

**"FEMALE REPRESENTATION OF DIVINE AS
ROLE MODEL FOR HINDU WOMAN"
(DESCRIPTIVE & ANALYTICAL STUDY)**



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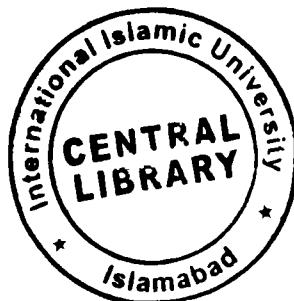
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(DESCRIPTIVE & ANALYTICAL STUDY)



Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
MS. in Islamic Studies
With specialization in Comparative study of Religions
At the Faculty of Islamic Studies (Usuluddin)
International Islamic Study Islamabad

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FORWARDING SHEET

The thesis entitled "FEMALE REPRESENTATION OF DIVINE AS
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Submitted by Neelam Shad in partial fulfilment of MS. in Islamic Studies with Specialization in Comparative Study of Religions has been completed under my supervision and guidance. I am satisfied with the quality of student's research work and allow her to submit this thesis for further process of as per IIUI rules and regulations.

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my parents.

For their endless love, support and encouragement

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I would firstly like to express my gratefulness to Allah Almighty for giving me strength and opportunity to complete my research work and countless blessings on His last Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alaihi wa aalihi Wasallam as being a great teacher who is forever a pinnacle of knowledge and character for humanity.

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ABSTRACT

According to Hinduism the absolute reality is manifested in both masculine and feminine form. Each prominent Hindu god has divine consort goddess. The great Hindu trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are dominating along with their spouse as Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati. Hindu sacred scriptures provide the richest source about mythologies, characteristics and worship of goddesses. It is not possible to write about all Hindu goddesses, so I will discuss the chief and well-known Hindu goddesses as Mahadevi, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Parvati, Sita, Radha, Durga and Kali. I will also explain that how Hindu females consider them as role model in the light of Hindu sacred literature. This research is of descriptive and analytical nature regarding female representation of divine as role model for Hindu women. It comprises of five chapters.

The first chapter is meant to introduce the primary concept of female representation of divine in Hinduism. It also includes the origin of Hindu goddesses, concept of avatar and supremacy of Mahadevi.

The second chapter of the study deals with the descriptive and analytical description of Hindu Devi trinity. Hindu Devi trinity consists of three prominent goddesses as Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati. These goddesses are consort of three main gods of Hinduism as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. This chapter also provides the detail account on the origin, mythologies, worship, festivals and characteristics of the goddesses.

The third chapter briefly describes Hindu famous goddess of love like Sita and Radha. These two goddesses are famous because of their love for spouse

as Rama and Krishna. Sita was very loyal toward her husband and faced many crises for her husband. On the other hand, Radha fell in love with Krishna while she was married to someone else.

The fourth chapter is about fierce or warrior goddesses like Durga and Kali. These two are famous because of their power to destroy the evil and are consort of Shiva the god of destruction. This chapter also provides detail account information on the origin, mythologies, worship, festivals and characteristics of the goddesses.

The fifth chapter briefly describes the female aspect of divinity as role model for Hindu woman and I will deal this chapter analytically and critically. In Hindu tradition every goddess has diverse characteristics. Some goddesses are very kind and motherly caring nature; on the other hand, some of them are deprived from this quality. So they are different from one another. Several goddesses are great fighter, fierce, independent and physically powerful; whereas others are married, have relation with male deities and domestic in nature. Certain goddesses are related with wild civilization; others are personification of culture, music, art and well known for education. I will explore that how and why Hindu sources considered them role model for Hindu women.

The last chapter is about Islamic perspective on concept of God. Islam has totally opposite stance regarding divine, it is strictly monotheistic and against pantheistic and henotheistic tendencies like Hinduism. Allah is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent alone without any consort. Last chapter also contain critical analysis and conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Hindu mythology shares the divine reality with idea of gods and goddesses. The godlike “Ardhanarishvara” is described as “a half man and half woman”. Ardhanarishvara symbolises that the divine reality constitutes of both a male and a female and both are equally important. Every prominent god in Hindu theology has his consort goddess. The great Hindu trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are dominating along with their spouses as Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati. The sacred scriptures of Hinduism provide the richest source of mythology, its characteristics and the worships of goddesses.

Myths regarding Hindu Gods and Goddesses indicate that Gods treated their wives with care, respect and love. Hinduism makes it mandatory for his followers to fulfil the rights of their wives like their Gods. Myths about Goddesses signify their lives and different characteristics which are a great source of motivation and power for Hindu women. According to Hindu belief women can get their rights and improve their status by modelling their goddesses.

It is said that all the mythological Goddesses are different from each other due to diverse characteristics. As Goddess Sita, Lakshmi and Parvati are considered as the role models with good qualities. They are portrayed as the role models for Hindu women for example a good wife and a mother. Durga and Kali are different from other goddesses. They both are warrior goddesses and Hindus consider them as a role models and guides for combating new challenges and difficult situation of modern life.

Importance of the Topic

In Hinduism two parallel but opposite practices are present. Hindu people give minor status to their woman as wife, mother and sister. Contrary to this, they have a female aspect of divinity known as goddess, to whom they give a lot of respect and very high status like gods and worship them. Although there are several books on the history of goddesses in India but, there is still need for a research work on goddesses in Hindu tradition. This study not only focuses upon the description of these goddesses but, also describes their roles in different aspects of life. It also highlights the importance of each of the goddesses within Hinduism and impact of these goddesses on Hindu women being a role model for them. The basic aim of research is to trace out the common features of goddesses and women in a Hindu society.

Problem Statement

This dissertation explores the various aspects of female representation of divine as role model for Hindu woman:

What is the origin of female aspect of divinity in Hinduism? What is the origin, characteristics, worship and festivals of goddesses in context of Hindu sacred scriptures? Are all goddesses having equal importance or some? If some, then what are the fundamental causes? Are Hindu goddesses role models for Hindu women? If so, in which way they are models for them? How Can Hindu female become an ideal woman by following the Hindu goddesses?

Methodology of Research

I have used descriptive and analytical methodology in my research work. First I used descriptive method to explain the concept of female representation of divinity in Hinduism. Then I described the origin, characteristics, mythologies, festivals and worship of Hindu goddesses according to their scriptures. My primary focus was on chief or prominent Hindu goddesses which have been often observed as the consort of Hindu gods.

Subsequently, I used analytical and critical method to deal with this phenomenon. The aim of this research is to highlight that how Hindu goddesses are role model for Hindu women. I have explained that how different goddesses are role model for Hindu women by indicating the characteristic of every goddess individually. I have also highlighted that how a Hindu woman can become an ideal wife, mother, teacher, spiritual partner warrior, owner of prosperity and educator through goddesses.

Literature Review

The previous research works in this topic are many, but their perspectives differ as well. Writers have explained the characteristics, mythology and origin of goddesses but except few there is no book giving the impact of goddesses on Hindu women. Some important works related to my topic are as following.

There is abundant of Hindu sacred scripture present regarding my research work. Some of them are related to my study include: “*Sri Mad Devi Bhagavatam*” translated by Swami Vijnananda, this sacred literature is devoted to Hindu Goddesses or the scripture of Saktism. It describes the Devi as the

foundation of the universe and the mother of the world. Sri Mad Devi Bhagavatam also deals with the topics like holy places, spiritual knowledge, personal and social ethics. I used this book as the primary source of my research work while explaining the origin of female representation of divine in Hinduism like Mahadevi.

I have also consulted *The Puranas* compiled by the Dharmic Scriptures Team; many puranas are related to my research work like Markandeya, Vishnu, Brahmavaivaratta, Matsya Purana etc. These puranas are enriched with the information about the origin of goddesses, their characteristics, roles and worships. I tried to explain all goddesses like Saraswati, Lakshmi, Parvati, Radha, Sita and Durga in the light of these Puranas.

Sacred Books of the East by F Max Muller, has fifty volumes regaraboutding the sacred scriptures of Eastern religions. Its 21 volumes deal with Vedic Brahmanic system like Bhagavadgita, Satapatha Brahmana, the Institutes of Vishnu, laws of Manu, and Vedanta-Sutras etc. These are the most important texts of Hinduism which describe importance of goddesses, their mythologies, functions, family life, and worship and so on. Thus these volumes provided detaile information about the essence of Hindu gods and goddess.

Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition by David R Kinsley, this book represent a rich source of information regarding Hindu goddesses and Hinduism in general. It describes that each goddess in Hinduism is an independent deity and has her own temple and worshipers. I used this book to describe the worship and festivals of goddesses and their importance in Hindu society.

CHAPTER 1

FEMALE REPRESENTATION OF DIVINE IN

HINDUISM

CHAPTER 1

1. FEMALE REPRESENTATION OF DIVINE IN HINDUISM

The Hindu traditions are distinctively contented with the idea that the supreme Reality, while transcendent and formless, is absolutely capable of manifesting in both mundane and divine forms.¹

In Hinduism the cosmic hierarchy, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva (The great Hindu trinity) are dominating along with their consorts Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Parvati. Behind them stands Mahadevi, the Great Goddess, who gives them the power to perform their cosmic functions and vitalizes all the other deities. The active energy of each male god is the goddesses' energy or their Shakti that activates the functions of the male god. Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are always helped by their consort goddess. Brahma the god of creation he brings the worlds into manifestation with the help of his Shakti, Saraswati, who is the power behind creative speech. Vishnu is preserver or the protector; he sustains and protects the worlds by his Shakti, Lakshmi who is the energy of nourishment and wealth. Shiva manages the practice of yoga and dissolves structures. His power is personified in strong, warrior goddesses like Parvati, Kali and Durga.²

¹ Vidya Dehejia and Thomas B. Coburn, *Devi: The Great Goddess* (USA: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 1999), 29.

² Bulbul Sharma, *The Book of Devi* (India: Penguin Books, 2010), 9.

In various iconic demonstrations of Hinduism the divine, Ardhanarishvara, is drawn as half man and half woman which depicts Hindu god has two forms as male and female or he is without any gender. Lord Vishnu and many other male deities sometimes incarnate as women to save Dharma. Today in Vaishnava tradition God is worshipped as Vishnu together with Lakshmi. Even Rama and Sita are worshiped in the form of a couple and considered as the incarnation of Vishnu and Lakshmi. According to Hindu sources it is mandatory for Hindus to pay equivalent respect and importance to both male and female representation of divine. It may be prescribe through this quotation. As sage Parashar said:

“O Maitreya! Always a companion of Vishnu and the Mother of this Universe,

Devi Lakshmi is eternal. Vishnu is omnipresent, so is she.

If she is speech, Vishnu is the object of description.

Vishnu is the Law, and she is the Policy.

Lord Vishnu is knowledge, she is intelligence.

He is Dharma, She is good karma.

If Vishnu is the Creator, She is the Creation (that abides eternally with Him).

He is the mountain, she is Earth.

He is the virtue of contentment, she is the very satisfying.

If Lord Vishnu is desire, she is the object of desire.

He is the sacred Vedic ritual; she is the priestly fee”³

³ Diptanu Dey, *Hinduism-A Critical Review* (USA: Lulu. 2013), 79.

1.1. Concept of Avatar in Hinduism

The doctrine of Avatar is regarded as one of the core principles of Hinduism. The word avatar in the Sanskrit means descent and is mostly translated into English as incarnation. It refers to a purposeful descent of the divine to earth generally for the purpose of defending or reestablishing righteousness, cosmic order and dharma. It refers to a purposeful descent of the divine to earth generally for the purpose of defending or reestablishing righteousness, cosmic order and dharma. The well known of Hindu scripture “Bhagavad-Gita” consists of seven hundred texts. In these texts Krishna promises that he would appear in this world when there is religious ignorance, evil and decline of righteousness. According to Hinduism, the number of avatars is theoretically infinite because supreme reality can take on numerous forms.⁴

The phenomenon of an avatar is a seminal concept in certain forms of Hinduism as Vaishnavism. In Shaktism avatars are also observed, this sect is dedicated to the worship of the Goddess Devi. Devi Bhagavata Purana is one of the most important works in Shaktism which explains the descent of Devi avatars to defend the righteous and punish the wicked.⁵

1.2. Maha Devi as the Origin of Hindu Goddesses

In Hinduism there is close connection of women with divine revelation as the four hundred and seven sages who were connected with the revelation of Rig Veda, twenty one

⁴ Bhagavad-Gita 4.7.

⁵ *The Srimad Devi Bhagawatam*, p840.

were women.⁶ According to some account the actual number of women was twenty eight. In Atharvaveda a very invocatory mantra talks about divinity as a 'Devi' the Goddess, who fulfills all desires and hopes. The entire fourteen books of Atharvaveda are attributed to women dealing with domestic, marriage and many other issues.⁷

There is an inclination in many myths, texts, and rituals to include all the goddesses under one great goddess. This goddess has many names, but her most worldwide title is simply Mahadevi (great goddess) or Devi (goddess).⁸

The Devi Bhagavata Purana, the famous scripture about goddesses considers Mahadevi as the supreme reality. She is believed to be the source of all human beings and ultimate cause of this material world. According to sacred scripture, she is the ruler and mother of all worldly beings. It is considered that she created Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and ordered them to complete their cosmic duties. She is described as the source of all divine manifestations whether male or female and she is ultimate reality itself.⁹

1.3. Mythological functions and Characteristics

The central role of Devi in mythology is that of queen and creator of the cosmos. When she is depicted in her own form she is generally portrayed as a beautiful young woman in royal dress surrounded by thousands of followers and seated on a throne in the highest paradise. As cosmic queen she performs the three most important cosmic functions of creation, preservation, and destruction. When she blinks her eyes the world is said to be

⁶ Vishal Agarwal, *Women in Hindu Dharma-a Tribute*, (India: University of Minnesota, 2004), p2.

⁷ Vidya Dehejia and Thomas B. Coburn, *Devi: The Great Goddess*, (USA: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 1999), p54.

⁸ Nagendra Kr. Singh, *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2000), Vol.42, 1834-1857.

⁹ *The Srimad Devi Bhagawatam* 840-46.

destroyed and when she opens her eyes the world is suppose to be recreated. Many Hindu mythological texts attribute the three cosmic functions to Brahma as creater, Visnu as preserver and Siva as destructor. But actually the male gods only act according to the Devi's command and at her will.¹⁰

According to some myths, the great male gods are impotent and helpless if Devi withdraws her power so they are completely dependent on her for their power and strength. The Devi-Bhagavatapurana also makes it obvious that the traditional heavenly residences of these deities are far below and inferior to the Devi's heaven. According to Lalita Sahasranama the ten forms of Visnu actually spring from Devi's ten fingernails. In the Saundaryalahari the whole world is shaped from a little speck of dust from the Devi's foot. Then Brahma takes that speck and Vishnu preserves it.¹¹

Myths indicate that great male gods have central roles to play, but eventually they are the servants of the Devi and perform according to her command. According to Hindu belief Mahadevi has created them and she has created innumerable copies of each of them. They all act as her cosmic agent. The male deities are often pictured as functioning at Devi's command. She herself is also frequently portrayed as taking an active job in the cosmic processes. She always remains attentive to the world, particularly to her devotees and protects her creatures.¹²

Her concern, love and care are that of a mother for her children. As she performs many roles but her preferred role as preserver and protector of the cosmos is that of the

¹⁰ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, (California: University of California Press, 1988) ,130-133.

¹¹ Lynn Foulston and Stuart Abbott, *Hindu Goddesses: Beliefs and Practices*, (United States of America: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), 194-195.

¹² Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India*, (England:Hard Press, 1885),183-185.

warrior as her epithets highlight this aspect of her character. The Lalita-Sahasranama calls her Raksasaghni (she who kill demons), Mahavirendravarada (she who grants boons to great warriors), Caturangabalesvari (ruler of armies), Viraradhy (she who is worshiped by warriors) and Viramata (mother of warriors). The most famous mythological exploit of Devi's defeat the demons that tried to snatch the world and transferred the gods from their positions as rulers of the cosmos. To a great extent Devi's most common or favorite form is Durga. Devi is without attributes in her ultimate essence, but she assumes a great multiplicity of forms in order to uphold cosmic order.¹³

As Durga, the Mahadevi is usually described as an aggressive, unconquerable warrior who descends into the world to fight evil of various kinds especially demons. Durga (Mahadevi) is like god Vishnu who oversees the stability of the world.¹⁴ He descends in different forms to combat the danger while the world is threatened by demons. The Mahadevi is also said to have appropriate forms to combat the cosmic threats.¹⁵

Traditionally it is said that Visnu have ten avatars. He takes ten different forms to combat ten different demons in every universal cycle. The Mahadevi, also have ten forms which are called Dasamahavidyas means the ten great insights or scenes. These ten forms include numerous famous Hindu goddesses. Hindu goddesses are varying manifestations of Devi.¹⁶

The auspicious aspect of Devi is manifest in several of the goddesses. She displays positive roles fertility, cultural creativity, wifely duty, material abundance, the protection and establishment of dharmic order. She at a time plays many roles or better to say that

¹³ Bulbul Sharma, *The Book of Devi* (India: Penguin Books, 2010), 160.

¹⁴ Gavin D Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (New York: Cambridge University press, 1996), p175.

¹⁵ Nagendra Kr. Singh, *Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2000), Vol.45, 2800-2810.

¹⁶ *The Srimad Devi Bhagawatam* 841-48.

many roles are connected with the Devi's auspicious forms for example, her role as the embodiment of female beauty and the exciter of desire, her role as the source of food and nourishment and her role as granter of wisdom, learning, and liberation.¹⁷

In the Aryastava she is named as mukti (liberation), she who is the knowledge of Brahman and she who speaks of the knowledge of Brahman. In the Mahabharata a hymn addressed to the Devi in which she is called mother of the Vedas as well as liberation and knowledge of Brahman. She is also called destroyer of ignorance.¹⁸

In the Lalitasahasranama she is called great intelligence and she who is wisdom itself, she who is great and auspicious knowledge, she who removes bonds, she who releases creatures from bondage, she who bestows heaven and liberation, she who removes all misfortune and who gives salvation. Devi as the granter of wisdom and learning assumes the role and displays the characteristics of Sarasvati. She is connected with civilization and sensible knowledge. In this aspect she is a goddess associated with culture. Her association with wisdom, knowledge and liberation depicts that the Devi transcends the world she creates.¹⁹ So many texts are in the praise of her physical appearance from head to toe. In Saundaryalahari almost 4288 texts tell the detail of her physical beauty. The Lalitasahasranama also describes her every feature in detail.

Another distinctive characteristic of Devi is her association with food and nourishment. In Lalitasahasranama Devi is the one who gives food and nourishment.²⁰

¹⁷ The *Srimad Devi Bhagavatam* 841-48.

¹⁸ Constance A. Jones and James D. Ryan, *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, (USA:Infobase Publishing, 2006) 387.

¹⁹ Lynn Foulston and Stuart Abbott, *Hindu Goddesses: Beliefs and Practices* (United States of America: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), p12.

²⁰ John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, *Devi: Goddesses of India* (India: Motilal Banarsi Dass Publ, 1998), 188.

Brahmans approached the Devi in desperation and begged her for relief. The Devi kindly emerged in a form having many eyes. She began to weep seeing the pitiful condition of her creatures and she cried for nine nights which caused heavy rains to fall on the earth from her eyes. So life once again returned to the earth in abundance, the rivers again flowed, the lakes and ponds were filled. In this manifestation she is attributed with many names as (Sakambhari) she who bestows vegetables, (Sataksi) she who has one hundred eyes, and (Annapurna) she who is full of food.²¹

²¹ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (California:University of California Press, 1988), 137-139.

CHAPTER 2

HINDU DEVI TRINITY

CHAPTER 2

HINDU DEVI TRINITY

In Hindu mythology there are three main goddesses who are known as Hindu Devi trinity. In sunsikrit term Devi trinity is known as Devi Trimurti. Devi is word for goddess and Trimurti means trinity. One of them is Saraswati; she is goddess of knowledge, creative arts and music.²² She is one of the few goddesses who remain significant in later Hinduism. She is the mother of Veda's and also famous as goddess of speech. Usually she is portrayed in white dress and rides a peacock and sometimes swan while playing music on a veena. In the Vedas she is associated with the mighty River. She is praised both to cleanse and to fertilize as a river goddess. To perform well in examinations Students worship Saraswati as she is goddess of knowledge. Many mantras related to Saraswati are read by students to improve memory, power and concentration in studies. She is also known by many different names.

