

Mother Sarasvati: Goddess of Learning and Knowledge
by Pujya Gurudev Swami Chinmayananda

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It is a Vedic tradition that in India , from the very dawn of history, we have been respecting women to such an extent that our greatest scriptures are today called “Mother” Shruti. Thus, the Goddess of Learning is represented in Hinduism as a feminine deity and She is called Shri Sarasvati—She who gives the essence (*sāra*) of our own self (*sva*).

The Mother of Learning is represented as sitting on a lotus because the Upanishads declare that a teacher who can teach Reality must be himself well-established in the experience of the Real. Sitting upon the supreme Reality, the Mother holds the sacred scriptures in one hand. Her arm with the Lord’s conch and arm with the mace represent the mind and intellect, respectively. She holds the veena and sings the enchanting melody of Truth as contained in the book of Upanishads (Shruti), as experienced by Her in Her own bosom.

Shrotriyam (one who knows the philosophy of the Upanishads well) and *Brahma-nishṭham* (one who is well-established in the subjective experience of the Self) are the two qualities of a true teacher. In short, She represents not merely a man of Realization in samadhi, but a true guru, who plays his knowledge upon the heartstrings of his disciples. She gathers the instrument, tunes up its strings properly, and starts singing. Soon, the wafting music enchants others to approach Her feet to learn this music and to produce the same celestial melody by themselves.

Mother Sarasvati is wedded to the creator (Brahmā-ji) which is most appropriate indeed, inasmuch as the Creator would be certainly helpless if He did not have the knowledge of what He had to create. All creative endeavors must spring forth, and can sustain themselves, only with knowledge of what to create and how to create.

This is why, in the nine days of Devi Puja, we have in the first three days invoking Shri Kali (Durga), the second set of three days invoking Shri Lakshmi, and the concluding three days invoking Goddess Sarasvati. Kali is the mighty power of destruction invoked so that the seeker can destroy all his negative tendencies in himself. Thereafter, Lakshmi, Goddess of Wealth, is invoked—to cultivate the nobler emotions and

sentiments in him, the inner wealth of his heart. One who has thus accomplished the cleansing of one's inner personality alone can, with sure success, worship Shri Sarasvati, the Goddess of Learning.

The study of the Upanishads is futile and cannot bring about any spiritual awakening in one who has not made his heart pure. One must weed out the false values of desire, lust, and passion, and instead cultivate love, charity, self-control, and the other virtues. When one has thus invoked Kali and adored Lakshmi, one is fit to enter the temple of Shri Sarasvati, the Goddess of Learning.

When such a mature student, properly prepared, comes to listen to the songs of Mother Sarasvati, he not only understands Her divine music (scriptures), but also comes to comprehend and experience that the Self in him is the Self everywhere. To experience this eternal Oneness is the acme of peace and perfection—the state of Godhood, the realm of pure Consciousness. Reaching this state divine, the Upanishads declare that “there is no return.” There is no chance to fall back into the earlier misconceptions arising from the body-mind-intellect identifications.

This state of perfect Freedom from the little ego and the rediscovery of the supreme Self—the large, divine Personality within us—is called liberation (moksha). This—the supreme reward for a life of intelligent self-control (*tapas*), deep study (*svādhyāya*), continuous reflection (*mananam*), and steady meditation (*nīdīdhyāsanam*)—is symbolized in the lotus that the Lady of Learning holds in her fourth hand.

The divine Book is in Her hand of *chit* (memory). Her veena is in Her hands of *manah* (mind) and *buddhi* (intellect). And Her lotus is in Her hand of *ahankāra*. When the truth of the Upanishads are brought to our constant awareness, and when our mind and intellect, through silent self-discussion between themselves (*mananam*), sing the song of the Self in our reflections, the wisdom born of experience (lotus) floods our being, lifting the dreary darkness of ignorance.

The kindly Lady of Wisdom is Mother Shruti, Shri Sarasvati. She leads us to the end of our slavery, to the end of the devil in us, to the passions and lusts. This is symbolized in the burning of the effigy of the lower nature on the tenth day (*Dassehra*) of Durga Puja. This day is also called the Day-of-Enlightenment (*Vidyārambha*, the start or awakening of Knowledge). May the blessings of Sarasvati be ever on our hearts, lips, and pens.