Navarātri and Kojāgarī Pūrṇimā

By Smt. Sādhanā Kaikiṇī, Beṅgal̄ūru

Navarātri is the much-awaited festival that celebrates the Goddess with much fanfare and grandeur. The Māghī Navarātri (in February), the Chaitra Navarātri (in March/April), the Ās̲h̲ād̲h̲a Navarātri (in August) and the Shāradīya Navarātri (in October/November) are the four main Navarātri-s. Yet, it is the one happening in the Āshwija Māsa - the Shāradīya Navarātri - that is most significant and popular. Every Hindu month has an Adhis̲h̲t̲h̲āna Devatā. The Universal Mother is the Adhis̲h̲t̲h̲ātrī Devī of the Āshwija Māsa. Thus, during the Shukla Paks̲h̲a of this month, the Devī is specially welcomed all over the world.

Shāradīya Navarātri starts on the first day of the Āshwija Māsa - the Shukla Pratipadā and culminates on the tenth day which is celebrated as Vijayādashamī or Dussehrā. Every day of those 9 days finds the Devī Shakti celebrated in a different form, recognised by a different name.

On the first day, She comes as Shailaputrī, the beautiful daughter of Himavāna, the king of the mountains. The second day finds Her as Brahmachāriṇī, a form that is steeped in tapasyā in Her bid to woo the Ascetic Shiva. On the third day, She appears with a bell-shaped crown bearing the crescent moon and is thus called Chandraghaṇṭā. On the fourth day Her form is Kūs̲h̲māṇḍā, where She is depicted as the Creator of the entire Universe. The fifth day (Lalitā Pañchamī) is sacred indeed, and She is shown as the mother of Subrahmaṇya or Kārtikeya in the form of the attractive Skandamātā. The sixth day is dedicated to Devī Saraswatī and the Goddess is worshipped as Kātyāyanī, the daughter of Sage Kātyāyana. On the seventh day, Her fearsome form of Kālarātri is worshipped where Her serene form changes into this Dark Goddess to destroy evil. As̲h̲ṭamī, the eighth day is called Durgās̲h̲ṭamī and the Goddess returns to being the gentle and compassionate Mahāgaurī. The ninth and the penultimate day of the Navarātri celebration sees Her as Siddhidātrī, the wish-fulfilling Goddess.

After being worshipped for nava-rātri - nine nights by devotees all over the world, the tenth special day is called Vijayādashamī. It is also celebrated as Dussehrā - the day when Bhagawān Shrī Rām killed Rāvaṇa and began His Digvijaya Yātrā back to Ayodhyā.

In our own Shrī Chitrāpur Mat̲h̲ in Shirālī, the Navarātri festival carries a unique flavour. Quite a few Chitrāpur Sāraswat families have their deities in the Mat̲h̲ and they congregate to celebrate the festival of the Divine Mother. The larger vigraha-s are brought out into a small pandal called the Devī Maṇṭapa that makes it possible for the devotees to offer their worship. Draped in sarees of different colours, wearing traditional jewellery and bedecked with fragrant flowers, the array of Goddesses adds to the Divinity of our Mat̲h̲ during Navarātri.

The Navarātri Utsava begins at our Mat̲h̲ with a Sāmūhika Prārthanā to Lord Bhavānīshaṅkar and the Ghaṭa Sthāpanā. Dhānya is ceremoniously planted, that becomes aṅkurita over the next ten days, and is then distributed as prasāda. Nitya Pūjā at the Devī Maṇṭapa, Durgānamaskāra, and Devī Pūjana performed by H.H. Swāmījī every night are regular features of the Utsava. The Chaṇḍikā Homa, an elaborate yajña to propitiate the Devī is a special sevā.

Another lovable feature of Navarātri is the Kumārikā Pūjā. Girls from the age of 3 to 7 are invited for the ceremony as Kumārikā-s. Mothers dress up their daughters lovingly for it is believed that the Devī Herself manifests in each of them during the Pūjana. Married women worship the little girls, washing their feet, doing an āratī and showering them with gifts. In our Mat̲h̲, H.H. Swāmījī begins this much-loved ritual to the sheer joy of th Kumārikā-s.

The tenth day is the culmination of the Navarātri Utsava and is rightly called Vijayādashamī, and commemorates Her victory over Bhanḍāsura, the demon who tormented the Devā-s. This is also the Ordination Day of our 10th Mat̲h̲ādhipati, H.H. Shrīmat Parijñānāshram Swāmījī III. On Vijayādashamī pūjana is offered to the Shamī Vṛks̲h̲a. It is considered an extremely auspicious day by all Chitrāpur Sāraswat-s. The Ghaṭa Visarjana marks the end of Navarātri.

The Shukla Chaturdashī is an extension of the upāsana of the Goddess as we worship Devī Laks̲h̲mī as Mā Bhūmi. As Dhānya Laks̲h̲mī, a Pūjā is offered in the paddy fields to the Devī. Nava Dhānya (9 types of grain) are brought into the Mat̲h̲ as an offering.

On the Pūrṇimā, we perform Dhanalaks̲h̲mī Pūjana. This very special full moon day has a special and significant name - Kojāgarī Pūrṇimā! It is believed that staying awake through the night brings rich dividends spiritually. Devī Laks̲h̲mī is believed to descend from Her Heavenly Abode and walks along the path created by the radiant moonbeams as She asks -" Ko jāgarti” meaning "Who is awake?" The one who is awake, is specially blessed! The Devī Pūjana offered on behalf of the Samāja by our Revered Swāmījī carries on late into the night. Badām Milk that has been exposed to the moon rays is served as Prasāda.

The festivities conclude with all age groups participating in a vigorous and joyous garbā dance to lively bhajana-s. The garbā concludes with the bhajana-s sung by H.H. Swāmījī. Soon after, the entire gathering enters into divine silence as His Holiness guides them into meditation.

Thus, the fortnight-long celebration of the Devī draws to a close. The Navarātri Utsava truly represents an UT- sava: an upliftment in the spiritual energy of every one who worships HER.