Second one is Lakshmi, the most popular goddesses and known as the goddess of wealth and prosperity.²³ She is the wife of the god Vishnu. Lakshmi is commonly represented as a good looking woman with four arms, there are usually one, or sometimes

²² Bulbul Sharma, *The Book of Devi* (India: Penguin Books, 2010), 61.

²³ Constantina Rhodes, *Invoking Lakshmi*, (USA: SUNY Press, 2010), 50-53.

two elephants behind her, anointing her with water. Sometimes she is depicted standing on a lotus flower but often she is shown sitting beneath Vishnu, massaging his feet.²⁴

According to Hindu belief Lakshmi was the daughter of the sage Bhrigu and when the gods were sent into exile she took shelter in the milky ocean and she was reborn during the Churning of the Ocean. When she was reborn and gods saw Lakshmi, they all fell in love with her beauty then her hand was given to Vishnu, whom Lakshmi herself preferred. Hindus worship Lakshmi and consider her that she is the goddess of wealth light, beauty, good fortune, she signifies love and grace. Hindu believed that Lakshmi also re born Whenever Vishnu incarnated as being his consort each time. For example, she was Radha to Krishna and Sita to Rama.²⁵

Third is Parvati, the well known goddess in the Hindu mythology. She is the mother goddess in Hinduism and divine consort of Lord Shiva. She is the gentle and nurturing aspect of Shakti. In Hindu literature Parvati is presented as being beautiful, as a daughter of the Great Himalayan Mountains as a mediator in the conflicts of heaven and as the divine sister of Goddess Ganga. To express her each aspect over 100 names have been given to her in regional Hindu mythologies of India. She forms the trinity of Hindu goddesses along Lakshmi and Saraswati. According to Hindu belief Parvati is the second consort of Lord Shiva and daughter of mountain king Parvat and mother named Mena. She is the mother of Ganesha and Kartikeya who are Hindu deities. Being the consort of Shiva she is a central deity in Saivism. She is the power of Siva. Parvati has hardly any independent story unlike

²⁴ Mircea Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (London: Macmillan publishers, 1987), 52-58.

²⁵ *The Srimad Devi Bhagawatam* 959-969

Lakshmi. Even her mythological deeds, identity and nature are defined in the context of her consort Shiva.²⁶

2.1. Goddess Saraswati

The name Saraswati is a mixture of two Words ‘Saras’ meaning flow and ‘Wati’ meaning a woman. Flow represents the flow of knowledge, arts and music. In Hinduism, Saraswati represents intelligence, consciousness, cosmic knowledge, creativity, education. In the ancient scriptures we have the mythological river Saraswati along with other sacred rivers.²⁷ As in sacred books of the east Saraswati is also goddess of speech.²⁸

2.1.1. Description

Saraswati's female form demonstrates the great respect and recognition that women held in the Vedic tradition. She stands for tolerance, as well as moral and spiritual strength. She can bear up violence and pain. She is as beautiful as Brahman called her in sacred books of the east:

“O beautiful one! As you came personally to speak to me, therefore, O Saraswati! You shall never speak after hard exhalations”.²⁹

Her four arms denote four sides suggesting her omnipresence she sits on the white lotus supporting veena with one hand and playing it with another, a mala or rosary of

²⁶ Shiva Maha Purana.p207-209.

²⁷ Thomas E. Donaldson, *Tantra and Śākta Art of Orissa*, (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2002), Vol 2,286.

²⁸ Satapatha Brahmana, 74.

²⁹ The Bhagavadgita, p264

crystals held in third and Vedas in fourth hand. Besides denoting four sides her four arms also represent the four aspects of human personality in learning namely mind (mana), intellect (buddhi), alertness (chitta), and ego (ahankara). She hands no weapon to prove that knowledge is all powerful she is always seated next to a stream clean flowing river. The idol of Saraswati itself is the origination of most pure and peaceful sensations. The white color associated with goddess represents absolute truth and purity of true knowledge. The scarcity of jewels suggests her preference of knowledge over the worldly things as gold and money.³⁰

Appearance of Goddess Saraswati is described in Brahma Purana as:

“Wearer of the white clothes giver of the power to reflect the essence of Brahma, supreme power, holder of veena (Lyre), book, beaded rosary, the benevolent Goddess is seated on a lotus. I respectfully pray the Goddess who gives us knowledge.”³¹

Saraswati is depicted in pictures as sitting on Lotus. Hindu believes that lotus is a symbol of evolution. She is presenting Vedas to her devotees telling that she is the composer of Vedas and all the knowledge with letters. Placing it in the left hand means that application and acquisition of knowledge should be controlled by the softer side of the human personality. Saraswati is a representation of the science of life, or the Vedanta, which attempts to unravel the essentials of human existence and the universe concealed within. She gives the essence of one's self. She provides her followers the divine and spiritual knowledge of their lives.

³⁰ Bhagwant Sahai, *Iconography of Minor Hindu and Buddhist Deities*, (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1975), 141.

³¹ Brahma Purana, 29.

The rosary symbolizes concentration or the meditative process involved in the acquisition of knowledge. In fact there is a special type of veena called Saraswati veena. The Saraswati veena is considered as one of the oldest instruments known to the mankind. Veena represents the eternal cosmic music. The Veena points to the collective sound of all our thoughts and actions as it is manifest as music in the cosmic universe. Placing the left hand on top of the veena closer to the heart shows that knowledge should be used for the good of others. Placing the right hand on the bottom shows that negative knowledge should be kept under control.³²

The Saraswati River is one of the chief Rig Vedic Rivers mentioned in ancient Hindu texts. There are different hymns in the Rig Veda mentions the Saraswati between the Yamuna in the east and the Sutlej in the west. According to some hymns of Rig Veda goddess Saraswati was originally a personification of this river, but later developed an independent identity and meaning. The sacred water flowing in the river represents purity of thought and action and her close association with the river Saraswati. By mounting the peacock the goddess tells to overcome arrogance and pride of knowledge and skills.³³

2.1.2. Birth of Saraswati

There are different stories about her birth. According to Matsya-Purana, there was chaos all over the world in the beginning of creation. Brahma was very worried that how to bring order and create this world. While thinking over all these problems he heard the voice that you can create the world through the help of knowledge.

³² Lynn Foulston and Stuart Abbott, *Hindu Goddesses: Beliefs and Practice*, (USA: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), 29.

³³ B K Chaturvedi and Suresh Narian Mathur, *The Diamond Book of Hindu Gods and Goddesses*, (New Delhi: Diamond pocket books, 2005), 25.

2.1.3. Different names of Saraswati

Saraswati is also known by many different names which are as following:

“One of her name is Savitri “Savitri of all branches of learning; Pragapati of deities; whatever is prescribed in this world, all that is called Savitri.”³⁷ Kamadhenu (the wish cow), Bijagarbha (womb of the seed or womb of the elements of speech), Vacdevi (divinity of speech), Vinapani (the one that holds the vina), Sarada (giver of essence), Satarupa (with seven forms), Vageshvari (goddess of speech) and Gayatri (song or hymn). Bharati (eloquence), Mahavidya (transcendent knowledge), Vac (speech; as the text in sacred books of the east depicts:”

“Saraswati in truth is speech”.³⁸

One of her name is cow as mentioned in sacred books of the east:

“Saraswati come hither! For the cow is Ida, and the cow is Aditi, and the cow is saraswati.”³⁹

2.1.4. Saraswati Vandana and Bhajan

Saraswati vandana is a beautiful hymn composed in Sanskrit which depicts Saraswati in a beautiful manner. It is believed that every intellectual work should begin with

³⁷ The Bhagavadgita, 353

³⁸ Satapatha Brahmana, 418.

³⁹ Ibid 474.

Saraswati vandana and the blessings of the goddess. For the protection and removal of all the lethargy, a boon is asked by the devotees of this goddess of knowledge at the end.⁴⁰

“Oh Goddess Saraswati, I prostate onto your feet, you taking the form of desires fulfills all the wishes. When I begin gathering knowledge please help me attain success and accomplishment always”.⁴¹

Believers also chant this bhajhan for Goddess Saraswati:

“Yaa kundendu tushaar haar dhavalaa,
Yaa shubr vastra vritaa
Yaa Veena vardand mandit karaa,
Yaa shvet padm-aasnaa
Yaa Brahma aachyut Shankar prabhriti bhir,
Devai sadaa vanditaa
Saa maam paatu Saraswatce bhagwatee,
Ni-h shesh jaadyaapahaa”

“Our obeisance to Saraswatee Maa, the Goddess of learning, who is fair like the kund flower, the moon and the snow; who is dressed in white with the precious Veena in her hand; who is ever adored by Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Protect me Mother, by removing the dullness of my intellect completely.”⁴²

⁴⁰ *Prayers*, (Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America) http://sanskritdocuments.org/doc_z_misc_general/prayers.pdf (accessed september 27, 2014).

⁴¹ Pandit Chunelall Narine, *Bhakti Sangeet* (New York: Bhakti Sangeet, 2006), 93.

⁴² Saraswati, <http://pbfloridahomes.com/bhajans/saraswattie/> (accessed July 3, 2015).

2.1.5. Sararswati in the light of Mythology

a. Sarasvati as Divine River of Remedial and Fertility

Sarasvati has her initial stages in the Rig Veda, which is highlighted in the oldest of the four Vedas, and was composed between 1300 and 1000 BC in Northwest India. In this album of hymns goddess is linked with a particular river, the Sarasvati, which has since vanished but which become visible here as the chief of the divine rivers. The river is frequently addressed as an immense and mighty goddess because it is not an ordinary river, it creates in heaven and flows down to earth, giving it fertility and blessing it.⁴³

It is said to permeate the three realms of earth, atmosphere and the heavens in one mantra. The associations then, are with productiveness and bounty and requests are made to Sarasvati for, immortality, wealth, nourishment and children. She is also considered as a great mother.⁴⁴

b. Sarasvati and Ritual Drink

Sarasvati is associated with water, not only with rain and clouds which but also with water in general and the sacred drink Soma which pervades all creation. Soma is the divinized sacrificial plant. According to Louis Renou:

⁴³ Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, (Calcutta: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 496-7.

⁴⁴ Wendy Doniger, *The Rig Veda*, (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 81.

"It is the essence of the waters and ranks as a god of the waters. it is the amrita itself, the drink of immortality, and the remedy par excellence which stimulates the flow of words, produces a sort of ecstasy and confers all the delights." ⁴⁵

c. The Three Sarasvatis

In the Rig Veda she is associated with Ila and Mahi as one of the three goddesses who are present at the time of sacrifice. They "give birth to bliss and stumble not" (into pitfalls and error):

"May Bharati⁴⁶ come speeding to our sacrifice and Ila hither awakening our consciousness (or knowledge or perceptions) in human wise, and Saraswati, - three goddesses sit on this blissful seat, doing well the Work." ⁴⁷

Sarasvati sometimes appears in a group of three goddesses for example in the Atharva Veda charms for ants as a remedy against poison declare:

"The gods have given, the sun has given, the earth has given, the three Sarasvatis, of one mind, have given this poison-destroying (remedy)".⁴⁸

d. The Sacred Word and Sarasvati

In Rig Veda with all the associations of water, nourishment, fertility, cleansing, wealth and prosperity, she is also described as one who inspires songs, right thinking and an

⁴⁵ Louis Renou and Philip Spratt, *Vedic India*, (Delhi: Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1971), p 96.

⁴⁶ Another name for Mahi, with whom Sarasvati is identified in later Puranic worship

⁴⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Secret of the Veda*, (India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1988), 85.

⁴⁸ *Atharva-Veda*

awareness of the truth.⁴⁹ Sri Aurobindo explains the important verses of the hymn in this way:

"May purify Saraswati with all the plenitude of her forms of plenty...and illumines entirely all the thoughts."⁵⁰

David Kinsley mentions "In Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition" that in all three Indian religions rivers signify the idea of crossing from a place of ignorance to one of enlightenment. So river is a place of transition where the seeker, on his spiritual quest, is purified by the waters, dies to his old self and is reborn. According to him it can be linked with Sarasvati.⁵¹

e. Vac and Sarasvati

Sarasvati became identified with Vac; the goddess of speech from the time of Brahmanas (composed around 900 BCE). Vac or Speech is of major importance in the Rig Veda. A hymn spoken by her is particularly beautiful:

"I move with the Rudras, with the Vasus...Beyond the sky, beyond this earth, so much have I become in my greatness."⁵²

The same hymn also states that speech does not expose herself to everyone because one who listens does not hear it and another who looked did not see speech. It reveals itself to someone as a loving wife, beautifully dressed, reveals her body to her husband.⁵³

⁴⁹ Rig-Veda, 323

⁵⁰ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (California :University of California Press, 1988)p10.

⁵¹ Ibid 61

⁵² Wendy Doniger, *The Rig Veda*, (London: Penguin Books, 2005),p 62-63.

⁵³ Ibid 61

f. Transcendence and Purity

Hindu believes that Sarasvati gives birth to works of art rather than to children and in the stories about her, her sexual aspect is not highlighted. She is said to have tried to escape from Brahma when he wanted to have sexual intercourse with her. She is not, therefore, a domestic goddess. Basically whiteness and the swan and lotus are typically associated with her. The theme here is of transcendence and purity. She is not like other goddesses who do domestic works and have kids rather Saraswati is goddess of knowledge.

River symbolism has a great significance in Hindu religion; Saraswati is associated with transcendence. In a sense she has evolved from having a purifying and cleansing function like water. Kinsley notes:

“Sarasvati born aloft or in the air by her swan suggests the realm of artistic achievement that has enabled human beings to transcend the restrictions of the physical world and to create beauty and perfection. As lotus is a symbol of transcendence and the swan is also a symbol of transcendence and perfection in Hindu thought.”⁵⁴

2.1.6. Saraswati worship and festivals

Saraswati worship is celebrated with great excitement in various parts of India.

a. Saraswati Worship in Eastern India

⁵⁴ David R. Kinsley, *The Goddesses' Mirror: Visions of the Divine from East and West*, (USA: Albany press 1989), p95-97.

Saraswati Puja is celebrated in the Magha month (January-February) in the eastern part of India, West Bengal, Bihar and Assam. It is performed with Vasant Panchami, for example the 5th day of the bright fortnight of the lunar month of Magha. It is believed that on this day the goddess was born that's why it is also known as Saraswati Day. The most significant aspect of this day is that children are taught their first words on this day, for it is considered an auspicious day to begin how to read and write. Educational institutions organize special prayer for Saraswati. People place books near the Goddess' statue or picture and worship the Goddess. Book reading is not allowed on this day. The color yellow is given special importance on Vasant Panchami. On this day, Saraswati is dressed in yellow garments and worshipped. People prefer to wear yellow clothes on this holy day. Sweetmeats of yellowish hue are distributed among relations and friends. The goddess is also offered honey on this day. Some people feed Brahmins, some perform Pitri-Tarpan (ancestor worship) and many worship Kamadeva, the god of love on this day. ⁵⁵

Saintly people and individuals inclined toward spiritual progress attach great importance to the worship of goddess Saraswati. Particularly educated people and men of principle worship goddess Saraswati for spiritual enlightenment. In their opinion, there can be no comparison between the king and the learned or the spiritually advanced. The king is honored within his kingdom, whereas the learned is respected or worshipped throughout the world.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Gods and Goddesses*, (America: Courier Dover, 2003), 100-102.

⁵⁶ W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Gods and Goddesses*, (America: Courier Dover, 2003), 100-102.

b. Ritual worship of Saraswati in the Bengali Tradition

The worship of saraswati is performed in a specific and different way. The place where the idol is kept for the puja (worship) is decorated with rangoli (powder of different colors) and the design of a fish is considered auspicious. A flat low stool made of wood is covered with yellow cloth and the idol is placed on it, facing east. The idol is in white, symbolizing purity. The sari of the deity is white or yellow dyed in the natural dye made by flowers. Then, the face of the idol remains covered till the priest begins chanting the mantras at the commencement of the puja. Students place their books in front of the goddess. The offering is done in batches of devotees who repeat mantras after the priest. Nobody touches books on that day. This signifies that the goddess is blessing the books placed in front of her that day.⁵⁷

The offerings to the goddess are mainly fruits and most significant are berries from the wild plum tree. Sweets must include puffed rice and yogurt. Family members bathe early and dress in yellow attire and assemble in front of the Goddess. A haven puja is done by the priest using special wood, ghee, joss sticks and incense. There absence of a burnt smell signifies the success of the puja. A diya or lamp is also kept lit along with the Prasad.⁵⁸

c. Saraswati Puja in South India

Saraswati Puja is conducted during the Navaratri in the southern states of India. No studies or any performance of arts is carried out; as it is considered that the she is blessing

⁵⁷ Constance A. Jones and James D. Ryan, *Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, (USA:Infobase Publishing, 2006) 388.

⁵⁸ David R. Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine*, (Delhi Banarsidass Publ, 1998), 98.

the books and the instruments. On the ninth day of Navaratri, books and all musical instruments are ceremoniously kept in front of the Goddess Saraswati early at dawn and worshipped with special prayers. The festival concludes on the tenth day of Navaratri and the Goddess is worshipped again before the books and the musical instruments are removed.⁵⁹

2.2. Goddess Lakshmi

Lakshmi is one of the most prominent goddess in Hindu mythology. She is the consort of Vishnu the second god of Hindu trinity and she is famous as the goddess of wealth or prosperity. She is mostly portrayed as good looking woman and having four arms. Sometimes two elephants are shown behind her for rubbing with water or some time there is only one elephant performing this duty to anoint her. Sometimes she is shown as standing on a lotus flower but often she is shown sitting beneath Vishnu, massaging his feet.

According to one mythology from Srimad Devi Bhagawatm goddess Lakshmi took shelter in the milky ocean and was reborn through the mixing of the ocean during the tie when gods were sent into exile. When she was reborn through milky ocean she was very pretty all gods fell in love with her due to her beauty. She preferred Vishnu so she became the wife of Vishnu. Whenever Vishnu reborn, Lakshmi also born with him as being his spouse. For example, she was reborn in the form of Radha for Krishna and Sita for Rama.⁶⁰

Hindus have firm belief that Lakshmi has many qualities like she is the goddess of wealth, good fortune, prosperity and beauty. She has loving nature as she is portrayed while

⁵⁹ W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Gods and Goddesses*, (America: Courier Dover, 2003), 107.

⁶⁰ *The Srimad Devi Bhagawatam* 959-969

massaging the feet of her husband Vishnu. She has also the quality of preserver as being the wife of Vishnu the god of preserver. It shows that goddess Lakshmi has more qualities than any other Hindu goddess. She is worshipped by Hindus to gain her mercy, success, good fortune, wealth and prosperity.

2.2.1. Origin of Lakshmi

Lakshmi is represented as the power of multiplicity and the goddess of fortune as she is consort of Vishnu, the preserver god.⁶¹ As Vedas describes the goddess of wealth, prosperity and good fortune as “Sri” or “Lakshmi”. Though there is possibility to believe that Sri and Lakshmi are two deities, but in fact, their descriptions are so identical that they represent one and the same deity. According to some scholars ‘Sri’ was a pre Vedic deity and later she fused with Lakshmi.⁶²

The origin of Lakshmi is written in Puranas, first of all she was the daughter of Khyati and her father was sage Bhrgu. In her second incarnation she was born out of the ocean of milk at the time of its churning. Being the consort of Vishnu, whenever he incarnates she is born as his spouse for example when he appeared as Rama, Krishna, Vamana, and Parasurama, she appeared as Sita, Rukmini, Padma and Dharani. Vishnu and Lakshmi are inseparable as good deeds from righteousness knowledge from intellect. She represents all that is feminine and he represents all that is masculine.⁶³

In pictures she is mostly portrayed as good looking woman and having four arms while standing on lotus. Sometimes two elephants are shown behind her for rubbing with

⁶¹ *The Institutes of Vishnu*, 3.

⁶² David R. Kinsley, *The Goddesses' Mirror: Visions of the Divine from East and West*, (USA: Albany press 1989), 53.

