

Sri MahaGanapati

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Introduction:

The Lord MahaGanapati refers to a form of Supreme Being, who is worshipped before the beginning of any auspicious work. In addition, the well-known mantra from The RigVeda (2-23-1) says,

“Ganaanaam Tvaa Ganapatigam Havaamahe, Kavim Kaveenaam Upamashravastamam Jyesh taraajam Bramhanaam Bramhanaspata Aa Nah Shrunvan Ootibihihi Seeda Saadanam, Sri MahaGanapataye Namaha”

Which means, “You are the Lord of all faculties. You are the poet (seer) of the poets (seers). You are the King of kings. You are the Lord of all mantras and glories. We invite you to listen and to grant our prayers for our protection and blessings on us. Our salutations to Lord MahaGanapati”

In the well known five deity worship procedure namely Panchaayatana Pooja, the five deities are Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti, Suryanarayana and Ganapati. The devotees who worship Lord Ganapati as the main deity are said to belong to Gaanaapatya Matha. Lord Ganapati is also commonly referred by several other names such Ganesha, Vinaayaka, Vighnesha, Gajaanana, Ekadanta, Vakratunda, etc.

MahaGanapati is also referred as the ruler of the various faculties especially the mind. The role and importance of pure and clear mind required in focusing and successful completion of any work either materialistic or spiritual is very well known. It is also known that the numeral 21 has significance to worship Lord Ganapati. The reason being 21 refers to the mind, which is above and controls the 20 faculties that we possess and interact in our daily life. They represent 5 senses of cognition namely hearing, touching, seeing, tasting and smelling. The 5 senses of action are speaking, holding, walking, excretion and procreation. The 5 subtle elements are sound, touch, form, flavor and odor. The 5 sense particulars are ether, air, fire, water and earth.

This brief article presents the significance of the divine form of Lord Ganapati, the story related to Ganesha Chaturthi and its spiritual interpretation, the description of the Lord MahaGanapati (in Ganesha Atharva Upanishat) as Supreme Being and also Lord MahaGanapati as the embodiment of Shabda Brahman.

Significance of the form of Sri MahaGanapati

The form of MahaGanapati is not an imagination but is a yogic vision (of the Supreme Being) by the sages. Symbolically Ganesha’s form indicates several concepts

for us to focus. He is located as energy form in the Mooladhara Chakra. The elephant face indicates the omniscient wisdom. The large ears refer to the all-pervading listening ability. The goad in right hand denotes the control of mind. The noose in left hand denotes His control over changing world. The sweet dish in His hand signifies the fruits of the sincere hard work. In spiritual pursuit, the sweet refers to spiritual bliss. The other hand signifies the protection. The four-hands together denote the four-goals of human life namely dharma, artha, kama and moksha. The curved trunk when bent to His right denotes the OM (this form is worshipped by renunciates) and when bent to His left signifies the blessings of spiritual and materialistic wealth (this form is worshipped by students and house-holders). His large belly denotes that the faculties of the universe are embedded in Him. The snake as belt signifies the Kundalini power of yoga. The rat signifies the disturbing and leaky nature of mind. When Lord Ganesha is seated on the mind, it means that His grace firmly enables us to carry out the work successfully with the disciplined, pure and clear mind. Hence Lord Ganesha is worshipped before any work is begun so that no obstacles arise and deter the successful completion of the work undertaken.

Ganesha Chaturthi Festival

Ganesha Chaturthi is a very important Hindu festival celebrated by Hindus around the world. A Hindu festival is a celebration that integrates spiritual, philosophical, religious and cultural aspects of human life. The **spiritual** aspect is based on the basic human instincts of joy and happiness. The **philosophical** aspect is based on the principle that the good always wins in the constant struggle between the good and the evil. The victory of good is to be celebrated. The **religious** aspect deals with the particular rituals of that festival. *The spiritual insights of the stories of the specific manifestation of the God (Supreme Being) make the festival relevant to us.* The **cultural** aspect deals with the customs, activities, food, dress, social interaction with family and friends etc. *In the view of Sriranga Sadguru, a yogi-seer, "The planetary positions are favorable to spiritual development on these festivals and one should make use of these special timings".* Thus we see that festivals are not only a celebration and a means for spiritual development but also an effective means to convey the values of life to future generations.

Ganesha Chaturthi occurs during August-September of the year (fourth day of Shukla Paksha of Bhadrapada month).

