hedgewar deeply felt the need of reviving this bonding in Hindu society, that has had been dormant (for many reasons). He did every possible task to express that deep feeling. That led to Sangh. His life and legacy is all about need for integration and reawakening of this spirit in every heart. That he began with 5 Hindu kids. The seed sown by him, soon started growing up. We see the same spirit unfolds and spreads through life and works of Shri Guruji. He thought about most of the facets of society that needed attention. The emotional appeal was supported by his intellectual inquiry, spiritual quotient and social applications. He developed this bonding with thousands and thousands of swayamsevaks. He talked to, visited, wrote countless (probably average over a dozen everyday) letters to guide, cheer up, compliment, appreciate, understand, support swayamsevaks and others, too. In other words, he strived to boost up EQ, MQ, SQ and IQ as well with his knowledge, efforts and own life.

What’s Sangh, afterall ? Understanding it’s nature sheds light on why it continues to grow even several decades later after the demise of it’s founder.

Sangh is a vision. It's a kind of means, not the goal. It's expected to support cohesive virtuous forces developing, integrating for a better individuals, families and consequently the society.

Most of the powerful organizations rise and fall within a few decades. They are often centered around the charisma of the founder or the leader. They often exist as a movement to address a critical issue. They tend to decline soon after the issue is addressed or no longer relevant. They are often characterized by impacted by reactionary approach striving for immediate visible results. They are impacted by character and integrity of it's members.

It's interesting to know how is that in Sangh.

The sangh was formed to unite, organize the Hindu. It has been an effort to address the conditions of divided Hindu. It has had been working in ways, to address the propensity to separate, be indifferent, aloof from others due to circumstances or other personal shortcomings. We still have a long way to go before we can say this is no longer relevant. While this sounds grim, it leaves a scope for growth for right sangh spirit as equal and opposite force need to rise that would unite / integrate, otherwise ineffective or trifle, yet virtuous forces as our people. (sanghshaktih kaliyuge). For the balance, this would happen some or the other way. The choice with individual is which force to be a part of. (may refer to conversation between Krishna and Arjuna)

Though coined / founded and inspired by Doctorji, what's important is Bhagava Dhwaj. The respect and commitment to that is still relevant.

Nature of means

Shakha offers a platform to understand, brainstorm, mingle, develop bonds. Sewa work is an application to extend the benefits to the needy. It's voluntary phenomenon that fills up the vacuum. An hour spent in shakha, what we learn in Shakha is supposed to positively influence our rest of the time at work, at home or elsewhere in the society. The main objective of Shakha is character building. Afterall, the strength of a chain is the strength of it's weakest link. The focus on **character building** ensure strong karyakartas. The efforts are made to make a shakha an interesting, involving, flexible yet disciplined regular get-together.

Everyone is considered an integral part of it. It's incomplete without one swaymsevak being not there. Aabaji Thatte would ask if an absence of a swyamsevak is felt. He would ask mukhya shikshak or gatanayak if he misses someone who missed shakha. Did he make any efforts to find / understand and address the difficulty a swayamsevak might be facing ? Does he make an effort to console, care to see a hurt swayamsevak ? While most people thought the number of swayamsevaks and variety of activities as the parameter of evaluating a shakha, the bond and affinity swayamsevaks develop has been unseen strengthening force that keeps us together and keeps up the momentum.

The bond was just not developed with those who come to shakha but with those as well we don't or can't. The expectation has always been that we associate every virtuous force

and deal with every adverse force. “ayogya purushah nasti, yojakah tatra durlabha” . None is inappropriate or incapable or incompetent, but the assigned role.