⁶³ Steven Rosen, *Essential Hinduism*, (USA: Greenwood, 2006), 136.

water or some time there is only one elephant performing this duty to anoint her. Sometimes she is shown as standing on a lotus flower but often she is shown sitting beneath Vishnu, massaging his feet. She is wearing colorful and beautiful grabs while decorating herself with awesome jewelry. Separate temples for Lakshmi are rather rare; in temples she is usually shown as sitting on the lotus, having four hands and holding Amrtakalasa (pot of ambrosia) Bilva fruit, Padma and Sankha. Sometimes she is shown with eight hands and few things are added in her hands like mace, arrow, bow and discus are added. Her color is described as dark, yellow, white, pink or golden.⁶⁴

Here the question arises that why she is described with so many colors, the explanation is that if she is portrayed in golden or yellow complexion to show the source of all wealth. If she portrayed as dark that shows her as the consort of Vishnu. She represents the purest form of Prakrti (nature) in white. Since Lakshmi is the mother of all so the pinkish complexion which is more common reflects her compassion for creatures.⁶⁵

Her presentation with four hands indicates her authority to give the four things to human beings as Dharma (virtuous conduct), Artha (material prosperity), Kama (pleasure and enjoyment), and Moksha (spiritual liberation).⁶⁶

2.2.2. The rebirth of Lakshmi

The rebirth of Lakshmi in Hindu mythology is the most persuasive story as she took shelter in the milky ocean and was reborn through the mixing of the ocean during the tie when gods were sent into exile to fight against demons to achieve immortality.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ B. K. Chaturvedi, *Garuda Purana*, (Dehli: Diamonds Pocket Books, 2002), 88.

⁶⁵ Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India*, (England:Hard Press, 1885),103-112.

⁶⁶ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*(California :University of California Press, 1988) ,19-32.

According to the mythology it was the duty of Indra the worrier Hindu god to defend this universe against all demons. He passed many years in this duty and protected the world in the presence of Lakshmi which made for him the surety of success. One day a sage met Indra and offered him a wreath of sacred flower but Indra refuse to accept it and threw it on the ground in his arrogance. This display of arrogance upset Lakshmi according to Hindu belief. So she entered into milky ocean while leaving the world of gods. As the text from sacred book of the east indicates:

“She beheld then the ocean, from which the Amrita arose. It was lovely, like the rays of the moon, and agitated by hundreds of waves produced by stormy blasts of wind.”⁶⁸

Then gods were deprived from successful or good fortune without goddess Lakshmi. As a result, gods lost their power or strength and demon enter in this universe and took control over it. In this time, people were not worshiping gods and become greedy and world became darker. Indra was very worried he asked Vishnu what should be done. After a long discussion Vishnu told him that to regain Lakshmi and her blessing, so gods felt the need to mix with the milky ocean.⁶⁹ So gods worked hard to churn the ocean for many years. After one thousand years the treasures began to raise its surface. Then a gorgeous woman rose toward the surface standing on lotus flower and was among them. This beautiful woman was goddess Lakshmi. So Lakshmi was known as twice born.⁷⁰ Then gods got their power again with the mercy of Lakshmi and defeated demons and forced them to go out of this universe.

⁶⁷ B. K. Chaturvedi, *Garuda Purana*, (Dehli: Diamonds Pocket Books, 2002), 88.

⁶⁸ *The Institutes of Vishnu*, 6

⁶⁹ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (California:University of California Press, 1988), 7-34.

⁷⁰ *The Institutes of Vishnu*, 293

In mythologies it is written about this account that the followers of Lakshmi should work hard and seek her help sincerely.⁷¹

2.2.3. Different names of Lakshmi

Lakshmi has numerous names, her famous name is Lakshmi which is a Sanskrit word and derived from laks and laksa. It's meaning to observe, know, and understand objective, aim and goal. So it depicts to know and understand your goal.⁷² Her many nicknames are on flowers names because she is closely associated with lotus,⁷³ such as:

“Padmasundari: One who is as beautiful as a lotus, Padmakshi: One whose eyes are as beautiful as lotus, Padmamukhi: One whose face is as beautiful as a lotus, Padmamaladhara Devi: One who wears a garland of lotuses, Kamala: lotus dweller, Padmapriya: One who likes lotuses, Padma: lotus dweller, Padmahasta: One who holds a lotus. She is also known as Goddess of earth.”⁷⁴

As she is beloved of Vishnu so she is known as Vishnupriya. She has many other names some of them are as following:

“Madhavi, Paramaa, Janamodini, Tripura, Tulasi, Ketaki, Malati, Vidhya, Sridevi, Chanchala, Jalaja, Madhavi, Sujata, Shreya, Maheshwari, Madhu, Trilochana, Tilottama, Subha, Chandika, Devi, Kriyalakshmi, Viroopa, Vani, Kalyani, Nandika, Nandini, Rujula, Vaishnavi, Samruddhi, Narayani, Bhargavi Gayatri, Savitri, Apara or Aparajita, Aparna, Aruna, Akhila, Bala, Tara, Kuhu, Ambika, Manushri, Mohini, Chakrika, Kamalika,

⁷¹ The Institutes of Vishnu, 293

⁷² Monier Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, (London, Clarendon, 1872) .268.

⁷³ The Institutes of Vishnu, 6

⁷⁴ Ibid

Aishwarya, Lalima, Indira Poornima, Aditi, Anumati, Avashyaa, Sita, Taruni, Jyotsna, Jyoti, Nimeshika.”⁷⁵

2.2.4. Lakshmi prayer

Namastay astoo maha maayay, Shripeetay soorpoojatay

Shanka chakra gada hastay, Maha Lakshmi Namastutay

“Salutations and salutations to Goddess Mahalakshmi, Who is the great enchantress, Who lives in riches, Who is worshipped by Gods, And who has conch, wheel and mace in her hands.”⁷⁶

2.2.5. Characteristics of Lakshmi

a. Lakshmi is personification of the Four Wealths

Songs related to Lakshmi in Puranic literature emphasize the themes of prosperity, wealth, abundance and harmony in the lives of all beings because they experience the different features of moving their way through samsara. So the songs from puranic literature praise the goddess of wealth as personified in the caturartha, this term is often translated as four aims of life means four components which contribute to a life of harmony and balance. Catur means four and artha refers to aims or goals. Hindus can get liberation by following the four goals of life. Worshippers can also get more holistic sense of Lakshmi’s attributes if

⁷⁵Lakshmi names, <http://www.drikpanchang.com/hindu-names/goddesses/lakshmi/1008-lakshmi-names.html> (accessed December 27, 2014).

⁷⁶Lakshmi Stotram. <http://pbfloridahomes.com/bhajans/lakshmi/lakshmi-strota/> (accessed June 21, 2015).

they keep in mind four goals of life. These four goals are considered as very important component in living a balanced life which are as following:⁷⁷

Dharma means virtuous conduct, Artha material prosperity, Kama means pleasure and enjoyment and Moksha means spiritual liberation. Actually these four aspects of living well are forms of the goddess herself. As mentioned in Satapatha-Brahmana:

“You are the supreme mother of all,
And every woman is an embodiment of you.
So too do you express yourself in the forms
Of dharma, artha, kama, and moksha.”⁷⁸

Hindus can achieve a spiritual liberation and prosperity of the world by following the four purposes. The four are not separated but rather they exist as a spectrum. In the worship of the goddess first of all one must embrace the world worship it as a sign of divine core and one must live well in the world before liberation can be attained.

b. Lakshmi as kama the world's delight and wealth of pleasure

Kama is pulse and impulse of nature, deeper than intension or thought that ensuring the continuance of life from generation to generation and ignites the flash of procreation. Actually it is delight, sensuality and pleasure. Lakshmi is scintillating in golden color and full of passion, the first stirrings of the sexual energy necessary for expansion. Lakshmi is visible in every aspect of the material world, in its collection of rasas (flavor), in its multicolored fragrances, and in all that expresses the pulse of divine energy because it exist

⁷⁷ Charles Russell and Coulter, Patricia Turner, *Encyclopedia of Ancient Deities*, (America: McFarland, 2012),102.

⁷⁸ Satapatha-Brahmana

within the world. When senses are enlivened, one can experience the goddess's presence and grace.⁷⁹

The Puranic songs and the Vedic hymns, recognize Lakshmi in many forms that are part woman and part flower. Her spirit is recognized in abundant green plants developing from the moist earth, in the sparkling colors and intoxicatingly lovable fragrance of blossoming flowers. She expresses herself as much in the flowering vegetation of the forest as in the intertwined bodies and souls of lovers. The kama aspect of Lakshmi is completely graceful, fragrant, lovely, moist, and sensuous, and Lakshmi becomes Radha through her expression of kama.⁸⁰ As Lakshmi is praised in heavenly God's honor song for her:

“You are the goddess more dearly to Krishna

Than life itself,

His own Radha

You are Krishna's desire.

And on the hundred-peaked mountain you are the lovely Sundari.”⁸¹

c. Lakshmi as prosperity consciousness and material wealth

More than any of her other aspect, she is known as goddess of prosperity or wealth. She is mostly worshipped to attain material prosperity. She is the standard picture of material wealth or artha that's why many business establishments in India grace their premises with private shrines to the goddess and merchants are among her most ardent devotees. All worship her with great devotion by chanting as:

⁷⁹ A Parasarthy, *Symbolism in Hinduism* (India: Chinmaya Mission Publication, 1983), 11-17.

⁸⁰ Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, (India: Pearson Education, 2008), 359-369.

⁸¹ *Sri Mad Devi Bhagavatam*

“Giver of wealth, giver of pleasures to all senses,
 Giver of the right to rule kingdoms,
 She who has lotus like eyes,
 She to whom Salutations remove all miseries fast,
 And my mothers to you are my salutations.”⁸²

There are so many festivals related Lakshmi but most important is Diwali known as festival of light. Gambling is encouraged on this occasion and is also considered as closing out financial books and beginning a new fiscal year. Lakshmi is always praised for her generosity as her sacred images present her with open hands pouring forth endless streams of gold coins. Lakshmi exist in different forms as bestowal of prosperity currents of gold, any form of energy, easeful life giving and fructifying rains are her different images.⁸³

In Puranic literature Lakshmi is presented with a variety of nicknames, one of them is “Dhanada da dhana” means “bestower of wealth”. The term dhana is definition of luxury, happiness, material wealth, meaningful spiritual life, and harmonious relationships with family friends and community, comfort, good health and well being. Another famous name mentioned in Puranic Literature is Vasudha “yielder of wealth” it refers that she is the yielder of the earth’s hidden treasures, gemstones, minerals, crystals and precious metals that lie beneath its surface and mysterious treasures in the depths of forests and the sea. As Lakshmi is goddess of wealth people ask for the conscious awareness to dwell in that state of prosperity and material abundance.⁸⁴

⁸² Sri Kanakadhara Stotram_ Adi Shankaracharya, text 16.

⁸³ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, (California: University of California Press, 1988) ,19-22.

⁸⁴ Vishnu Puran

d. Lakshmi as wealth of both worlds

Lakshmi is most certainly considered as the source of material prosperity, but she is never addressed as bestowal of money (artha da) and often addressed bestowal of wealth(dhana da). It depicts that goddess bestow not only material wealth but she bestow all kind of prosperity to her followers. According to Puranic literature goddess listens to requests and if she is pleased she grants her followers.⁸⁵

e. Lakshmi as Dharma The Wealth of Virtue and Harmonious Relationships

The term Dharma is translated in many ways like balanced way of life, social consciousness, living in right relationship and even doing the right thing, communal obligation, harmonious relationship, virtuous duty and a way to cultivate wisdom. If we talk about dharma on cosmic level then it is harmony of interconnectedness that supports the creation and upholds society. it is Lakshmi and Vishnu who control over that auspicious function, so Lakshmi is praised in poetry and described as upholder of dharma. Lakshmi's association with dharma tells to have successful interconnections with others and those seeking a spouse, good home, steady income so often approach to Lakshmi.

Lakshmi as a consort of Vishnu, they together serve as sustainers of the universe according to Puranas. After every world cycle they appear as embodiments of dharma and

⁸⁵ Steven Rosen, *Essential Hinduism*, (USA: Greenwood, 2006), 137.

restore harmony among different elements that constitute the realms of existence. In Hindu wedding the image of Lakshmi and Vishnu set the paradigm for the bride and groom.⁸⁶

In puranic and Vedic songs to Lakshmi there is great emphasized the importance of happiness in the home and communal well-being. Lakshmi is an embodiment of dharma also reminds her devotees of the karmic results of benevolent through dharma many of the aspects of Lakshmi's wealth may be enjoyed and as she is upholder of dharma so worshippers seek her blessings. The fluid nature of Lakshmi moves in a propitious cycle, blessing her followers with divine grace.⁸⁷

f. Lakshmi as source to gain Moksha

Lakshmi is the goddess who infuses the creation with pleasure, prosperity, and living in right relationship or Kama, artha, and dharma. These three together compose an entity and are named as bhukti, the enjoyment. The fourth component is mukti or moksha release from worldly attachment. Lakshmi is considered as a transport to liberation from attachment to the world and the final refuge in the way of moksha. Her devotees are not forced to choose between materiality and spirituality because this would be against the magnificent arena of the goddess's essence. She is the material and spiritual substratum, a platform to achieve blessings and best experience of life. The goddess is invoked by her followers for both spiritual and material blessings. Her best known epithets are bhukti, mukti, pradayin that is bestower of spiritual liberation and worldly enjoyment. One of her best known epithet

⁸⁶ Constantina Rhodes, *Invoking Lakshmi*, (USA: SUNY Press, 2010), 46-56.

⁸⁷ Patricia Monaghan, *Goddesses in World Culture*, no 1, (USA: Praeger publications, 2011), 11-15.

is Great Lakshmi or Mahalakshmi. The name Mahalakshmi highlights three aspects of goddess as the creater, preserver and destroyer. ⁸⁸

g. Lakshmi of the royal place

In the king's court Lakshmi played a central role and in this capacity the goddess was known as Rajya means royal so she is known as royal Lakshmi. Ideally, the king itself as a form of Vishnu upholder the universe was personification of dharma (virtue). Without the active presence of Lakshmi a kingdom could not prosper. The queens were embodiments of dignity most specifically associated with the virtuous conduct like an expression of Lakshmi. So they together embodied stability, prosperity, sovereignty and virtue. Lakshmi presence at the court also took form as devadasis, literally means servants of the gods, their responsibility would be that they will try their level best to invoke the goddess within their own bodies. Their presence in the court will be the sign of prosperity for the kingdom. ⁸⁹

h. Lakshmi of home

The royal court and the home of an ordinary person may seem to be distinct fields, they are actually two versions of the same model, for the king, whose duty it is to ensure the well being of the whole monarchy, is the ideal householder. Lakshmi is known as house holder wife as it is written in Sri Kanakadhara Stotram.

“Those eight elephants from all directions,

⁸⁸ A Parasarthy, *Symbolism in Hinduism* (India: Chinmaya Mission Publication, 1983), 57-110.

⁸⁹ Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, (India: Pearson Education, 2008), 359-436.

Decant from out from golden pot,
 The water from the Ganga which flows in paradise,
 For your holy cleansing bath,
 And my greetings to the mother,
 Who is the mother of everything
 And who is the daughter of the ocean which gave nectar
 Who is the house wife of the Lord of the universe.”⁹⁰

Similarly the home is the central foundation for the prosperity of the kingdom from which all of life's activities originate. Lakshmi is known as Rajya in royal place also known as goddess of household, so she is considered not only a deity but in the form of a woman also recognized as householder. ⁹¹

2.2.6. Lakshmi in ancient Literature

a. Sutras and Stotrams

In Hinduism various ancient stotram and sutras are donated to her. She is a chief goddess of the Itihasa and Puranas. In ancient Hindu scriptures, all Hindu women are considered as the embodiment of her. For example,

“Every woman is an embodiment of you.
 You exist as little girls in their childhood,
 As young women in their youth,

⁹⁰ Sri Kanakadhara Stotram_ Adi Shankaracharya, text 19.

⁹¹ Das Subhamoy, *Lakshmi: Goddess of Wealth & Beauty*,
<http://hinduism.about.com/od/hindugoddesses/p/lakshmi.htm>. (Accessed December 16, 2014).

And as elderly women in their old age
 Every woman is an emanation of you.”⁹²

b. Puranas

According to puranic literature Lakshmi is most closely affiliated with Vishnu. Lakshmi descends into the world with Vishnu whenever he mediates to sustain the creation according to Vaishnava school of thought. In the Puranas There are details about Lakshmi and her descents into the earthly realm, her avatars, her birth, her parents, her deeds, her marriage, her physical characteristics and her offspring.⁹³

c. Tantric Traditions

Lakshmi in Tantaric tradition express itself as the sweetly smiling lady, bestower of prosperity in the world. However the fierce aspect of goddess is also present as having a sword and a necklace.

In Tantaric tradition Lakshmi is worshipped for abundance and prosperity in the world.⁹⁴ According to tantric tradition Lakshmi applies her awesome powers to destroy whatever comes in the way of success instead of focusing directly on liberation. Tantaric personality of Lakshmi is full of blessings, prosperity and success and enables her followers to spend a powerful life.⁹⁵

⁹² Constantina Rhodes, *Invoking Lakshmi* (USA: SUNY Press, 2010), 25-26.

⁹³ Vishnu Purana

⁹⁴ Martha Ann and Dorothy Myers Imel, *Goddesses in World Mythology*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 1995), 621-630.

⁹⁵ Patricia Monaghan, *Goddesses in World Culture*, no 1, (USA: Praeger publications, 2011), 4-11.

d. Vedas

Vedas are earliest scriptures of Hindu tradition. We come across invocations for the presence of sri which means the divine power of auspiciousness, glory, majesty, brilliance and glory. The person touched by sri becomes healthy and wealthy because sri is the power of life. In late Vedic when bright and valuable qualities known as sri come to be recognized as obvious in a specific form they named Lakshmi. Later on this divine force takes form as a goddess of prosperity, splendor, and beauty that have long been recognized as desirable qualities in life. It is not surprising that the goddess of prosperity Lakshmi is attributed with great collection of names which lend further dimensions to the human perception of her identity.⁹⁶

2.2.7. Worship of Lakshmi

Lakshmi is the most popular and the most widely worshiped goddess in all of India. Her devotees have invoked her in song and ceremony for centuries. Authorship of these songs is attributed to the gods and it is said that these songs are very beneficial for humankind. The tradition holds that Lakshmi will listen and respond to the call if a worshiper sincerely invokes Lakshmi with these words because all of these songs are invocation. Her shrines appear everywhere in India. People worship her with great devotion as in Sri Kanakadhara Stotram the text about Lakshmi is as following.

“She who has lotus in her hands

She who sits on the Lotus,

⁹⁶ Das Subhamoy, *Lakshmi: Goddess of Wealth & Beauty*, <http://hinduism.about.com/od/hindugoddesses/p/lakshmi.htm>. (accessed December 16, 2014).

She who shines in garlands and sandal paste,
 She who is dressed in dazzling white,
 She who gladdens the mind,
 And she who confers prosperity on the three worlds,
 The Goddess who is the consort of Hari,
 Be pleased to show compassion to me.”⁹⁷

Hindus gave very imperative place to the worship of Lakshmi and believe that if someone worships her with devotion, sincerity without any greed after that blessings of Lakshmi surely reaches to that worshipper. The follower got wealth, prosperity and good fortune. Lakshmi exists in places of virtue, bravery and hard work, it indicates that Lakshmi is present wherever her follower are doing good deeds. Particularly her worship is done on the Diwali festival. This festival is celebrated to revive the story of Ramayana. In this story Hindus believe that Lakshmi is incarnated in the form of Sita to marry prince Rama. The story tells that Rama and his wife lived in forest and kingdom was taken from them. When Ravana abducts the wife of Rama then a harsh battle started between them. Epic follows the story of Rama's eventual return to his kingdom after defeating the demons. When Sita, Rama and his brother Lakshman comeback to their home, the people of their kingdom lit candle lights for them in dark places. So in remembrance of that holy day, on the second day of Dewali festival people lit candle lights for invoking Lakshmi. They wish through this act of candling that Lakshmi bless their home with prosperity, wealth and good fortune in coming year.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Sri Kanakadhara Stotram _ Adi Shankaracharya, text 18.

⁹⁸ B K Chaturvedi and Suresh Narian Mathur, *The Diamond Book of Hindu Gods and Goddesses*, (New Delhi: Diamond pocket books, 2005), p25-26.

During this Dewali festival Hindu business men buy a lot of silver, gold or other material for their business so that in coming year their business will be flourished with the blessings of Lakshmi. The sacred day for goddess Lakshmi is Friday and Hindu worship her in both temple and home.⁹⁹

2.3. Goddess Parvati

Goddess Parvati is the well known goddess in the Hindu mythology. She is divine consort of Shiva and she has very kind and mother caring nature. In sacred literature of Hinduism, she is presented as the daughter of Himalayan Mountains, very mediator as in the variance of heaven and the divine sister of goddess ganda.¹⁰⁰ To express her each aspect over hundred names have been given to her in regional Hindu mythologies of India. She forms the trinity of Hindu goddesses along Lakshmi and Saraswati. According to Hindu belief Parvati is the seconded consort of Lord Shiva and the daughter of Parvat the king of mountain and her mother was Mena. Ganesha and Kartikeya were her sons. Being the consort of Shiva she is a central deity in Saivism. She is the power of Siva. Parvati has hardly any independent story as Lakshmi have her own mythologies. Even her mythological deeds, identity and nature are defined in the context of her consort Shiva.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Suresh Chandra, *Encyclopedia of Hindu Gods and Goddesses* (Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 1998).