The story commonly associated with the Ganesha Chaturthi

The Goddess Parvati created a son out of her sweat. Then She made him to guard her chamber and told him not to allow anyone to enter. The obedient boy strictly followed the rule. Lord Shiva came to enter Goddess Parvati's chamber. However the boy did not allow Lord Shiva and was very firm in stopping Lord Shiva to enter. The boy did not allow Lord Shiva to pass. In spite of Lord Shiva's intent, the boy did not yield. Lord Shiva became angry and chopped of the boy's head. As soon as Goddess Parvati

came to know of this, she was very upset and asked Lord Shiva to bring back Their son. Lord Shiva sent His subordinates to find a suitable head for the boy. They brought the head of a sleeping elephant facing north, and the head was put on the boy. Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati blessed Their son. Also Lord Shiva declared that Lord Ganesha is to be worshipped at the beginning of any auspicious activity in life as Lord Ganesha is the Lord of all faculties and also He is Lord Vighnesha (God who removes all obstacles in the path).

The spiritual interpretation of the story based on the vision of yoga is as follows:

Goddess Parvati represents Mother Nature. The first basic layer of Nature is element Earth. The interpretation of Goddess Parvati creating Her son using Her sweat refers to Her creating with the first layer of Her body. The element of Earth refers to Mooladhara Chakra in which Lord Ganesha's spiritual energy form is held (as referred in Ganesha Atharva Upanishat). Thus we see correspondence between Lord Ganesha, Mooladhara Chakra and the element Earth. After the boy was created, Mother Parvati asked him not to allow anyone into Her chamber. However, this rule does not apply to Her husband Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati are not only husband and wife but also are the father and mother of the universe and they are inseparable. When the boy becomes indifferent to this fact and does not allow Lord Shiva, Lord Shiva gives him a punishment by chopping of his head. However after learning from Parvati, Lord Shiva blesses His son with an elephant's head to signify the omniscient wisdom. Then both Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati bless Ganesha as the Lord of all faculties and of mind. Thus, Lord Ganesha is to be worshipped before starting any work as His blessings will remove obstacles to our mind.

In addition, on the night of Ganesha Chaturthi, it is forbidden to see the moon. This is because as the story goes, the moon laughed at Ganesha when He fell off His rat. The interpretation of this is that Lord Ganesha is responsible for disciplining the mind. The moon signifies a wavering mind. On Ganesha Chaturthi one should meditate and focus the mind on the Lord MahaGanapati. Looking at the moon on the night of Ganesha Chaturthi, will signify wavering and a lack of focus.

Also in the celebration of Ganesha Chaturthi, the deity of Lord Ganesha is made of earth (mud) and is worshipped. Then in the evening, it is submerged in a lake or river. The spiritual insight is that the mud (earth) signifies the Mooladhara chakra and the when it is mixed with water, the energy is raised to a higher Manipoora Chakra. The physical form of the Lord is merged into the formless. Thus, we see that the physical form of the Lord Ganesha, the story and the celebration of Ganesha Chaturthi festival essentially deal with our mind and the ways of making our mind to take spiritual inner journey to reach the destination of God-realization. We know the utmost importance of our mind in life and living. Thus praying and worshipping Lord Ganesha with spiritual insight can only help us in reaching the goal.

Sri MahaGanapati as Supreme Being

The Ganesha Atharva Upanishat, also known as Ganaapatyopanishat clearly describes the Lord MahaGanapati as the Supreme Being. A summary of this upanishat is as follows