There lived a man called Hari in a small village where he did not have tap water. He had a well several yards away from his house. He would get water from the well for his needs, with the two big earthen pots balanced on his shoulder with a strong stick. Someday, one of the pots developed a crack in it. Due to this, most of the water in it would leak leaving the pot nearly empty by the time Hari went in house. Several days passed by, yet Hari did not replace the pot. Curious neighbor once laughed at him and asked him why he didn't get a new one to replace the cracked pot. He replied, “the cracked pot still serves the great purpose. I sow the seeds along the sidewalk and let water from cracked pot drip. Look at the vegetation and flowers along the way, without an extra effort.”

In Shakha or in Sewa, an opportunity and responsibility is offered to everyone joining it. One is supposed to contribute “yatharuchi, yathashakti”. That leaves scope for everyone to join us. The characteristics like “Right Task for right person, Realistic and measurable targets of each individual and shakha” also help.

Qualities knowingly or unknowingly earned

By being an active and sincere part of this, swayamsevak tends to develop, increasingly, understanding, patience, persistence, perseverance, continuity, integrity, compassion, discipline, dedication etc. It's this strong character that helps one perform, contribute the best everywhere. It happened in the past and expected to happen today, too. This has been earning a good will in social psyche, that in turn weakening the opposing forces and helping the cause of Sangh.

Focus on internal cohesion

By and large, Sangh spent it's time, energy and resource in character building rather than draining it trying to shut every barking dog. It believed firmly that a strong, interdependent, mutually supporting integration of virtuous people of high moral and good character will naturally lead to solutions to solve issues, resolve conflicts and address criticism.

(* Abaji Thatte – Served for over 2 decades as personal doctor to Shri Guruji assisting him in all his tasks while he toured with him.

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Dattopant Thengadi – Guide, philosopher, founder of many visibly big organizations like Bharatiya Majdoor Sangh, Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, Sanskar Bharati, Sahakar, Udyog Bharati

Bhaurao Deoras – founder of Vidya Bharati that runs thousands of schools in Bharat

Eknath Ranade – Key person in making Viveknand Kendra and Vivekanand Rock memorial a reality. Also had served as sarkaryavah.

Balasaheb Deoras – 3rd Sarasanghchhalak of RSS)

Geet

चल चल पुरतो निधेहि चरणम् |
सदैव पुरतो निधेहि चरणम् ||

chala chala purato nidhehi charaNam |
sadaiva purato nidhehi charaNam ||

गिरिशिखरे तव निज निकेतनम्
समारोहणम् विनैव यानम्
आत्मबलम् केवलम् साधनम् ||

giri-shikhare tava nija nikanam
samaarohanam vinaiva yaanam
aatma-balam kevalam saadhanam ||

पथि पाषाणाः विषमाः प्रखराः
तिर्यचोपि च परितो घोराः
सुदुष्करम् खलु यद्यपि गमनम् ||

pathi pashaanaah vishamaah prakharaah
tiryanchopi cha parito ghoraah
sudushkaram khalu yadyapi gamanam ||

प्रयत्न साध्या लोके नीतिः
समाजधारिणि कुशला बुद्धिः
तस्माद् साधय सत्त्वरक्षणम्

prayatna saadhyaa loke neetih
samaaja-dhaarini kushalaa buddhih
tasmaad saadhaya sattva-rakshanam

जहीहि भीतिम् हृदि भज शक्तिम्
देहि देहि रे भगवति भक्तिम्
कुरु कुरु सततम् ध्येय स्मरणम् ||

jaheehi bheetim hridi bhaja shaktim
dehi dehi re bhagavati bhaktim
kuru kuru satatam dhyeya-smaraNam ||

Meaning

March forward with firm feet.

Your goal(home) is the the top of the mountain
You need to climb the mountain without any aids
Your will power alone is your aid.

The path is full of sharp rocks and wild animals
Inspite of all the difficulties
Continue to march forward

With effort everything is possible
With right knowledge and skills society can be organized
Thus protecting the goodness in the society
Continue to march forward

Win over the fear, worship strength in your heart
With complete devotion to God
Constantly reflecting upon our divine mission
Continue to march forward