¹⁰⁰ Nagendra Kr. Singh, *Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2000), Vol.38, 524-655.

¹⁰¹ Ibid

2.3.1. Mythology

The Puranas describe the story of Shiva and Sita wedding. Sita's father was against the wedding of Sita with Shiva while ignoring the wishes of Sita for Shiva. In a chief ceremony of fire, the father of Sita did not invite Shiva so Shiva did not come to attend that ceremony.¹⁰² Then Sita cannot bear this grief and that critical situation so she self immolates herself. Shiva is so grief-stricken that he retires and isolates himself in the mountains, in meditation and austerity and loses interest in worldly affairs.¹⁰³ Sita reborn and is named Parvati¹⁰⁴ the second daughter of Himavat who is known as Parvat and mother Minavati.¹⁰⁵

As the text indicates:

“Then in the space (ether) he came towards a woman, highly adorned: it was Uma, the daughter of Himavat.”¹⁰⁶

According to different version of myths, Parvati showed her desire to marry Shiva. When her parents came to know about her desire they discouraged her but in spite of all restrictions she insisted to marry with him. She went to Hindu god of desire known as god Kama, and asks him to help. Kama gets agree for her help and he went to Shiva and shoots him.¹⁰⁷ When the arrow hits Shiva, he got third eye on his forehead and burns the arrow to ashes. In spite of all these things Parvati does not get disappointed and becomes more courageous to achieve Shiva. She begins to live a life of asceticism in mountains, she

¹⁰² Shiva Maha Purana, 202

¹⁰³ W. J. Wilkins, *Hindu Mythology Vedic and Puranic*, (Egypt: Library of Alexandria, 1972), p243.

¹⁰⁴ The Bhagavad-Gita, 347

¹⁰⁵ Ibid 300-301

¹⁰⁶ The Upanishads, 151

¹⁰⁷ James G Lochtefeld, "The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Hinduism." America: Rosen Publishers, 1957, Vol. 2, p503-505.

engages in the same activities as Shiva. All the efforts done by Parvati for awaking his interest and draw the attention of Shiva. But he considered his self is not able to her so he meet her in disguised form and tells her all the personality problems and weaknesses of Shiva. Parvati insists in her determination and refuses to listen anything against him. Finally he shows respect for her feelings and accepts her, so they get married. After the marriage Parvati moves to the residence of Shiva which is Mount Kailash. Kartikeya and Ganesha were born on that mountain. ¹⁰⁸

Another myth about Parvati in Purana is as following, Shiva, the god of War, was mourning the death of her beloved wife and living in a dark cave in meditation. But Parvati was determined to win his affection and becomes an ascetic herself. Parvati use to visit his cave every day to sweep the floor and decorate it with flowers and to bring eatable things for Shiva. ¹⁰⁹

But Shiva was not giving any importance to her care and he has no concern with her. As Shiva was living in forest, Parvati also took shelter in the cave. She was living in the there without clothes to save her body from fierce weather. She totally ignored her physical needs and used to go everyday to Shiva to serve him. But he always ignores her.

Brahma the God of creation took pity on Parvati and asked what she wanted. She told him that Shiva does not give her any importance and she is not attractive for her maybe because of dark skin. She requested Brahma for her beauty and fair complexion. He divided Parvati in two parts, the new skin in golden color like a sun, while black side of Parvati

¹⁰⁸ Stella Kramrisch, *the Presence of Siva*, (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 1993), 349.

¹⁰⁹ Linga Purana

became Kali. When Shiva saw her he was unable to resist her and realized how powerful and beautiful she had become. They married in a holy ritual performed by the gods.¹¹⁰

Shiva did not want to be worried with offspring but Parvati desired for a child. Then Shiva provided her a piece of fabric and asked her to create a doll and embrace it. She withdraw to a cave and started meditation to control her emotions Parvati's tears dropped on the cloth given by Shiva and become the form of Ganesha as her son. She asked her son to guard her cave and does not allow any stranger to come in.¹¹¹

Shiva was feeling regret and came to cave in order to apologies her over his impulsive act. But Ganesha blocked his way as he did not recognize him. Shiva flew in anger and beheaded Ganesha. When Parvati saw Ganesha her grief was so intensive that Shiva assured to find another head for him. He went to forest and could only find an elephant's head. So Ganesha was reborn as half elephant and half human. He became the God of good fortune, keeper of the threshold and an obstacle to all that is undesirable. Shiva once again concerned for the world after the union with Parvati.¹¹²

2.3.2. Different Names

In Sanskrit language, name of Parvati shows her association with Himalaya Mountain and as the daughter Parvati king of mountains. As the text in the Upanishads (sacred books of the east) indicates:

“Parvati is the daughter of the mountains.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ S. K. Adlakha, *Religious Mysticism*, (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2005), 131.

¹¹¹ Prem P. Bhalla, *Hindu Gods and Goddesses*, (India: Pustak Mahal, 2007), 20 -30.

¹¹² Sally Kempton, *Awakening Shakti*, (USA: Sounds True, 2013), 147-150.

¹¹³ The Upanishads, 151

As Parvati is famous as daughter of mountain so many names associate her with mountains as Shailaja, Shailaputri Nagajaa and Adrija (Daughter of Mountains). One of her name is Haimavathi Means Daughter of Himavan. Girirajaputri, Shailaja and Girija are also names for Parvati which indicates that she is daughter of the king of mountain.¹¹⁴ Parvati is also famous for her beautiful eyes, as text from sacred books of the east indicates:

“Among all those who are followed by (men) full of desires, (the chief) is the great goddess Mahesvari, who has beautiful eyes. She is called Parvati. Know the goddess Uma to be the best and (most) holy of all females. Among women who are (a source of) happiness.”¹¹⁵

Lalita sahasranama is a sacred text of the Goddess Lalia Devi, actually Lalia is an epithet for Shiva’s wife Goddess Parvati and the Goddess of bliss, a list of one thousand names of Parvati is in Lalita sahasranama.¹¹⁶ One of her name is Lalitha as in sacred text

“Oh Goddess who is the darling Of Lord Shiva Who became Lalitha by your penance while you were a lass.”¹¹⁷

That Goddess Parvati you are loveable for Shiva and you are given the name of Lalitha because you faced a lot of difficulties when you were a young girl. The most famous epithets of Parvati’s are Uma and Aparna. As the text in sacred books of the east:

“Uma is wife of Shiva and better known by her earlier name, Parvati the daughter of the mountains.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ David R. Kinsley, *The Goddesses' Mirror: Visions of the Divine from East and West*, (USA: Albany press 1989), 36.

¹¹⁵ The Bhagavad-Gita, 347

¹¹⁶ Keller, Ruether, *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America*, Indiana University Press, 2003. p 663.

¹¹⁷ Parvathi stotram. <http://stotraratna.awardspace.com/stotra/Parvathy/p55.pdf> (accessed December 30, 2014).

¹¹⁸ The Upanishads, 151

In the Ramayana Uma is used as synonym for Parvati. She is also known by many other names such as Kamakshi (the goddess of fertility), Shivaradni means Queen of Shiva, Bhavani (fertility and birthing), Bhairavi (ferocious) Durga (invincible) Maheshwari (great goddess), Mataji (revered mother) Shakti (power) Ambika (dear mother).¹¹⁹

Sometimes Parvati is depicted as fair one or sometimes as dark. Once her husband Shiva scolded Parvati due to her dark complexion, then she became angry for the fair complexion she underwent severe austerities under the guidance of Brahma after a long time she got her goal.¹²⁰

2.3.3. Description

Parvati is usually represented as benevolent, fair and beautiful. Normally she wears red sari with a head band. When she is portrayed along with her husband, she shows her two arms. On the otherhand when is presented alone she shows her four arms.¹²¹ While holding flowers such as lotus, sugarcane stalk, dish, bell, rosary, mirror, crown and conch.¹²² Her front arm shows hand gesture not to fear. Ganesha is on her knee. Stone is most common material used in her sculpture. Her sculpture is often portrayed near a cow as source of food. The common figures of their worship are linga and yoni. This icon is widely worshiped for fertility in South Asia and East Asia. Sometimes Parvati is publicized with yellow or golden color skin, as the goddess of full grown harvests.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Harsha V. Dehejia, *Parvati: Goddess of Love*, (United states: Mapin Publishing, 1999), 10

¹²⁰ Sally Kempton, *Awakening Shakti*, (USA: Sounds True, 2013), 58.

¹²¹ Genna, Barsk. March 2009. <http://www.mahavidya.ca/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/Barsky-Genna-Parvati-Yes.pdf> (accessed December 21, 2014).

¹²² Edward Moor, *The Hindu Pantheon*, (London: Johnson publishers, 2009), 463.

¹²³ Harsha V. Dehejia, *Parvati: Goddess of Love*, (United states: Mapin Publishing, 1999). 10.

She has many arms sometime eight or sometime ten and set on a lion or tiger as ferocious aspects of Shakti such as Kali or Durga.¹²⁴ In Hindu mythology, Parvati is power of Shiva and an active agent of the universe. She has both aspects as sometime furious or sometime kind according to circumstances.¹²⁵

2.3.4. Different Features of Parvati

Parvati has several aspects such as the warrior aspect as Shakti. Her anger symbolizes into a dark tangled hair, with a drooping tongue and opened mouth she is thirsty for blood. In this condition the she is mostly identified with Kali the furious goddess.¹²⁶

According to Linga Purana, Parvati changes her physical appearance and took the form of Kali on the order of her husband Shiva to demolish feminine demons. So Kali destroy all the demons but sometimes her anger become out of control so Shiva takes the form of crying baby to lower down her anger. When she listens the voice of crying baby then her maternal nature raised and she restore back as Parvati.¹²⁷ Parvati is also known as warrior goddess who defeats demons and in this aspect she is given the name Durga. According to Skanda Purana Durga assumes the form of buffalo.¹²⁸

In sacred book of Hinduism “Devi Bhagwata Purana”, she is mentioned as foundation of all Hindu goddesses. That is why she is worshiped as one with various names and forms and her different moods bring different incarnations for example, Demon fighting

¹²⁴ Sally Kempton, *Awakening Shakti*, (USA: Sounds True, 2013), p 118.

¹²⁵ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine In the Hindu Religious Tradition*, (California: University of California Press, 1988), 43-49.

¹²⁶ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine In the Hindu Religious Tradition*, (California: University of California Press, 1988), 50-54.

¹²⁷ Linga Purana

¹²⁸ Skanda Purana

form of Parvati is Durga. Another fierce form of Parvati is Kali.¹²⁹ Chandi is the nickname of Durga, she rides on lion and black in color.¹³⁰

2.3.5. Parvati Bhajhan

“Yogeswaram prachura bhakthi gireesa maraa.
 Dhekantha vaethinamupethya thapascharantham,
 Aakamkshaya pari charishnumanakulaam thwam,
 Ye kechidheeswari bhajanthi tha yeva dhanya”

“For fulfillment of our desires, we worship you Goddess, Who went to Lord Shiva with extreme devotion, Who did solitary penance and meditation, With anxiety and did service to him with a pleasant mien.”¹³¹

2.3.6. Worship and Festivals

A famous festival for Hindu women is Teej. The main or basic deity of this festival is Parvati. This festival is particularly celebrated in northern and western states of India. Typically girls wear green dress as seasonal color of crop. The females in green dresses play on these swings and sing regional songs. Traditionally, married female desired on this festival from goddess for the well being of their husbands while unmarried girls prayed to Parvati for a good mate. In Teej festival people visit the temples of Shiva and Parvati. This

¹²⁹ Devi Bhagwata Purana

¹³⁰ John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, *Devi: Goddesses of India*, (India: Motilal Banarsi Dass Publ, 1998), 200-205.

¹³¹ Durwasa, Sage. *Prayer to Parvathi seeking to marry the husband of her choice*.

<http://stotraratna.sathyasaibababrotherhood.org/g79.htm> (accessed August 2, 2015).

festival is celebrated for three days. Devotees chant different sacred texts on festivals for example.

“Salutations and salutations oh Goddess,
 Who wears ornaments over her chest,
 Who is the life partner of Lord Shiva,
 Who has an extremely pretty form,
 Who is worshipped by Vishnu and other greats,
 Who is the mother to Lord Ganesha and Subrahmanya,
 Who is of the golden colour, who is killer of Chanda
 And who is the golden daughter of Himalayas.”¹³²

The Gauri festival is chiefly celebrated by women. Parvati is worshipped as protector of women and as the goddess of harvest. This festival continues for eighteen days and it starts on first of Chaitra. Navaratri is a festival celebrated in respect of Parvati. This festival continues for nine days. It is celebrated in all parts of India, particularly in Bengal Assam Odisha, Jharkhand and Gujrat. This festival is associated with Durga and with her nine forms which are Skandmata, Katyani, Kalratri, Mahagauri, Siddhidaatri, Shailputri, Brahmacharini, Chandraghanta and Kushmunda..¹³³

Another festival Gauri tritiya is also very prominent in Karnataka. It is unknown in Bengal and less observed in North India. In this festival, unwidowed female raise the image

¹³² Sage, Durwasa. *Swayamvara Parvathi stotram*. <http://stotraratna.awardspace.com/stotra/Parvathy/p55.pdf>. Text 3 (accessed 4 15, 2015).

¹³³ Pratapachandra Ghosha, *Durga Puja*, (USA: Harvard University, 2005), 7-15.

of goddess Parvati in the air. Neighbors also join this festival with gifts and flowers. Prayers are held by singing and dancing at night.¹³⁴ As the following prayers,

“Oh Goddess who has pity on her devotees,

In past, in present and in future,

In sleep, in dream and even when I am awake,

By mind, by words and by my action,

Let me be able to worship you always,

And I salute you to get this blessing. From you.”¹³⁵

On the new moon day of Dewali, there are many other festivals are celebrated in South India to respect Parvati. Women especially arrange many foods or especially sweet dishes for the worship of Parvati so that they live happily in their family.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ IslamKotob. *The-Ramayana-of-Tulsidas-Ramacharitamanasa*.

https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=1a1AbuANtEYC&dq=pdf+download+on+goddess++parvati&source=gbvlinks_sl (accessed February 2, 2015).

¹³⁵ Sage, Durwasa. *Swayamvara Parvathi stotram*. <http://stotraratna.awardspace.com/stotra/Parvathy/p55.pdf>. Text 44 (accessed 4 15, 2015).

¹³⁶ John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, *Devi: Goddesses of India*, (India: Motilal BanarsiDass Publ, 1998), p208.

CHAPTER 3

GODDESSES OF LOVE

CHAPTER 3

GODDESSES OF LOVE

3.1. Goddess Sita

Hindus believe that Sita is the incarnation of Lakshmi and consort of prince Rama. She is considered as the ideal wife, ideal mother and ideal daughter. Goddess Sita is remembered for her attributes and virtues since ages. She is the symbol of chastity, loyalty and all that is noble in womanhood. She is the heroin of Hindu epic Ramayana. Her life is a perfect example of morality, loyalty and idealism.

Goddess Sita faces hardships and leaves all the charms of palace for the sake of her husband. She lives in exile with her husband. In the period of exile Sita was abducted by a cruel king Ravana and locked up for months. When she got freedom from the authority of Ravana she showed her sanctity to Lord Rama by giving Agni Pariksha which means Fire Ordeal. Sita walked on fire to prove her chastity, the coals turned to lotuses and she was not burnt.¹³⁷

Ram and Sita were declared as the king and queen of Ayodhya after facing all the hardships. But people still had many doubts about her chastity. Rama expelled Sita from his household and again she found herself in exile, this time she was pregnant. She delivered

¹³⁷ Kurma Purana, 522

twins in the refuge of sage Valmiki. She named her sons Kush and Luv. Even today Sita is known for her self-sacrifice, dedication, purity and courage. She is also regarded as the role model of adherence to duty and wifely love.¹³⁸

3.1.1. Different Names

The most famous name of goddess is “Sita” which is derived from the Sanskrit language. It means “furrow or line”. In Vedic literature her name is connected with plow fields. It is mentioned in Ramayana that Janaka found her while he was plowing as to perform sacred ritual which is called Yagna. He adopted her and named Sita.¹³⁹

In the Vedic time period she was one of the goddesses related with fertility. According to Rig-Veda:

“Sita is an earth goddess who blesses the land with good crops. Goddess Sita is also famous by many epithets for example as the daughter of Janaka She is called Jānaki and as the princess of Mithila she is called Maithili.”¹⁴⁰

3.1.2. Sita Bhajhan

“Kousalya Garbha sambhootham,
Vedi Garbhoditham swayam,
Pundareeka Visalaksham,
Sphurad indhee varekshanam”

¹³⁸ Ramayana, 14

¹³⁹ Suresh Chandra, *Encyclopedia of Hindu Gods and Goddesses* (Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 1998), 304.

¹⁴⁰ Heidi Rika Maria Pauwels, *Indian Literature and Popular Cinema: Recasting Classics*, Routledge publisher ,2007. p. 53.

“Born to the queen Kousalya, Rose from the Yagna floor herself, one who has lotus like eyes, One who has eyes like fully open Indivara flowers.¹⁴¹

3.1.3. Description

As a traditional archetype of feminine elegance and gorgeousness in the Hindu religion, Sita is often depicted in Indian art, iconography and sculpture as a stunning woman with pleasant facial features. She is white skinned with silky long black hair, in order to communicate her queenly status her sometimes her head is covered by an elaborate head dress. She is often decorated with bracelets and anklets of gold. She wears a sari which symbolizes her virtuous nature. As an incarnation of Lakshmi she may be depicted with additional arms in images she is typically standing or seated at the left side of her husband Rama, sometimes portrayed other important characters from the Ramayana including Lakshmana Hanuman, Ravana and her twin sons. She is often depicted as an ideal wife, ideal daughter and an ideal mother in various stories texts and illustrations.¹⁴²

3.1.4. Birth

Sita's birth is mystical. Her name as well as the nature of her birth reveals the essential contact of king and earth, which leads toward abundance and fertility.¹⁴³ Janaka was very sincere king of Videha. He had no kids. All people respect him because of his

¹⁴¹ Ramachander P.R, *Sri Sita Rama stotram* <http://stotraratna.sathyasaibababrotherhood.org/ra12.htm> (accessed August 5, 2015)

¹⁴² Millett Kate, *Sita* (America: University of Illinois Press, 2000) 15-20.

¹⁴³ Sage, Durwasa. *Swayamvara Parvathi stotram*. Text 3,
<http://stotraratna.awardspace.com/stotra/Parvathy/p55.pdf>. (accessed 4 15, 2015).

boundless knowledge good works, and sanctity. Janaka was not a king that merely sat on his throne he loved his people. He used to go in fields to do work in fields with his people. On that day he was involved in some royal sacrament, part of which involved the king's plow in the earth to bring about fertility. After half day Sweat started to drip from Janaka's forehead.¹⁴⁴

His hands had become rough from his many hours of work in the fields. He had prepared the piece of land for conducting a Yajna means spiritual sacrifice and decided to go home. Suddenly he saw a golden strongbox, Out of curiosity Janaka uncovered the box in which he found a beautiful girl. She had beautiful big green eyes and curly brown hair. She was a gift from the goddess of the earth.¹⁴⁵ As the text from Vedanta-Sutras (sacred books of east) indicates:

“There are moreover, traditions, apart from the Veda, that certain persons like Drona, Dhrishiadyumna, Sita, Draupadi, &c., were not born in the ordinary way from Mothers”.¹⁴⁶

He named the baby as Sita. The king's good luck appeared with the arrival of the baby. The royal couple brought up Sita with great affection. They gave her a good education. The beautiful princess, by her good behavior, noble qualities and intelligence, endeared herself to all and grew to become ideal princess. Sita was not just a baby given to Janaka from the goddess earth. Actually she was the part of a bigger plan. She was the avatar of Lakshmi who is the wife of Vishnu.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Nagpal saraswati, *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* (India: Campfire publishers, .2011), 5.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid 6-7.

¹⁴⁶ The Vedanta-Sutras, 125

¹⁴⁷ Ramayana, 14

The Hindu sacred scripture, Ramayana tells the coming of earth goddess to the creator god Brahma so that he protect her from evil kings who were destroying life through evil conducts, bloody wars and plundering her resources. The deva (gods) also came to Brahma begging that they are worried because of cruel king Ravana. He took rule over the universe and heaven with his strong power. For deliverance from Ravana's cruel rule Brahma and all other gods worshipped the Preserver Vishnu. He accepted their prayers and satisfied them through killing Ravana. Vishnu incarnated as man to fight Ravana in order to accompany her consort Vishnu Goddess Lakshmi also incarnated in the form of Sita. So actually Sita's birth occurred to assist the plan that the gods shaped to defeat Ravana.¹⁴⁸

3.1.5. Marriage

When Sita stepped in her youth a swayamwara or "self-choice" ceremony was held for the selection of a suitable husband for her. King Janakha wanted to select a best partner for her daughter Sita. King presented the challenge of lifting the bow of Lord Shiva and stringing it. He declared that only the man who performed this epic task would be able to marry with Sita. Numerous noblemen failed at stringing the bow. Rama prince of Ayodhya was also there with his brother Lakshmana. King Janaka was very disappointed and he invited Rama to do it. On the request of Janaka the father of Sita, prince Rama lift the bow of Shiva and he strung it without any difficulty. So Rama not only won the heart of King Janaka, but he had also stolen the heart of Sita. King was very happy and agreed to marry her daughter with prince Rama.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Menon Ramesh, *The Ramayana*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2012. p. 10–11.

¹⁴⁹ Mercy Krishna's, *How We Met: Sita Describing Her Marriage to Rama* (Krishna's Mercy publishers, 2010).

3.1.6. Exile, kidnap and liberation

They started to live a happy life but sometime after the wedding circumstances became such critical that Rama thought it was his duty to spend a period of exile in the forests of Dandakaranya and leave Ayodhya. Sita convinced her husband and went with him because she considered it her responsibility to stand beside her husband, even in exile. She happily joined her husband in the forest and renounced the comforts of the palace. However, living in the forests with her husband was the least of her troubles. Surpanakha a rakshasa woman of ill repute is the name of the sister of Ravana the demonic king of Lanka and also one of Sita's former suitors. She tries to seduce Rama and Lakshmana, who opposed her and hurt her as punishment. In great anger Surpanakha tells this to her brother Ravana so a plan for revenge hatches in his mind.¹⁵⁰

He sends to the forest a rakshasa masked as a golden deer. Upon seeing a beautiful deer, Sita requests Rama to capture it for her. The deer leads Rama off far away and the deer begins to cry out its agony in Rama's voice when he is finally struck down by Rama's arrow. When Sita hears that voice she demands that Lakshmana go to the aid of Rama. Lakshmana refuses to go that he has been ordered by Rama to keep watch over Sita, but Sita insists him to go. So Lakshmana runs off to his brother's aid.¹⁵¹

So Ravana successfully kidnap defenseless Sita. When Rama and Lakshmana came back discovering Sita missing, they set out to find her and what would be a long and hazardous search to find her. Sita remains in his captivity for a year but she protected her

¹⁵⁰ The Ramayana 147-60

¹⁵¹ Doniger Wendy, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 220-251.

chastity at all costs. Hanuman the anthropomorphic monkey offered to Sita to free her and carry her home on his back, she rejects the offer, knowing that it was the only fortune of Rama to defeat Ravana and save her. Finally, Rama succeeds in killing Ravana after a terrific fight.¹⁵² As the text in sacred books of the east indicates:

“How much less for our master, freed from anger, should we be niggard of our lives! Rama, for Sita’s sake, killed all the demon_spirits.”¹⁵³

So Sita is promptly liberated by her victorious husband.

3.1.7. Sita's fire trial, exile and death

When they came back people started talking about Sita’s character. King Rama also looked at Sita with the eye of doubt and he felt insult because of Sita.¹⁵⁴ He became angry with Sita and ordered her to go wherever she wants. He also insulted Sita with very harsh words. Indeed he spoke very harsh words the sensitive lady shed profuse tears which cut her loving heart like arrows tipped with poison. Actually Sita required this ordeal in the eyes of the people to prove her chastity that she was living with her husband in the hard time of Ravana’s captivity. Sita calls her brother in law Lakshmana and asks him to raise for me a pyre and he started to prepare the pyre. Rama was standing there and she moved toward the scorching flames, the immortal gods, living beings, the four Vedas, Dharma the cosmic elements all cried out in horror. Sita went into fire and she was safe and sound.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² *Rituals, Prayers, Attitude.* http://sanskritdocuments.org/doc_z_misc_general/prayers.pdf (accessed september 27, 2014).

¹⁵³ The Fo-sho-hing-tsan-king, 330.

¹⁵⁴ Nagendra Kr. Singh, *Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1999), Vol.16, 1-5.

¹⁵⁵ Mankekar Purnima, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television* (Womanhood: Duke University Press, 1999), 208-212

Because the fire was burning due to the heat of Sita's heart because of her faithfulness and self controlled life. This was the same heat which had scared Ravana against coming near her. King Rama was happy that she has proved her chastity before people and he ruled over his nation for long time.¹⁵⁶ They again started a happy life. But people again started to talk about the queen chastity, that how we can be prosperous having a queen whose chastity is doubtful. Rama took these arguments to heart and exiled Sita to forests by his younger brother Lakshmana. Sita faced a lot of difficulties in the forest and where she gave birth to her twin sons and alone she take care them. Hindus believe that she was the first women in their history who brought up her kids alone. When the children of Sita reached the age of youth, then the story of her bravery started to spread everywhere in the nation.¹⁵⁷

Rama also listened about their bravery and soon he realized that they were his own offspring. He immediately called Sita and the two boys. In the court everyone was present, in the presence of everyone, Rama asked her to undergo fire for these respected persons as some of them were not present at earlier trial. But Sita's reaction however was different. With folded hands, she prayed to mother earth to embrace her with earth, if she was loyal to her husband as she spoken her words, then the ground beneath her feet opened for her and she entered in it, while Rama lived helpless and in grief throughout his life.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Genna, Barsk. March 2009. <http://www.mahavidya.ca/wp-content/uploads/2008/04/Barsky-Genna-Parvati-Yes.pdf> (accessed December 21, 2014).

¹⁵⁷ Ramayana

¹⁵⁸ B K Chaturvedi ,Suresh Narian Mathur, *The Diamond Book of Hindu Gods and Goddesses* (New Delhi: Diamond pocket books, 2005), 8.

3.2. Goddess Radha

She is often known as the consort of Krishna but she was married to someone else. She always remains as a source of attraction for Krishna. They have love for each other regardless of norms. The followers of Krishna or the Vaishnavas write many poems to invoke the love of Radha for Krishna. The love affair of Radha and Krishna is a symbol for the relationship of divine and human beings. The aim of Krishna followers is to develop the dimension of Radha in themselves to get the love of Krishna.¹⁵⁹

3.2.1. Significance of Radha

According to Vaishna belief, Radha is consort of Krishna and in Hare Krishna mantra she is always chanted as the consort of Krishna.

“Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare”

In this mantra “Hare” is a form of “Hara”. This Hara is a name of Radha or the consort of Krishna. Hare is Radha who steal the mind of Krishna. Actually her presence in this mantra is to invoke the love of Krishna. Her name emerged in Hare Krishna mantra eight times to call out her love for Krishna.¹⁶⁰

She is the mean to addressing the power of Krishna through her name in mahamantra. Hare Krishna means that Hare is shakti of Krishna and Krishna is name of god himself. Vaishnavas are chanting this mantra to get salvation or to get the unity with

¹⁵⁹ Kinsley, David R, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine In the Hindu Religious Tradition*. (California: University of California Press, 1988), 82.

¹⁶⁰ Choudhury Basanti, *Love Sentiment and Its Spiritual Implications In Gaudiya Vaisnavism*. In *Bengal Vaisnavism, Orientalism, Society and the Arts*, edited by Joseph T. O’Connell. (East Lansing: MI: Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1985), 4.

godhead. The famous scholar of Vaishnava tradition Sri Chaitanya in 16th century emphasized on chanting the Hare Krishna mantra and gave very high status to Radha. Then after his death there were many Vaishnava scholars who suggested this ascetic chanting of Krishna and Radha for salvation. Because they believe that this material world is polluted by maya, so there is only one way to get out from this maya that is chanting of Hare Krishna mantra.¹⁶¹

They believe that these two words Hare Krishna are the central seeds of this mantra. When this chanting is occurred then anyone get spirituality through the blessings of Krishna. So it means that this chanting is spiritual call for Krishna and his spouse Radha. They both bless the chanter and protect him against materialism. This chanting is just like a cry of any child for her mother so in this mantra mother Radha in the form of Hare helps the chanter to reach Krishna.¹⁶²

Above discussion shows that Radha has very high status in Vaishnavism because of her association with Krishna. They gave even same respect just like Krishna because of her love for Krishna. In their festivals or their religious gatherings Radha is worshiped with Krishna.

3.2.2. The Early History

In the Hindu tradition, Radha appear quite late. The early references about her are few and they never describe extended descriptions. Radha fell in love with Krishna in a village Vraja and started to spend time together then soon Krishna become ready to leave

¹⁶¹ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *The Science of Self-Realization* (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1997), 115.

¹⁶² A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *ŚRī NāMāMrTa: the Nectar of the Holy Name* (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1982), 34-45.

Vraja and to visit Mathura. Radha weeps piteously. Then he decided to marry someone else due to her illicit relation with Krishna after Krishna had left her in village and went away. She married to another man because she has to live there and spend a life. She is always associated with Krishna. In Indian literary tradition Radha is known for her passionate love for Krishna. Another historical thread which is important in understanding Radha is Gopi Tradition. This is a tradition in Vraja village of Krishna. Basically the gopis are the cowherd women of the village.¹⁶³

According to one famous myth, the father of Krishna has some kind of dispute with his brother so he left Krishna in Varaja village so that Krishna become safe from his cruel uncle and his father did not allowed him to live in Mathura. In this village Krishna sports with his young friends. The village women treat him with lovely attitude and enjoy by his childish acts. When he grows older their interest in him changes to passionate desire. He was very beautiful and lovely so women were attracted toward him even they are all married women. When the moon is full he plays his flute on autumn nights while hearing the music, when women listen him they suddenly give up their works and started to listen. The gopis are usually treated as a group and are not mentioned by names. In gopis tradition, all gopis are not mention except Radha because Radha was very beloved to Krishna himself.¹⁶⁴

Actually Radha is married to another man and by pursuing her affair with Krishna she risks social ostracism. She loves Krishna and does not care her character. She sacrifices her status and reputation. She curses her fate and the society that would keep her away from Krishna. She considers her husband as a dolt and remains impatient and angry with her

¹⁶³ Kinsley, David R., *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*. California,:University of California Press, 1988. Page 83.

¹⁶⁴ Chandra Suresh, *Encyclopedia of Hindu Gods and Goddesses* (Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 1998), 259-260.

painful situation. According to Hinduism their love was beyond materialistic world, so Hindu always worships Krishna with Radha.

In this regard a devotional movement arose in Bengal in sixteenth century devoted to the worship of Krishna along with his Shakti Radha. The founder of this movement was Sri Chaitanya; he provided a spiritual system through chanting Hare Krishna mantra to his followers. This mantra invokes the Radha so that Radha helps her devotees to reach Krishna. Radha has been given very respect in the whole history of Chaitanya movement. Chaitanya believe that the love of Radha is selfless love for Krishna without any sexual desire, so her love leads toward spirituality and unity with Krishna. Radha continues to love Krishna even she is a married woman and faces a lot of obstacles. Radha is considered as everlasting sakti of Krishna. Theology of the Bengal Vaisnavas believes that Radha only loves Krishna not any other man. According to spiritual point of view, if Radha marry to Krishna then her love would not remain selfless or sacred love.¹⁶⁵

The Brahmavaivarta- purana also describes the status of Radha as she was linked with Krishna and remains his sakti. Radha helped Krishna in creation process of this universe while presenting her in different forms. Indeed she is his underlying power that empowers him. Radha is elevated to such an extent that shows the superiority of Radha than Krishna. Krishna loves Radha and one day he was conversating with Radha and said that everything needs some kind of support and without that support that they could not live. He concludes by saying that his support is Radha. Sometimes Krishna is considered as father of the universe and Radha as the mother of it.¹⁶⁶ As being mother of the universe, she is called

¹⁶⁵ Kempton Sally, *Awakening Shakti: The Transformative Power of the Goddesses of Yoga*, America Sounds True. 2013. 237- 242.

¹⁶⁶ The Brahma-vaivarta Purana: Translated by Rajendra Nath Sen (India: Sri Satguru Publications, 2010), 219-221.

mother goddess because she was with Krishna in the time of creation. Actually both are understood to be eternally related. Radha is described as the princess of the universe and the spouse of their supreme god Krishna and worshiped by millions of cowherd devotees.¹⁶⁷

3.2.3. Radha in Vaishnava tradition

Radha is very prominent in Hindu Vaishnava sect because of her association with Krishna. She is often known as the consort of Krishna but she was married to someone else. She always remains as a source of attraction for Krishna. Some Hindu believe that her relation with Krishna was illicit and against the social norms throughout her history. They have love for each other regardless of norms. This relationship takes place before Krishna's adult years. Their relation takes place Vraja village of cowherd. In many ways their love and setting is idyllic. The followers of Krishna or the Vaishnavas write many poems to invoke the love of Radha for Krishna. The love affair of Radha and Krishna becomes a symbol for the relationship of divine and human beings. The aim of Krishna followers is to develop the dimension of Radha in themselves to get the love of Krishna.¹⁶⁸ It is a traditional vision and exists well outside of orthodox Vaishnavism that the association of Radha with Krishna is selfless love which leads toward spirituality.¹⁶⁹

There is no matter of doubt that Radha is the incarnation of Goddess Laxmi and Krishna is that of Lord Vishnu. In every incarnation Laxmi, in word of herself, can be the wife of only Vishnu. So it is absolute bright that God Brahma made Radha and Krishna get

¹⁶⁷ Kinsley, David R, Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition (California: University of California Press, 1988), 92.

¹⁶⁸ Foulston Lynn, Abbott Stuart, Hindu Goddesses: Beliefs and Practice (United States of America: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), 42- 43.

¹⁶⁹ Seattle Heidi R.M. Pauwels, Sita and Radha in Scripture and on Screen (UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 49.

married secretly in the forest. Krishna had gone Mathura promising to Radha that he would be come back soon.¹⁷⁰

In the Vaishnava devotional traditions of Hinduism that focus on Krishna, they consider Radha is Krishna's friend, advisor and his original Shakti. Some devotees of these traditions believe on Radha's important which sometimes even exceeds that of Krishna. It has been mentioned in the narration of the Skanda Purana that there are billions of gopis but 16,000 are well-known, 108 are important out of these and among them only eight are most important. Radha and Chandravali are important out of eight gopis and Radha is superior out of these two. All the gopis are considered as re-embodiment of goddess Lakshmi. Radha relationship to Krishna is of two types married relationship and a relationship signified with eternal mental "love". According to Vaishnavism shakti or the divine feminine energy implies shaktiman or God. As Radha is the consort of Krishna and Krishna is the source of all human beings mostly masculine, in the same way his consort Shri Radha is considered the ultimate source of all females of this universe. There are so many temples of Radha and Krishna prevalent throughout India and the world. But the temple of Vrindavan city and Mathura are believed to be the best among all. The most significant temples of Vrindaban are as "Radha-Gopinath, Radha Shyamasundar, Radha-Gokulananda, ISKCON temple and so on. Radha is worshipped throughout India especially by women. Followers consider her embodiment of Krishna. Radha is elevated to such an extent that shows the superiority of Radha than Krishna. So they both are worshipped with great devotion. ¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ John Stratton Hawley, Donna Marie Wulff, *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India* (India: Motilal Banarsi Dass Publishers, 1982), 1-3.

¹⁷¹ Kempton Sally, *Awakening Shakti: The Transformative Power of the Goddesses of Yoga* (America: Sounds True Inc, 2013), 247.

CHAPTER 4

WARRIOR GODDESSES

CHAPTER 4

WARRIOR GODDESSES

4.1. Goddess Durga

One of the most terrible and striking deity of the Hindu pantheon is the goddess Durga. Her primary mythological task is to fight demons that terrorize the constancy of the cosmos. In this task she is often described as the best queen of the war while having many arms and holding weapon in these arms. She rides on a destructive lion in a posture which shows that she is always ready for war or battle. She is very prominent to defeat the demon Mahisa and her most popular nickname is “Mahisa mardini” the killer of Mahisa.¹⁷²

In her history Durga becomes associated with the god Siva as his wife at a certain point. In this role Durga often identified with the goddess Parvati and assumes domestic characteristics. In her later history she also takes on the role of mother. She is shown flanked by four deities identified as her children: Karttikeya, Ganesa, Sarasvati, and Laksmi at her most important festival is Durga Puja. Her festival, which is held at harvest time, associates her with plants it shows that she has a close connection with the crops and fertility of plants.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Varaha Purana, 389

¹⁷³ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (California: University of California Press, 1988), 95.

4.1.1. Different Names

In Hindu mythology Goddess Durga has very imperative status. She is considered as having whole feminine energy and is created with the combination of all energy of Hindu trinity of devas as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. According to her qualities she has many different names.¹⁷⁴ As in sacred books of the east her names are mentioned:

“anye manye mane mamane kitte karite sūme, sañitavi, santé, mukt...”¹⁷⁵

She is commonly known by the name of Mahisasuramardini it means that the one who killed Mahisasura the demon. She has different names and incarnations. There are names given to the avatars of Durga as Himavati, daughter of the mountain, Parvati, consort of Shiva, Brahmacharini, one who observes true penance. Durga is invoked by many names and has two sides compassionate and ferocious. In the form of Kali, she shows her anger. For the presentation of her compassionate nature, she emerged in Gauri mean in her fair form.¹⁷⁶

As she was born with the combination of the power of three Hindu main gods, so she is known as Brahmani due to having the power of Brahma, Vaishnavi while linking herself with Vishnu and Rudrani. The followers of Durga can call her through her one hundred and eight names. Some names of her as followings: Mahachakradharini the one who holds the Chakra, Tribhuvaneshvari the Goddess of three worlds, Vividayidhadhara the holder of many weapons. She has many epithets mentioned in Saddharma Pundarika (sacred books of the east) as:

¹⁷⁴ Suresh Chandra, *Encyclopedia of Hindu Gods and Goddesses*, (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 1998), 58.

¹⁷⁵ Saddharma Pundarika, 371

¹⁷⁶ Sally Kempton, *Awakening Shakti*, (USA: Sounds True, 2013), 79.

“gvale mahagvale, ukke, mukke...”¹⁷⁷

4.1.2. Mythology and function

Durga is both a warrior and a mother goddess. Mahabalipuram, in South India, the goddess is captured in the act of pulling her bow. She rides a roaring lion. According to Hindu belief every woman is embodiment of Durga and the active energy who embodies the active power of the feminine. Durga is one of the most popular goddesses in India, for young Indian women she is an icon of contemporary liberation and power.¹⁷⁸

There are so many myths about Durga. Usually myths start with a demon slaying. According to one myth Durga was invoked by kings for success in battles. She is the inner force that unleashes spiritual power within the human body and the power behind spiritual awakening. Paintings of Durga show her with a crown, red sari, bangles, necklaces, flowing hair and eight arms bristling with weapons. She is a guardian: beautiful, queenly, and fierce. Durga carries a mace, a sword, a spear, a bow, a rosary (symbolizing prayer) a conch (representing creative sound) and a lotus (symbolizing fertility).¹⁷⁹ In one version of her origin, she was brought into manifestation by the male gods to save them from the buffalo demon. So she emerges as a divine female warrior Mahisha. All the gods were powerless over a demon that couldn't be conquered. They sent forth their anger as a mass of light and power. Their combined strength joined together into the form of a beautiful woman who filled every direction with her light.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Saddharma Pundarika, 372

¹⁷⁸ Gavin D Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (New York: Cambridge University press, 1996), 177.

¹⁷⁹ Devdutt Pattanaik, *The Mother Goddess: An Introduction* (USA: Feffer and Simons Limited, 2000), 108.

¹⁸⁰ Nagendra Kr. Singh, *Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1997), Vol.5, 1472-1478.

It is Hindus belief that she was helped by Gods, first of all the mountain god named Himalaya gave her the lion for her mount, her face was formed by Shiva, her arms were given by Vishnu, her hair came from Yama who is the god of death and the wind god offered his bow and arrow. For the sake of the world, Durga set forth to battle the demon armed and protected by all the powers of the divine masculine. She is a world protector and her fierceness arises out of her uniquely potent compassion. She always appears when someone is in great trouble.¹⁸¹

4.1.3. Worship and Temples

Durga is very popular goddess and worshiped among Hindus with great devotion as she is the essence of Hindu sakti. As she was created with the combination of the energy of all gods so she has power to protect them against all evil.

Many festivals are celebrating for her honor but Durga puja is the most famous among others. She is often described as the best queen of the war while having many arms and holding weapon in these arms. She is always depicted in pictures riding on the lion as she is the goddess of war. It indicates her willingness to fight.¹⁸²

Durga has two kind of nature just like the sides of coin. Her followers pray for her protection against all evil as well as invoke her blessing while worshiping her in nine forms. It means that she is portrayed in two forms as killer of evil and on the other hand she has kind nature for her devotees. Durga puja remind her devotees to leave bad qualities as lust, greed and anger. She traind her followers to face the challenges of life and they should be

¹⁸¹ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine In the Hindu Religious Tradition* (California: University of California Press, 1988), 100.

¹⁸² Varaha Purana, 389

ready for war against evil. She demands from them to worship her and get blessings for their peaceful life.¹⁸³

Her followers pray for her protection against all evil as well as invoke her blessing while worshiping her in nine forms. Goddess Durga grants her power and spiritual energy to her devotees so that they can live a happy life. She also represents the victory of good over evil. Each day of Durga puja has a very importance. Goddess Durga is venerated in different forms and her temples are found all over the world. One of the well renowned temples is Vaishno Devi temple which is situated in Kashmir. The images of the deities Mahalakshmi, Mahakali, and Mahasaraswati are located in this holy shrine. Mahalakshmi temple, Devi temple, Chattarpur Mandir and Jwalamukhi Temple are the temples of Durga in India. The Jwalamukhi temple is devoted to the worship of other deities as well as Saraswati, Lakshmi, Mahakali, Chandi and other Goddesses. The Naina Devi temple is located in Nainital. The Chattarpur Mandir is located in the Capital of Delhi. Images of Durga are also found in North America, Indonesia, Cambodia and also been built in other countries. One of the most famous idols of Durga is that of the Goddess, riding a lion. All round the year temples of Durga are open for devotees but special celebrations brings thousands to these temples during Durga Puja, Navratra, and Ayudha Puja in the South. In western India, Navratra is celebrated and Puja is arranged on each of the nine days of Navratra. In Northern India, Navratra is celebrated with a period of fasting for seven days. In eastern India this festival is celebrated with much dedication. The idol of Durga is decorated in temples.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Sally Kempton, *Awakening Shakti* (USA: Sounds True, 2013), 74-76.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

4.2. Goddess Kali

4.2.1. Origin

Kali, the Hindu warrior goddess is quite different to other Hindu goddess. She is often depicted with black hair, a necklace around her neck, a lolling tongue dripping of blood and a belt of several heads. Like goddess durga, kali is also worshiped in catagories as the symbol of motherhood and destruction.¹⁸⁵

When the gods were sleeping, Mahisasura who was a demon tried to take control of the universe and heaven as well. When this news was heard by Hindu trinity of devas like Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva they became very angry and there was a blast light sparked from their foreheads, then suddenly these sparks took the shape of a female with the combined power of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Then the gods decorated her with different weapons and ready her to fight demon king. Kali angrily ruined the group of the soldiers which belong to demon, but it was impossible for her to overcome demons, because whenever drop of his blood fell on earth makes a duplication of new demon and Kali has a power to annihilate him. She raised demon king into air and swallowed him completely.¹⁸⁶

Kali appears for a second time during the fight between the two demons and Durga. When demons were trying to attack Durga, suddenly Durga became angry and from her anger and from her forehead Kali springs. Then Kali defeated these demons. There are so many other myths which indicate the bravery of Kali. According to another myth, in order to

¹⁸⁵ Sally Kempton, *Awakening Shakti*, (USA: Sounds True, 2013), p 126.

¹⁸⁶ Bulbul Sharma, *the Book of Devi* (India: Penguin Books, 2010), 25.

kill the demon Vishnu incarnates himself as Krishna and to fool demon Kali, is asked to incarnate herself. Kali sacrifices herself to save Krishna and as a reward she is promised blood worship and given a discus and conch. In the Ramayana Kali also helps Rama when he was attacked by evil king Ravana. Kali emerged in the form of Situ and tried to fight with Ravana. The word “kali” is derivative from “Kala” and this Kala means time and darkness. It means that Kali takes away the darkness. She takes away the darkness from the life of anyone who struggles in the path of rightness by performing the spiritual disciplines. Kali and her husband are god and goddess of destruction. Kali is portrayed as black or ugly woman, with dark black and dirty hair. Kali is rarely depicted as a submissive wife because she is the fierce form of Durga.¹⁸⁷

There is a group known as Mahavidyas, this group respects the females with qualities of Kali and Kali is exemplar for them, because the relation of Kali to the “ultimate truth” is also considered the ideal Mahavidya. She has a popular icon of worship and largely worshiped in Bengal because of her association with Siva. She is represented as a symbol of feminism, the fiercest form of Durga, and true knowledge in which Hindus try to obtain moksa.¹⁸⁸

4.2.2. Symbolism behind her terrifying nature

Kali is a Sanskrit name which is derived from the word Kal. It means time as nothing can run away from time so nothing can escape from Kali. She is the all pervading divine mother of the universe and her consort is Shiva. She is also goddess of death as the text in Gaina Sutras (sacred books of the east):

¹⁸⁷ Sally Kempton, *Awakening Shakti*, (USA: Sounds True, 2013), 118-120.

¹⁸⁸ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (California: University of California Press, 1988), 115-117.

“Then When death comes at last, the fool trembles in fear; he dies the ‘death against one’s will, (having lost his chance) like a gambler vanquished by Kali.”¹⁸⁹

Her ornaments and appearance has special meaning and significance. The garland of skulls and her skirt symbolizes the obliteration or destruction of the body and the ego. According to Hindus belief goddess Kali has the power to give freedom from attachment of this world. She loves her followers like mother and kill the evils and difficulties of her devotees by her hand.

She holds a sword in two of her hands and this represents a great battle in which she defeated the devil. Goddess Kali is often depicted as standing on a white skinned Shiva while her tongue sticking out. She also invokes wisdom, love and harmony to her follower’s hearts and minds.

4.2.3. Characteristics

a. The destroyer of the Ego

The destroyer of the Ego Goddess Kali brings the death of the ego and gives freedom to her followers from the prison of our own bodily self. She gives liberation by dissolve the illusion of the ego. She is the destroyers of unreality. Ego trembles with fear when sees the mother Kali because it sees its own eventual end. Hindus who are emotionally involved to their ego will not be able to obtain the vision of Mother Kali and she will come into sight in a horror invoking or furious. Hindus have firm believe that if they follow goddess Kali they can destroy their lust greed and ego.

¹⁸⁹ Gaina Sutras, 22

b. kind nature

Hindus believe that goddess Kali also has kind nature which indicates to her motherly love for her devotees. She is the ultimate female sign of compassion as she provides moksha or liberation to her children so among all the goddesses she is the most compassionate. She always remains ready to shower her affection and love to Anyone who care to turn their gaze toward heart.¹⁹⁰

c. Liberator of souls

She is the Goddess of enlightenment or liberation. She is the redeemer of the souls and killer of all negativity in them. According to Hindus belief when the attachment from this materialistic world comes to an end then they can get liberation.

Kali the great goddess is the symbol for the countless variety of experience. She represents the complete physical plane. She is the humor, sorrow and tragedy of life. She is the mother, lover, brother, sister, father and friend. She is the cruel, beast, monster and brute. She is the ocean, grass, dew and sun.¹⁹¹

4.2.4. Kali in Hindu Philosophy

In the Indian pantheon the Goddess Kali has become such a dominating figure. Goddess Kali has so many characteristics and manifestations. She has so many names and for example the so-called one Hundred Names that begin with the letter 'K'. These names define the goddess much more intimately and directly. Goddess worship is usually

¹⁹⁰ Gavin D Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (New York: Cambridge University press, 1996), 182.

¹⁹¹ Suresh Chandra, *Encyclopedia of Hindu Gods and Goddesses*, (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 1998), 164.

performed at midnight. Disciples stay awake the full night till the practices go on. The rituals are free from complexities and very simple. There is no complicated preparation or cooking required satisfying her. After the chanting of the specific mantras she is worshipped display of fireworks and amidst the bursting of crackers. Female cows and goats are sacrificed to gratify the Goddess. Hindus generally meditate or worship to Kali to reveal truth and take away their darkness. She also invokes love and wisdom in their hearts and minds. The new moon day of each month and the fourteenth day of each lunar fortnight are special days for worship of Kali.¹⁹²

Goddess Kali is respected in her destructive mode and Diwali festival is famous for her. She is frightening to look at, with four hands, black and furious, dressed in skulls and dripping blood. She is often portrayed with her tongue sticking out and with one foot on Lord Shiva. She is earth Mother Goddess capable of terrible destruction. Kali is a great and powerful black the chief goddess of time and has the power to destroy the universe. She is beyond the limit of space and time. On the end of each cycle, Kali helps her husband Shiva to destroy this universe and after destruction she collects the essences of the next creation.¹⁹³ Hindus offer her worship and celebrate festivals in her honor. Her three forms are three divisions of the year, as cosmos consists of three as heaven, earth and underworld. Kali is known as the most fully recognize of all the Dark Goddesses. Originally she was considered as warrior and she was given flesh and blood in her offerings. She is considered as a great protector. In the Hindu tantric tradition she is mostly famous for her loving nature like mother rather than dark one. They believe that she is the mother of universe. According to

¹⁹² Hawley John Stratton, Wulff Donna Marie, *Devi: Goddesses of India* (India: Motilal Banarsi Dass Publ, 1998), 78-80.

¹⁹³ Lynn Foulston and Stuart Abbott, *Hindu Goddesses: Beliefs and Practices* (United States of America: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), 74.

Hindus she goes into the darkness for her followers to abolish their sins, concerns and worries. Some groups of Hindus are afraid from her but they also adore and love her and they observe her as a manifestation of power. She is the female energy that incarnate. She is life, death, rebirth and regeneration. She is the complete symbol of power. They also believe that she has complete power to bring death for old one and give birth to a new baby.¹⁹⁴

She is the symbol to execute humans but actually she wants to remove the agoism from human beings which is the cause of many problems. She reduces the pain or diseases of human beings. Killing evil and destruction of the universe is her main function so she acts in violent, horrible, terrifying ways, but she has very kind nature for her children. So Goddess Kali has two aspects, on the one hand she is a loving mother who cares her devotees and on the other hand she is also a terrible mother who destroys demons and ego.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Sally Kempton, *Awakening Shakti*, (USA: Sounds True, 2013), 124-125.

¹⁹⁵ David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (California: University of California Press, 1988), 125-130.

CHAPTER 5

FEMALE ASPECTS OF DIVINE AS ROLE MODEL FOR HINDU WOMEN

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The majority of Hindu goddess is consort of various gods. In this role, they represent the power of their husband as being his Sakti. They are mostly portrayed significantly smaller than their husband and often shown in a subservient role, such as goddess Lakshmi who is often depicted rubbing the feet of her husband Vishnu. Many goddesses are presenting their role as wives of gods and giving very high status to their husband. This category includes goddess Lakshmi, Parvati, and Sita. These goddesses are very respectable for Hindu women and Hindu women consider them role model for their married life.

In Hindu tradition every goddess has diverse characteristics. Some goddesses are very kind and motherly caring nature; on the other hand, some of them are deprived from this quality. So they are different from one another. Several goddesses are great fighter, fierce, independent and physically powerful; whereas others are married, have relation with male deities and domestic in nature. Certain goddesses are related with wild civilization; others are personification of culture, music, art and well known for education.

The numerous aspects of the Hindu divine feminine show the infinite facets of her nature. The benevolent natured goddesses reward their devotees with divine grace.

Goddesses are a great source of motivation and power for Hindu women. In fact goddesses play a central role in the lives of women. Even Gods treated their wives with care, respect and love. In the same way males should follow their Gods and fulfill the rights of women. Women can get their rights and improve their status through goddesses. They should try to invoke the characteristics of goddesses within themselves. Women are supposed to be devoted and loyal to their husbands.

Goddess Sita, Lakshmi and Parvati are the goddesses with right qualities and role model for women as a good wife and mother. Durga and kali is different from other goddesses and not ideal for being a good wife. Basically they are warrior goddesses. They can be role model for women as an expression for dealing with new challenges and difficult situation in modern times. Now I will describe that how the goddess are role model for Hindu women.

5.1. Saraswati as role model for Hindu woman

Saraswati is described in Brahma Purana as:

“Wearer of the white clothes giver of the power to reflect the essence of Brahma, supreme power, holder of veena (Lyre), book, beaded rosary, the benevolent Goddess is seated on a lotus. I respectfully pray the Goddess who gives us knowledge.”¹⁹⁶

Goddess Saraswati is role model for Hindu women in follow fields

- a. Knowledge
- b. Music
- c. Salvation

¹⁹⁶ Brahma Purana, 30

d. Purity

5.1.1. Knowledge

Hindus sacred scriptures affirmed that Goddess Saraswati literally means knowledge. Therefore, she is the ruler of all kind of knowledge. Brahmins believed that all knowledge is coming from her and she is famous as mother of all kind of knowledge. Her worship is necessary for any student or anyone to become a learned being.

So Saraswati is a great role model for Hindu women in the field of education, because she gave birth to knowledge wisdom, arts, language and music rather than children. She is the mother of Vedas and primary Hindu texts. She is the goddesses of knowledge learning and science. As meaning of saraswati is flow of knowledge arts and music. So a woman should be educated intelligent, conscious and creative. It means that woman has privilege to get education and it is like a religious obligation. Women play an integral role in the progress of nation's evolution and advancement. So they should be educated, creative like their goddess. In this way they will not only play important role in society but also fulfill their religious obligation. Saraswati encouraged woman to get education because they have foster infants. Child gets his first training in the lap of a woman. He deprives from beginning education if his mother is not educated. As Saraswati stands for tolerance woman should have passionate and compromising attitude. They should bear up violence and pain.

When women are educated they set their goals in life. They can abolish ignorance and bring enlightenment as Saraswati is exemplified with river which removes the thirst of dry land.

Saraswati is goddess of speech so women should raise their voice against injustice and not be silent, Saraswati is also considered as the goddess of culture. In the same way women should be social and live according to their traditions and customs. In every woman Saraswati is hidden who arouses the buried powers in the self. Women are supposed to take decisions and help their family as their goddess helped Brahma to create the world. Women should choose a creative path as she lives in the creative instant.

But India still has one of the lowest female literacy rates in Asia and gender discrimination still persists there. So it is very imperative to note the historical fact of education in India. In Vedic time period women were enjoying the same educational rights with men. They were allowed to participate in religious and social activities, and they can enjoy specific customs, rituals and spirituality. Even men have not any right to interfere in their practices. They gradually lost their rights in late Vedic time. In Medieval period, many immoral practices as, Sati, deprivation of the right of education for woman and child marriage was started. Then later in British time, many Hindu religious or social leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Ray and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar started movement and tried to improve the right of education for Hindu woman.

Hindu woman should reflect on the importance of knowledge and consider their goddess Saraswati as their role in the field of education, so that they can get the right of education.

5.1.2. Veena or Music

Sage Bhartrihari writes in Brahma Purana:

“Without literature and music, a man is not more than an animal. Hence the book and veena in the hands of Saraswati teach that if the humans wish to do away with their bruteness, knowledge of literature and music is must for them.”

Therefore, Saraswati is portrayed with veenu and this veena is a symbol of music correspondingly. This goddess teaches Hindu women the importance of music. She combined knowledge with music and emphasized that Hindu women should get knowledge along with the practice of playing music.

5.1.3. Salvation

The final or absolute goal of knowledge is to reach the stage of salvation. This salvation leads human being toward godhead. The rosary is a symbol of this association with godhead by chanting god's names on rosary. Goddess Saraswati as mentioned above that she is holder of rosary, so it means that she teaches Hindu women the way of salvation through beaded rosary while fixing their mind and attention toward godhead which is the final goal of knowledge.

5.1.4. Purity

Saraswati is described in Brahma Purana as

“Wearer of the white clothes”

Goddess Saraswati is portrayed as wearer of white clothes and holder of white rosary beads. It shows that she loves white color as white color symbolizes purity. She teaches Hindu women to wear or use white color of beaded rosary for the eternal salvation. White rosary

illustrates the spotless clarity. Therefore, it presents a lesson for Hindu woman to rise beyond the lust, greed and anger while making their mind as spotless as the beads of rosary. Basically whiteness, swan and lotus are associated with her because of her transcendence and purity. Goddess Saraswati is more spiritual than other Hindu goddesses.

Scrawny

Goddess Saraswati is not a domestic goddess. She donated herself for knowledge and music. It shows that she separated cultural activities from family life. She was interested in art, painting and music but she did not pay attention toward family life and she was not loyal toward her husband. She does not want any sexual relation with her husband so she always tried to escape from Brahma. As it is mention in Matsaya Purana that she tried to escape from Brahma so that she remain pure.¹⁹⁷ So, it shows that Saraswati is not a complete role model for Hindu women in all aspects of life as a good mother or house wife.

¹⁹⁷ Matsaya Purana, 780

5.2. Lakshmi as Role model for Hindu Women

Satapatha-Brahmana describes characteristic of goddess Lakshmi as:

“You are the supreme mother of all,
And every woman is an embodiment of you.
So too do you express yourself in the forms
Of dharma, artha, kama, and moksha”¹⁹⁸

This sacred text indicates that goddess Lakshmi is role model for Hindu women in following fields:

- a. Dharma (virtuous conduct)
- b. Artha (material prosperity)
- c. Kama (pleasure and enjoyment)
- d. Moksha (spiritual liberation)

5.2.1. Virtuous conduct

Dharma means virtuous conducts, balanced way of life while performing both religious duties and worldly affairs. Goddess Lakshmi is considered as upholder of dharma. Her association with dharma tells Hindu women to live successful life in this world and the world hereafter by following dharma like their goddess Lakshmi.

Lakshmi is consort of Vishnu; they together serve as sustainers of the universe. After every world cycle, they appear as embodiment of dharma and restore harmony among

¹⁹⁸ Satapatha-Brahmana

different activities. During wedding functions, the picture of Vishnu and Lakshmi present an example of happy family life for bride and groom.

Invoking Lakshmi of the home also involves performing essential domestic ceremonies and women are also responsible for preparing ritual offerings in the home, which are included fasts at certain times throughout the year and simple daily offerings to complex vows.

The dharma form of Lashmi teaches Hindu women to harmonize their duties toward religion and family life. So they should do virtuous acts while performing and sustaining their family lives.

5.2.2. Material prosperity

More than any of her other aspects, Goddess Lakshmi is known for wealth and prosperity. She is usually worshiped as goddess of material prosperity. She is the standard picture of material wealth or artha that is why many business establishments in India grace their premises with private shrines to the goddess and merchants are among her most ardent devotees. All worship her with great devotion as:

“Giver of wealth, giver of pleasures to all senses,

Giver of the right to rule kingdoms,

She who has lotus like eyes,

She to whom Salutations remove all miseries fast,

And my mothers to you are my salutations.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Sri Kanakadhara Stotram_ Adi Shankaracharya, text 16.

Goddess Lakshmi association with material prosperity allow Hindu women to get wealth for material prosperity for their family. This also allows them to get the right of job inside or outside homes by following virtuous ways.

5.2.3. pleasure and enjoyment

According to Hindu belief Goddess Lakshmi is goddess of pleasure and she allows her followers to enjoy the every aspect of life. Goddess herself is delight, sensuality and pleasure. She is scintillating in golden color and full of passion, the first stirrings of the sexual energy necessary for expansion. Lakshmi is visible in every aspect of the material world, in its collection of rasas (flavor), in its multicolored fragrances, and in all that expresses the pulse of divine energy because it exists within the world. When senses are enlivened, one can experience the goddess's presence and grace. As goddess Lakshmi is famous for her beauty and she represents beauty in form as well as in essence. As woman is her embodiment should ornament the body with cosmetic coloring around the eyes and decorating herself with colorful dress and jewelry. This decoration of self is a actual honoring their goddess Lakshmi and is considered as religious duty.

As goddess Lakshmi is visible in every aspect of material world, so it allows Hindu women to enjoy or fulfill their material or sexual desires.

5.2.4. spiritual liberation

Lakshmi is the goddess who infuses the creation with pleasure, prosperity, and living in right relationship or Kama, artha, and dharma. These three together compose an entity

and are named as bhukti, the enjoyment. The fourth component is mukti or moksha release from worldly attachment. Lakshmi is considered as a transport to liberation from attachment to the world and the final refuge in the way of moksha. Her devotees are not forced to choose between materiality and spirituality because this would be against the magnificent arena of the goddess's essence. She is the material and spiritual substratum, a platform to achieve blessings and best experience of life. The goddess is invoked by her followers for both spiritual and material blessings.

So it means that goddess Lakshmi teaches Hindu women the method for liberation through following the three previous aspect of Lakshmi. If any Hindu woman follows all aspects of Lakshmi, finally she gets liberation or moksha.

By following the four "purposes anyone can enjoy a well balanced life with the blessing of Lakshmi. The four are not separated but rather they exist as a spectrum. In the worship of the goddess first of all one must embrace the world worship it as a sign of divine core and one must live well in the world before liberation can be attained.

There is another aspects of goddess Lakshmi that is an ideal wife which also become model for Hindu women.

5.2.5. Ideal Wife

Brahma Purana describes Lakshmi as:

"Lakshmi presents an example of an ideal spouse before the world. The supreme duty of a woman is described in the service of her husband. Second aspect of the message is for the people who want to get rich, that if they want the wealth, they must develop a

devotion for the feet of Narayana, for Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth) is to be found there and nowhere else."

Lakshmi is role model for Hindu women in many aspects as she is the wife of Vishnu so a husband and wife should follow the rules established by divine couple Vishnu and Lakshmi. In Hindu wedding ceremony the bride and groom are advised to be a representative of the divine couple and to follow their roles in their married life.

A married woman is viewed as a living embodiment of Lakshmi as she becomes a queen in her household and devadasi in the royal place. This is accomplishment of a woman's stri dharma means the inherent powers and responsibilities which are required in living a woman's life. Many of these responsibilities involve honesty in relationships with her spouse, children, extended family, storage, and preparation of food, and the management of finances.

If any woman follows all these obligations then it would draw upon the inherent energies of a woman to generate and sustain well being in her home and family. It is women who sweep and clean the home every morning and who create beautiful patterns on floors and walls to attract the goddess of wealth into their homes. So actually a woman is transforming the family home into a temple of Lakshmi. A woman is supposed to be a form of the goddess and thus an extension and repository of the goddess's power.

Women are understood as embodiments of the goddess's essence and all females are recognized as forms of the goddess, regardless of station, marital status or age. As ornamentation are considered as sign of auspiciousness.

All the efforts done by woman about decorating home environment takes on special significance because home is the temple of Grhya Lakshmi. When a woman gives attention to home it becomes a kind of ritual.

With the belief that the world is the body of goddess Hindu woman make efforts to prepare a hospitable space for her to reside in and through this obligation a woman can generates the creative cosmic power which is called sakti that is part of her own essential being. So a woman can convert her ordinary home into goddess residence and it can become an abode of Lakshmi.

Even devadasis means servant of the gods never considered as servants and ideally elevated dignity of their sacred status. A woman who does not follow Lakshmi and is not acting with those divine obligations which the goddess Lakshmi has sanctioned such a woman will not attain the goddess blessings. In Hindu society woman's work has never been degraded and it never should be, as it preserves life. When a woman does her domestic works considering them rituals she becomes manifestation of goddess Lakshmi. A woman may experience household Lakshmi and royal Lakshmi if she experiences herself not as servant but as a sovereign in her domain.

Lakshmi favor is very essential to a majestic fulfilling life of women. An ordinary work for example washing your dishes can turn into an exquisite ritual when you consider it religious obligation according to the view of Lakshmi.

A woman invokes the goddess in herself and becomes Lakshmi when she models her behavior, consciousness and attitudes on qualities that are recognized as embodiments of Lakshmi. In many devotional songs about Lakshmi eight qualities of a wealthy woman have been mentioned which are beauty, cleanliness, happiness, wisdom, courage, hamony,

balance and generosity. As Lakshmi is goddess of prosperity so women naturally contain the divine power of prosperity. It is Hindus belief that every woman is the embodiment of Lakshmi.

5.3. Parvati as role model for Hindu woman

Parvati is role model for Hindu women in three aspects as:

- a. Courageous goddess
- b. Ideal Wife
- c. Ideal mother

5.3.1. Courageous goddess

Shiva Purana indicates Parvati as courageous goddess. The story of Parvati's penance is mention in Shiva Purana as:²⁰⁰

“After taking the permission of her parents and relinquish all of her ornaments and royal apparels, Parvati went to the same place where Lord Shiva himself had done penance. This sacred place was situated at the Himalayas, from where the holy Ganges originated. Parvati companions too had accompanied her. Parvati commenced her penance which gradually became severer day by day. She did penance for three thousand years by chanting the five lettered mantra- OM NAMAH SHIVAY and performing other kinds of austerities. Becoming impressed by her tremendous penance even the deities flocked to see her. Parvati did her penance, surrounded by fire on all her sides during summer. In rainy season she did her penance without any shelter and during winter she used to do penance by immersing herself in neck deep water.”

This story shows that she teaches women to be courageous as she brings forth nourishment even in the midst of what seems to be rejection and disapproval. She is a spiritual teacher for Hindu women that there are no boundaries to what a woman can do

²⁰⁰ Shiva Purana, 211

when she uses her spiritual power in the pursuit of any target she decides. She is a great confirmation for women courage. Women should be powerful as parvati is one of the strong goddesses.

5.3.2. Ideal Wife

The Upanishads describe goddess Parvati as the wife of Shiva.

“Uma is wife of Shiva and better known by her earlier name, Parvati the daughter of the mountains.”²⁰¹

Parvati is ideal role model for Hindu woman in many aspects as mother, wife and how to face difficult situations. A woman can become ideal wife and mother by following goddess parvati advices. As she mentioned in Hindu epic Mahabharata, “uma” recommends the responsibilities of mother and wife. Wife should love her husband without any condition as goddess Parvati loves her husband unconditionally. While telling Brahmin Parvati said:

"You say that lord Shiva does not possess anything- not even wealth. He does not put on clothes on his body. You also say that he is not fit to be a bridegroom of me. But all of your utterances prove your mean intelligence."²⁰²

According to Parvati husband is respectable for wife. He is like her friend, god, refuge or a safe haven. A wife can get real happiness by serving her husband and children and keep them happy. By serving her family a time comes when their happiness is her happiness. She should be cheerful and positive even her family is in hardship, sickness or in anger. A woman should participate in social activities and encourages righteous social life.

²⁰¹ The Upanishads, 151

²⁰² Shiva Purana, 212

She always remains humble and cheerful before relative's family and friends. She always welcome her guests serve them and solve their problems. Parvati declares in Mahabharata that her home and her family is her heaven.

5.3.3. Ideal Mother

Shiva Purana presents a story that indicates Parvati as ideal mother of Ganesha as:

“Ganesha was born to Shiva and Parvati, when they went to Kailash Mountain shortly after their marriage. Once while going to take her bath, Parvati instructed Nandi, to stand guard at the entrance and not to allow anybody to enter the premise without her permission. After that Shiva comes and tries to enter inside but Ganesha refused to let him go inside. But when Shiva tried to go inside forcibly, Ganesha hit him with his stick. Lord Shiva became furious and ordered his ganas to kill him. Parvati became extremely furious at the death of Ganesha. Her anger resulted into the manifestation of innumerable goddesses, who started creating havoc on the deities. The deities went to lord Shiva and requested him to make Ganesha alive once again. Lord Shiva instructed them to go in the northern direction and bring the head of any creature they might find and join it with the trunk of Ganesha. The deities followed the instruction and went in the northern direction. They found an elephant which had only one tusk. They severed the elephant's head and joined it with the trunk of Ganesha. By the blessings of Shiva, Ganesha became alive once again and Parvati became happy.”

But Parvati connection with motherhood does not confine the feminine or weaken their activities and significance. She is strong and proficient without her femaleness through her aspect of Durga who manifests in every activity, from agriculture to dance, from art to

inspiring warriors. In short she is balanced by Durga. So women are also suppose not to confine their selves as good mother and they should be active in other types of activities also. Women should be kind with every one as Parvati is gentle aspect of Shakti. If a woman is not loved by her husband she should not be disappointed. Instead remain sincere and keep caring him. One day he will give her importance and respect. As Parvati insists in her determination and refuses to listen anything against his husband. When he started to live in a dark forest Parvati use to visit his cave every day to sweep the floor and decorate it with flowers and to bring eatable things for Shiva. Parvati was determined to win his affection and becomes an ascetic herself. Finally Shiva shows respect for her feelings. So if the woman is determine she can achieve her destination.

5.4. Sita as role model for hindu women

5.4.1. The Ideal Wife

In Hinduism the ideal wife is a woman who always remains faithful to her husband. It is a religious duty of a wife to worship her husband as god. Sita is an inspiring and empowering example for women. For her Dharma was superior to anything.

Sita is the ideal wife for Hindu woman. She is completely different from Kali and other fierce goddesses. In the Ramayana, she is defined mostly with relation to her husband Rama. She is also described as idyllic wife of prince Rama. She is described as paying very high status to her husband and he is the center of Sita's life. She is devoted entirely to her husband. In Hinduism a woman is trained to realize herself primarily in relation to others. In Hinduism, people believe that woman should be trained to keep best relation with her family and she is taught in developing her character what others expect of her. Sita is the ideal woman and got very high respectable status among Hindu goddesses. Other goddesses, such as Parvati, Laxmi and other heroines from Hindu mythology, express many qualities but Sita is most famous for devotion and love to her husband. In fact, she prescribes many qualities of ideal wife and perfect mother. Even if any woman is sincere for her husband then she is called as a second Sita. Sita is an integral part of Hindu woman's psyche. Her name is used in example for good woman in Indian tradition. She revealed her greatness wherever she was placed. She faced harsh crisis for her husband and helped her husband against Ravana and gave many other sacrifices. So, Hindu woman should also be settled in every kind of hardships.

Sita is considered as the ideal wife, mother and daughter. She is remembered for her attributes and virtues since ages. A woman should be symbol of chastity and loyalty like Sita is a perfect example of morality, loyalty and idealism. Women are suppose to bear all kind of pains and hardships as Sita leaves all the luxuries and charms of palace for the sake of her husband. She prefers to stay in exile with her husband. She showed her sanctity to her husband by giving fire ordeal. She walked on fire to prove her chastity, the coals turned to lotuses and she was not burnt. Women should have the spirit of sacrifice like their goddess. Even today Sita is known for her self-sacrifice, dedication, purity and courage. She is also regarded as the role model of adherence to duty and wifely love. Sita gives the lesson to women that they should be devoted to their husbands and even not take care about their lives.

Like Sita a woman is herself the sacrifice. Every woman still deprived from her rights should think about her. She is absolutely selfless wife, the good daughter; she bears infinity of feminine tears and hopes.

5.4.2. Forgiveness

Sita is ideal for women with her noble character. She never kept prejudice for anyone in her heart not even for enemies. When Ravana died, Hanuman asked Sita to take revenge from female gods who have tortured her. But she refused and said that they were following Ravana's order, no culpability should be attached to them. She gets a chance to retaliate but she did not even blame them. So women should always be kind to everyone like their goddess.

5.4.3. Love and openheartedness

Monkey worriers helped Rama in defeating Ravana. Sita used to say that if she could return to Ayodhya and meet with the wives of the monkey chiefs. Sita was very thankful to Hanuman and gave her precious necklace as a token of her appreciation. So Hindu women should also admire and appreciate who helped them.

On the other hand Sita can be considered a restrictive role model after long suffering. This type of sacrifice can be harmful for Hindu women. The fire ordeal cannot be imposed on women to prove their chastity.

In family matters it is women who have to pay the heaviest price as Sita renounced her happiness for family issues. According to Swami Vivekananda:

“There may have been several Ramas, perhaps, but only one Sita.”

In society women are blaming their husbands but only few are like Sita who try to obey their husbands. Her dignified patience is role model for Hindu women.

Sita’s husband constantly and cruelly rejected her she is the goddess who followed the dharma of worshipping her husband obeying his will.

She recommended women that mothers are always there to understand the feelings and sorrows of their children. Even in Last moments of life when she realized that she cannot prove herself as good wife and all her efforts are useless. She returned to mother earth by showing that women have an ideal unity with their mothers.

5.5. Radha as role model for Hindu women

There are surely lessons for Hindu women in the love stories of Radha. Women have two opposite role models regarding love, Sita a virtuous wife who is a queen, exclusively aware of her social responsibilities and Radha on the other side an adulterous lover who always focused on her romantic relationship with Krishna.

Radha loved Krishna in extreme level that she is assumed the place of his eternal Shakti. So a woman is also supposed to love his husband and become his power. Krishna admires Radha as his life and power and considers nothing himself. In the same way Hindu women should give support to their husbands.

5.6. Durga as role model for hindu women

5.6.1. Menacing warrior and compassionate mother

Durga holds a dualistic role of menacing warrior and compassionate mother. So women should be a good mother and also show her abilities in time of war or any difficult circumstances. They should be confident on their abilities like their goddess. Females should tackle their obstacles and think as Durga is within them. They are entirely independent, utterly strong and requiring nobody's aid. They are the goddess in their own right. Women should be Determinate like Durga to drive the chariot of their own fate. No matter whatever the hardship comes, women should not be afraid and be subject and object of strong passions. They are no longer perceived only in relation to their men as wives, mothers and daughters because Durga upholds the essential individuality of woman.

As Durga is a good role model for women, so they are not only in relation to their men as wives, mothers and daughters. She safeguards the integral individuality of women. She is role model for women in many aspects. Gods have no choice but to create a female warrior, when goddess Durga was born in the context of cosmic crisis. The gods create an independent female deity and she becomes battle queen. It indicates that women are not inferior in their abilities. They are independent as gods created Durga independently. . Durga is both warrior and mother goddess. She is an icon of contemporary power and liberation for women. As Durga is queen of cosmic so women are the guardians of her world.

Durga is not ideal for being a good wife. But she can be inspiration for women to deal with new challenges in modern age. Women should not understand themselves helpless and fight with courage.

5.7. Kali & Women's Roles

Goddess Kali also has a very significant role in the life of Hindu woman. Kali plays substantially different roles as she motivates and empowers women. She is also an iconic mother figure and a sense of hope for Hindu men and women. There are different views about the symbolism of Kali. Women mostly feel isolation because males are more dominant and powerful in this material society, so women also required some kind of power to cope with society through their goddess Kali who is fierce goddess. She is known as an “unusual mother” who takes as well as gives life and destroys as well as creates.

Kali exemplify characteristics of the different phases in a woman's life such as the Virgin, the Mother and the old woman which are associated with purity, maternity and wisdom. She has been compared to other religious figures who are inconsistent, or who control over love and war, or who have dangerous character. She is also loved as the holy-mother and also portrayed as killing devil on the battlefield. Kali is a union of opposite concepts as the above different depictions indicate. . Thus, she resembles equality, freedom and power for many women. The repressed characteristics of Kali can be beneficial for women.

She seems to provide them an outlet and her entire principle brings space for women in a male-dominated world. Women have made use of her descriptions (especially on which she is standing at Siva's chest and crushing him) to liberate themselves from patriarchy.

Woman should learn that Kali has progressed from a minor, bloodthirsty goddess toward a universally compassionate and kind mother. She maintains Hindu family values, especially encourages self-restraint and self-control. Even she is changed from a tantric icon to a domestic one.

In Hindu society women have to play different types of roles and one of which is to serve their husband. They are also expected to follow their duties as a wife, mother, grandmother and less to do with her actual rights. In Hindu society Females have the divine feminine power of sakti and without this supremacy gods are powerless. Goddess like Kali plays an inspiring role in the life of women and men. Hindus (men and women) worship goddess Kali as a means of comfort.

Woman should burn the negative tendencies by kali's fire. As she is most deeply understood the ego-smashing side of Shakti so she is like teacher. Actually the dark goddess lives in all women but often denied and suppressed. She will eventually reveal in sarcasm and hostility with nagging gossip and putdowns. For many women, Kali side is a metaphor for learning to love their own rage. Kali storms through in women as the self-conscious power that women hide. As they try to live up to the picture of the affectionate nurturing feminine model that every society idealizes. Some women use the goddess image to justify their egos as acts of vengeful anger against family members and relatives who have abused or betrayed them.

For thousands of years, women have suppressed their power and the process of finding that energy is fraught with missteps. They don't always know how to break up the anger that can stand against injustice. That courage hold in their cells and need is only to bring out.

Kali is the force, women can call her in those moments when they move beyond their own trauma or courageously face and when they are in discomfort. Kali fascinates modern women even with her problematic aspects or possibly because of them. When a woman wants to stand up for herself or discovers her inner fierceness, she is in need to find kali energy within herself. Kali is the great teacher for women who want to become courageous. She is spiritual teacher as well. She is literally death to the ego. She cut away whatever is extraneous and indulgent from the life of her followers. As she embodies anger but she also ironically destroys anger. She gives self confidence to women.

CHAPTER 6

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Islamic tradition is strictly monotheistic. As Allah Almighty says in Quran:

فَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُواً أَحَدٌ (1) اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ (2) لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُوْلَدْ (3) وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ إِلَهٌ أَحَدٌ (4)

“Say: He is Allah, the One! Allah, the Eternal Refuge! He neither begets nor is born, Nor is there to Him any equivalent.”²⁰³

Abul A’la Maududi in *Tafheen ul Quran* defines the concept of God as “My Lord to whom you want to introduce is none but Allah, Who is the Creator, Sustainer and Master of all things. I invite you to worship Him alone because there is no one like Him”.²⁰⁴

On the other hand, Hindu tradition has some other specialties like pantheistic and henotheistic. Hindu mythology shows that they worshiped many gods along with their consort and gave equal importance and status. As they believe that, Brahma is the god of creation, so he requires knowledge or wisdom as goddess Saraswati. She is the goddess of knowledge. Vishnu is preserver, and his consort Lakshmi is goddess of wealth and prosperity. The third god of Hindu trinity is Shive, the god of destruction. He has many wives like Parvati, Durga and Kali for his power. There are also some other goddesses worshiped with gods.

In Islamic tradition, the name of god is “Allah” in Arabic language. This Arabic name “Allah” has no plural form or any opposite gender, it is quite different from English

²⁰³ 112:1-4

²⁰⁴ Maududi, Abul A’la. *Tafheen ul Quran*. Lahore: Idara tarjuman ul Quran, 1977, vol 6.

word “god” who has its plural form as “gods” and opposite gender as “goddess”. Allah Almighty is quite unique in His attributes. Allah Almighty is transcendent, omnipotent, omniscient without any consort.

بَدِيعُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَئِ يَكُونُ لَهُ وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُ صَاحِبَةٌ وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ (101)

“The Originator of the heavens and the earth! How can He have a son when He has no consort, and when He has created everything and has knowledge of all things.”²⁰⁵

Muhammad Karam Shah in *Zia ul Quran* defines this verse as “It was the habit of Arab’s unbelievers or even of some other nations that they do shirk and say god has many sons and daughters. Even the Christians say Jesus as son of god and some Jews say Aziz is the son of god while polytheistic Arabs say angels are the daughters of god. These types of myths are strictly prohibited in Islam.”²⁰⁶

This ayat declares that Allah Almighty is alone powerful without any son or consort. It shows that God should be transcendent, omnibenevolent and omniscient. Because a transcendent, omnibenevolent and omniscient god would have knowledge and power to create, preserve and destroy the world alone without the help of any consort. In traditional sense, Hindu gods are not omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. The power of these gods is shared with their consort goddesses. These goddesses are not independent and ruled by gods. On the other hand, Hindu gods are not considered completely powerful or knowledgeable without goddesses. It means that they depended on each other for the fulfillment of their motives.

²⁰⁵ Surah anaam 6;101

²⁰⁶ Karam Shah, Muhammad. *Zia ul Quran*. Lahore: Zia ul Quran publishers, 1995, Vol 1.

Imam Ghazali in his book *Ihya Ulum-id-Din* describes the foundation of Islamic belief that Muslim should believe on Allah Almighty as He is transcendence (without body or form), He is all knowing, He is all powerful and wholly good. It means that Allah Almighty alone is powerful to create, preserve and destroy this world without any help of consort or son. Allah Almighty is source of all power as He is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent. He knows, sees and control everything of this universe and whatever is out of this universe. Thus, He is present everywhere.²⁰⁷

As Allah Almighty says in Quran:

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَةٌ وَلَا تُؤْمِنُ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْقَعُ عَنْهُ إِلَّا
بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفُهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْنَسِيَّةُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَا يَنْوِدُهُ
يَفْتَهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ (255)

“God: there is no God but He, the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. His is what the heavens and the earth contain. Who can intercede with Him, unless by His leave? He is cognizant of men’s affairs now and in the future. Men can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He will. His throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of both does not weary Him. He is the Exalted, the Immense One.”²⁰⁸

While translating this verse Maulana Maududi said that “Ignorant people might make several Gods and set up objects of worship, the fact remains that the whole of creation belong to eternal, Who has no partner whatsoever He is the living Allah Who sustains the whole universe. None else is partner in His attributes, characteristics, power and rights.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ *Ihya Ulum-id-Din*, translated by Fazl UL Karim (Pakistan: Darul-Ishaat, 1993), Vol 1, 92.

²⁰⁸ 2:255

²⁰⁹ Maududi, Abul A’la. *Tafheen ul Quran*. Lahore: Idara tarjuman ul Quran, 1972, vol 1.

“There is no God but Allah: the statement which might seem to affirm merely the Oneness of the Creator, in Maulana Maududi’s view, has implications far beyond what the words of the statement might suggest at first sight. The statement not merely proclaims the unity of God as the creator or even as the sole subject of worship, it also proclaims the uniqueness of God as the master, sovereign, Lord and law giver. Essentially God alone has the right to give command, to demand of man’s exclusive service and obedience, to claim man’s total loyalty. Being the creator of mankind, God alone has the right to tell man what is the true propose of his creation, and the way to achieve it. Mulana Mududi stress that the total submission to God alone is Islam.”²¹⁰

As Islamic tradition is strictly monotheistic, so it demands from its followers to worship god alone. If someone associates anything with god and worship it that is called shirk. This “shirk or idolatry” is strictly forbidden in Islamic tradition. This is considering as the worst sin which is never be forgiven by Allah Almighty.

ذلکم اللہ ربکمْ لَا إلہ إلّا هُوَ خالقُ كُلّ شَيْءٍ فَاعْبُدُوهُ وَهُوَ عَلٰى كُلّ شَيْءٍ وَكٰيلٌ (102)

“This is God your Lord; there is no God but He, the Creator of all things; therefore, worship Him alone.”²¹¹

Abul A’la Maududi in *Tafheen ul Quran* while translating this verse said “Some people due to their ignorance made a lot of deities as they believed that theses deities are manager of this universe. For instance, one has been made the God of rain, of disease or the goddess of wealth etc.”²¹²

²¹⁰ Ahmad, Khurshid and Zafar Ishaq Anasri, *SYED MAUDOODI - An Introduction to His Vision of Islam and Islamic Revival*, <http://prophetmuhammadforall.com/media/books/maududiintro.pdf>, (accessed 11, sep 2015).

²¹¹ 6:102

²¹² Maududi, Abul A’la. *Tafheen ul Quran*. Lahore: Idara tarjuman ul Quran, 1972, vol 1.

Islamic monotheism is the primal or basic belief or message of all prophets not an innovation of holy prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Allah Almighty sent many prophets for the betterment of human beings. As Quran says:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِيَ إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لِلَّهِ إِلَّا إِنَّمَا فَاعْبُدُونَ

“And we never sent a messenger before thee save that We revealed to him, saying, ‘There is no god but I, so worship Me’.”²¹³

Islamic tradition, does not allow human beings to pray or worship any god except Allah Almighty. As all other gods are creation so they are not powerful to answer the prayers of their worshipers. As Allah Almighty says in Quran:

لَهُ دُغْوَةُ الْحَقِّ وَالَّذِينَ يَذْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ لَا يَسْتَجِيبُونَ لَهُمْ بَشَّرٌ إِلَّا كَبَاسِطٌ كُنْيَهُ إِلَى الْمَاءِ لِيَبْلُغَ فَاهُ وَمَا هُوَ بِبَالِغِهِ
وَمَا دُعَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ

“To Him is due the true prayer; and those whom they pray to besides Allah give them no answer, but (they are) like one who stretches forth his two hands towards water that it may reach his mouth, but it will not reach it; and the prayer of the unbelievers is only in error.”²¹⁴

وَالَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَا يَخْلُقُونَ شَيْئًا وَهُمْ يُخْلُقُونَ

“And those whom they call on besides Allah have not created anything while they are themselves created.”²¹⁵

وَأَنْخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ اللَّهَ لَا يَخْلُقُونَ شَيْئًا وَهُمْ يُخْلُقُونَ لِأَنفُسِهِمْ ضَرَّاً وَلَا نَفْعَا وَلَا يَمْلِكُونَ مَوْتًا وَلَا حَيَاةً
وَلَا يُشْرِكُونَ

²¹³ 21:25

²¹⁴ 13:14

²¹⁵ 16:20

“And they have taken besides Him gods, who do not create anything while they are themselves created, and they control not for themselves any harm or profit, and they control not death nor life, nor raising (the dead) to life.”²¹⁶

In end, we can say that Islam does not allow its followers to insult the gods of other religious traditions so that they do not say bad words in return toward Allah Almighty. The reward of their bad deeds will reach to them at the end of the universe.

As Allah Almighty says in Quran:

وَلَا شَيْءٌ يَذْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيُسَبِّوْنَ اللَّهَ عَذْوًا بَغْيَرِ عِلْمٍ كَذَلِكَ زَيَّنَاهُ لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلَهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَى رَبِّهِمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَيَنَبَّئُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

“And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah, lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge. Thus We have made pleasing to every community their deeds. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them about what they used to do.”²¹⁷

Abul A’la Maududi in *Tafsheen ul Quran* while translating this verse said “The followers of the Holy Prophet peace be upon him have been advised not to lose their balance in zeal for preaching but to remain within proper limits when engaged in discussions and polemics with the non- Muslims and to refrain from offending against their creeds and from vilifying their leaders and objects of worship, for this will repel and alienate them all the more from the truth.”

²¹⁶ 25:3

²¹⁷ 6:108

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Scholars are agreed that the faithful in many religions talk about deities who marry. The references toward marriages of deities are less common in monotheistic traditions than they are in polytheistic traditions. For example we find this type of discussion in Christianity, the Roman Catholic nuns are considered as “brides of Christ”.

In Hindu tradition, every Goddess have divine consort which indicates towards sacred marriages and fertility itself. The sacred marriage indicates two things, the “sacred” context is that of deities, and the actions attributed to them. On the other hand “marriage” is an activity commonly attributed to human beings.

This context invites us to think of what deities do in term of what humans do. It shows that with respect to marriage, deities and human beings have some things in common. That there are similarities between the humane and divine realms, but the categories, divine and humane may be conceptually separate. The most important similarity is marriage.

When we look on the popular Hindu mythologies to explore the feminine concept of divine in Hinduism, we find the unusual emphasis on the importance of the deities being married.

Louis Dumont notes:

“Now where else...has the hint which nature offers in the complementarily of the sexes been put to use so lavishly as in India: witness the extreme stress on marriage and association of gods with their consorts.”

▪ Anthropomorphism

Hindu Godhead shows that some Gods have anthropomorphic qualities. For example the aniconic form of Shiva represents the union of male and female. When Shiva is represented anthropomorphically, he is most frequently represented with one of his wives, where the right half of his body is male and the left half is female.

When we study the myths regarding goddesses we find that when they are unmarried, are uncontrolled, malevolent, cruel not even controlled by Gods as Kali. Even Hindu Gods are considered incomplete without their consorts. There is a famous Tamil proverb that “without Sakti, Shiva is a corpse.

In Hindu society marriage is considered “sacred” because their Gods also married and have relations with their consorts. The term “Sacred” is always used for deities and their actions. On the other hand marriage is a common activity attributed to human beings. This definition of sacred marriage invites us to think about the actions of Gods and goddesses as being a married couple.

When we read the mythologies of Hindu goddesses we find that they are sexually involved with Gods as common females have relations with their husband. The famous literature of Saktism, “Sri Mad Devi Bhagavatam” describes the divine female association with God during the time of creation. Even God Vishnu was sexually involved with Devi in the time of creation of the world.

Brahama Purana indicates the eagerness of God Brahma toward goddess Saraswati. He was sexually involved with goddess Saraswati on the time of creation. Hindu believes that world came into being during their relation.

One of the important aspects is that Hindu gods and goddesses have their complete family life like human beings. Gods also have children from their spouses after relation. For example Ganesha is the son of Parvati and Shiva.

In Hindu myths regarding gods and goddesses their sexual aspect is extremely highlighted. There are many stories about every God that he had a sexual relationship with his spouse. Goddesses in Hindu tradition, have same status or importance like gods. Even these gods are not consider complete without their saktis and are not able to perform their action without the help of their saktis, for example, Brahma need goddess Saraswati for the creation of the world, Vishnu needs Lakshmi or mahadevi for the perseverance of the world while Shiva desires many goddesses to support his power for the destruction of the universe. On the other hand, these gods and goddesses are performing common actions like human beings. As goddesses are consort of Hindu gods, so they have sexual relation with gods and have children which is a worldly act.

God should be transcendent, omnibenevolent and omniscient. Because a transcendent, omnibenevolent and omniscient god would have knowledge and power to create, preserve and destroy the world alone without the help of any consort. In traditional sense, Hindu gods are not omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. The power of these gods is shared with their consort goddesses. These goddesses are not independent and ruled by gods. On the other hand, Hindu gods are not considered completely powerful or knowledgeable without goddesses. It means that they depended on each other for the fulfillment of their motives.

- **Dualism**

Above mention discussion leads toward the concept of divine dualism in Hinduism, as Paul Younger writes:

“The interdependence between Hindu God and Goddesses is the very heart of divine life in Hinduism.”

The dualism of the famous Samkhya philosophical school personifies the two ultimate realities, “Purusa and prakrti” as respectively male and female. Prakrti is understood as substance or matter, is regarded in this scheme as the ultimate cause of this universe. It is active, eternal or conscious principal which always in fluctuation. When Prakrti unite with purusa, regarded as spirit or essence of consciousness then does the universe come into existence.

Sri Mad Devi Bhagvatam and Brhma Purana also explain the story of creation that this world came in to existence with the help of Sakti. So dualism is the core of Hindu mythology.

- **Feminism**

The concept of dualism indicates the importance of feminism in Hinduism. Hindu sacred literature describes the association of female goddesses with every Hindu God. Brahma associates with goddess Saraswati; Vishnu makes love to sixteen thousand women while Shiva also has many wives. According to Sri Mad Devi Bhagvatam and Brhma Purana this world came in to existence with the help of Sakti.

It shows that originally a woman has very high status and same importance like men. But historical aspect demonstrates the inferior status of women in Hinduism. Women as

being wife, mother and daughter faced inferior status in many fields like education, right of marriage and even not allowed to fulfill their desires for many Centuries.

On the other hand, all Hindus whether females or males worship and give high status to divine feminism (goddesses) while ignoring the fact that female are embodiment of goddesses. Hindu women should consider their goddesses as role model for them in different fields of life so that they can enjoy the right of education, music, art and treated well by their husbands.

▪ **Scrawny**

Goddesses are role models for Hindu women but, there is no goddess in the Hindu tradition who is independent, creative, powerful, educated, good mother and an ideal wife at the same time. Thus none of the goddesses can become a perfect role model for Hindu women.

Saraswati donated herself for knowledge and music she is not as a domestic goddess. It seems that she separated cultural activities from her family life. She symbolises the interest of art, painting and music but she is not playing an important role in family life. As she was not loyal towards her husband and never desired for any sensual physical relation with him so she always tried to get away from Brahma. It is mentioned in Matsaya Purana that she tried to escape from Brahma to remain pure. So, it shows that Saraswati is not a complete role model for Hindu women in all the aspects of life i.e as a good mother or a house wife.

Goddess Sita, Lakshmi and Parvati are the goddesses with good qualities and are true role models for women as good wives and mothers. Durga and Kali are different from

other goddesses and not ideal to be followed as good wives. Goddess Radha had an intimate relationship with Krishna and she was married to someone else. For that reason she cannot become a chaste role model. According to Hindu sources all goddesses are not considered as role models for Hindu women as they do have some drawbacks in social dealings or chastity. So in Hinduism women make their life remarkable by following the characteristics of different goddesses.

CONCLUSION

The research verifies that the concept of God in Hinduism is very complicated. The female representation of divinity is also present along with the male gods. The worships of these gods and goddesses traces back to Vedic time period and are still popular among Hindus. The worship of Female aspect plays the role of a mediator to make a relationship strong between divine and human beings, as it reveals from Hare Krishna mantra. In Hare Krishna mantra, 'Hare' is vocative form of Radha, a sakti of Krishna. The followers of Vaishnavism chant this mantra to invoke the love of Krishna through his sakti.

The doctrine of incarnation or avatar is regarded as one of the core principles of Hinduism. This concept is also presents Shaktism. Mahadevi stands behind all the goddesses who gives them the power to perform their cosmic functions and vitalizes all the other deities. Sometimes, Hindu mythologies refer to Mahadevi as goddess Lakshmi who is the consort of Vishnu or mother of universe but, when we look at the concept of "Ardhanarishvara" which is described as "a half man and a half woman" is linked with Shiva. In this approach Mahadevi is considered as goddess Parvati who is the consort of the third god of Hindu trinity Shiva. It shows that the originality of Mahadevi is not clear in Hindu scriptures whether she is goddess Lakshmi, Parvati or Sarasvati but, this is very obvious from the scriptures of Saktism that she is the mother of this universe or the origin of all goddesses as all these goddesses are manifestation of her.

The active energy of each male god in real is the hidden goddesses' energy or their Shakti that enables the male god to perform their respective duties. The trimurti of Hindu

Devas Brahman, Vishnu and Shiva are always helped by their consort goddesses. According to Hindu mythology Brahman; the first god of Hind trinity is the god of creation; it is believed that he created this material world with the help of his Shakti. His shakti is goddess Saraswati, who is the goddess of knowledge or wisdom. Vishnu is preserver or sustainers of the world by his consort Lakshmi who has the energy of nourishment and wealth. Shiva the Hindu Lord of destruction manages his work through many consorts like Parvati, Kali and Durga. When a god incarnates to rescue the world his spouses also come to help him. For example Vishnu and Lakshmi are incarnated as Sita and Rama to restore the kingdom.

Hence equivalence stands for Hindu men and women in their mythology. Myths regarding Goddesses indicate that they are a great source of motivation and power for Hindu women. In Hindu tradition Goddesses play a central role in the lives of women. Gods treated their wives with care, respect and love so in the same manner Hindu men are also supposed to follow their Gods and fulfil the rights of women. This equivalence of Hindu gods and goddesses is a standard model for Hindu women to get their rights and improve their moral status in society. Their scriptures show that the characteristics of goddesses as education, love, compassion, and loyalty etc, are role model for Hindu women in different aspects of their lives.

Few of the goddesses do possess the great qualities for a Hindu woman as Sita, Lakshmi and Parvati. Durga and Kali are not be added to the list of good wives and mothers as they are fighter goddesses. They stand as model in an expression for dealing with new and difficult challenges of present.

It shows that originally women have a very high status and the same importance like men in the Hindu religion but, the historical and social aspects of a Hindu society

demonstrates the opposite. Women as being wife, mother and daughter have to face inferior status in many fields like education, right of marriage and are hardly allowed to fulfil their desires from many Centuries.

Hindus worship the female aspects of divinity and give a very high status to goddesses but, they do ignore this reality that women in their own society are an embodiment of goddesses. Goddesses are role models in different fields of life. By following their footsteps women do have the right of education, music, art and are justified to demand a well treatment by their husbands.

All the mythologies from sacred literature of Hinduism depicts that not a single Hindu goddess is a complete role model for Hindu women. So the good traits and characteristics of all goddesses are replica for Hindu women to make their own life noteworthy and sustainable in their society.

Glossary of Sanskrit Terms

Ardhanarishvara: depicted as half male and half female, commonly associated with Hindu god Shiva and goddess Parvati

Avatar: associated with Vishnu, he incarnates in this material world in many forms

Asuras: demons

Atharvaveda: is a sacred text of Hinduism and one of the four Vedas

Anekakotibrahmandajanani, Aditi, Annapurna, Aprameya: Name of Maha devi

Ahankara: Ego

Aditi: Name of Saraswati

Artha: material prosperity

Brahma: First god of Hindu trimurty, known as creator god

Brahmavaivartta Purana: Hindu scripture that describes detail about goddesses

Bhudevi: Goddess of Earth

Bhavani: fertility and birthing

Bhairavi: ferocious

Bhagavad-Gita: is known as one of the most fundamental texts that form the basis of *Hinduism*.

Chitta: alertness

Chaitra: Punjabi month

Devi Bhagavata Purana: one of the most important works in shaktism.

Dasamahavidyas: the ten great insights or scenes.

Durga: Hindu warrior goddess

Diwali: is the Indian festival of lights

Dhanada da dhana: means bestower of wealth

Dharma: virtuous conduct, harmonious relationships and religious duties

Ganapatya: Sect in Hinduism

Ganga: is sacred river

Gopi: cow-herd girl or lovers of Krishna

Ganesha: Son of Lakshmi

Gayatri: song or hymn

Hare: vocative form of Hare, the internal energy of Krishna (Radha) according to ISKCON theology.

Krishna: Supreme Personality of Godhead

Hanuman: Hindu monkey god

Himalayan: Mountains

Indra: the warrior god

Kartikeya: Daughter of Lakshmi

Kali: Hindu warrior goddess

Lakshmi: Hindu goddess of wealth, fortune, prosperity and consort of Vishnu

Lakshman: Lakshmana is one quarter component of manifest Vishnu

Lalita-sahasranama: is a text from Brahmanda Purana

Mahadevi: The great Hindu goddess

Matsya-Purana: is one of the oldest of the 18 post-Vedic Hindu scripture

Moksha of dharma: spiritual liberation

Mahalakshmi: highlights three aspects of goddess as the creator, preserver and destroyer

Mantra: a word or group of words, considered to have transcendental power

Mahamantra: great mantra

Maya: illusion or material energy or illusion that results from forgetting one's relationship with divine

Magha month: January-February

Mukti: liberation

Navratri Puja: the procedure of worshipping during Navratri festival

Nirguna: Without forms

Navaratri: is a festival dedicated to the worship of the Hindu deity Durga

Parvati: Hindu goddess of love and devotion

Prakriti: Maya and Illusion

Pitri-Tarpan: ancestor worship

Puja: worship

Prasad: a devotional offering made to a god

Purusarthas: Dharma

Rama: Hindu god or hero of the Ramayana

Rangoli Shiuli: flowers

Ramayana: is a Sanskrit epic poem

Radhe-Shyam: Radha and Krishna

Rig Veda: is an ancient Indian collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns

Ravana: is the primary antagonist in the Hindu epic Ramayana

Radha: consort of Krishna

Shiva: Third god of Hindu trimurty known as god of destruction

Shakti: The female principle of divine energy, especially when personified as the supreme deity.

Sita: Hindu goddess or consort of Rama

Saraswati: The Hindu goddess of knowledge, music, and consort of Brahma

Sita-Ram: Sita and Rama

Shri Vishnu: Lakshmi and Vishnu

Saura: is sect in Hinduism

Saundaryalahari: book name

Saraswati vandana: Holy song

Sri Aurobindo: Indian nationalist, philosopher, yogi, guru, and poet

Samsara caturartha: means four components which contribute to a life of harmony and balance

Sri: a title of respect used before the name of a man, a god, or a sacred book

Swayamwara: self-choice

Teej: Third

Trinayani Durga: one with three-eyes and Dushbhija

Uma-Mahesh: Parvati and Shiva

Vishnu: Second god of Hindu trinity known for the protection of world

Vaishnava: commonly understood as a branch of Hinduism, which holds reverence and devotion for Vishnu or Krishna as the highest manifestation of divinity and the source of all existence

Vraja: village

Vedas: four collections forming the earliest body of Indian scripture

Veena: Musical instrument

Vac: speech

Vedanta: orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy

Vasant Panchami: is the Hindu festival that highlights the coming of spring

Yamuna: is one of the holiest rivers in Hinduism

Yagna: a ritual sacrifice with a specific objective.

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