“Oh Lord Ganapati, salutations to you. You are the all existence and also the eternal indweller of all existence. You are verily the cause, the nourisher and the dissolver (or destroyer). I am saying both the implicit and explicit truth. Protect me and my teacher. Protect all who listen. Protect those who study Vedas. Protect those who retain and give knowledge. Protect the disciples. Protect me from the front, the back, the right and the left sides. Protect me from all the sides from all troubles. You are the speech and literature (in the form of letters). You are the Brahman and You are of the form, the immortal bliss. You are second to none as truth and bliss. You are the Brahman. You are both the knowledge and the science behind knowledge. The whole world has originated from You. It is sustained by You and It merges within You. The whole world is appearing within You. You are in the form of earth, water, fire, wind and the space. You are the four-fold speech namely Para, Pashyanti, Madhyama and Vaikhari. You are beyond the three gunas namely satva, rajas and tamas. You are beyond the three stages of time namely past, present and future. You are beyond the three types of bodies namely gross, subtle and causal. You are eternally enshrined in the Mooladhara chakra (referred to coccygeal plexus). You manifest in all the three forms of powers namely knowledge, desire and action. Yogis always meditate upon You. You are verily Brahmaa, Vishnu, Rudra, Indra, Agni, Vayu, Sun, Moon and Brahman. You are the three worlds namely Bhoohu (earth), Bhuvaha (space), Suvaha (heavens) and also the all-pervading Para Brahma referred as OM. The initial letter G (in Sanskrit) is recited first. Then the initial letter (first vowel in Sanskrit) A is to be recited. Thereafter the Anusvara is recited. Thus the ‘Gan’ enshrined with the half-mora (ardha Chandra) having restricted by the syllable Om (resulting in Gam) is the form of Your root hymn. Thus the Ganesha Vidya consists of the first form as Ga, the middle form as A and Anusvara as the terminal form and point (Bindu) is its answer form. The transcendental sound (Naada) is application (sandhanaa) and Samhita is referred as its joints (Sandhi). This is known as Ganesha Vidyaa. With the Rishi as Ganaka, the Metre as NichirdGayatri’ and the Devata as Lord Ganapati, the mantra is ‘Om Gam Ganapataye Namaha’. Then the mantra (known as Ganesha Gayatri) says that, we know Lord Ganesha as ‘Ekadanta’, we meditate on ‘Vakratunda’, and May ‘Danti’ (tooth-bearer) i.e. Lord Ganesha motivate us towards the benevolent and spiritual path.”

Thus after the prayer above, the upanishat continues to describe Lord Ganesha and also His sincere devotee as a yogi. The description of the Lord Ganesha and His devotee-yogi is summarized below.

“The devotee who meditates and worships daily the ‘Ekadanta’, four –armed, holding in His four-hands, the posture of ‘Abhaya’ (fearlessness), holding a (broken) tusk, holding a

‘Paasha’ (string), holding an ‘Ankusha’ (goad), bearing a flag mouse-marked, red-colored, a hug stomach, huge ears like a (corn fanning) bamboo fan, covered by red-color garments, body duly smeared by red sandal, (worshipped) by red-flowers, always graceful to the devotees, cause of creation of the universe, eternally established, born prior to the creation of this universe and beyond the nature, (that devotee) is the best and excellent among all yogis.”

Then the Upanishat offers salutations to Lord Ganesha by describing him with several attributes namely Vraatapati (Commander of commune of all gods), Ganapati (Lord of all faculties), Pramathapati (Leader of the attendants of Lord Shiva), Lambodara (with large belly), Ekadanta (with one-tusk), Vighnavinaashi (destroyer of all obstacles), Shivasuta (the son of Lord Shiva) and Varadamoorti (Lord who bestows boons to devotees).

This is an upanishat of Atharva Veda. The devotee who internalizes this upanishat becomes entitled to the position of Brahma. Any hurdles irrespective of their nature will not resist the progress of that devotee. The devotee avails joy and peace everywhere. That devotee is liberated from the five kinds of major evils such as stealing gold, drinking liquor, transgressing behavior with guru’s wife, slaying of brahmana (noble people), having company of people committing these evils and other minor evils. The recital of this upanishat made in the evening destroys the sins committed during the day. The recital made during the morning destroys the sins committed during the night. When its recital is done during both morning and evening times, will make the devotee free from sins. Thus the devotee obtains all the four-fold goals namely Dharma (spiritual wisdom), Artha (wealth), Kama (fulfillment of right desires) and Moksha (Liberation from all fetters of life). In other words, such a devotee realizes Supreme Being.

This upanishat should not be taught to unworthy and also not with any attachment to desires. If it is done with attachment to desires, then the one who teaches will become sinister.

Lord Ganapati as the embodiment of Shabda Brahman

Lord Ganapati in addition being referred as Lord of the mind is also referred as the Lord of transcendental sound termed as Shabda. A seer-scholar named Sri Vasishta Ganapati Muni nicely describes the relationship between Lord Ganapati and Shabda Brahman. Lord Ganapati as energy is located in the Moolaadhaara chakra, which is source of energy for production of any vocal sound. Also that energy is identified in the form of Kundalini Shakti, which is again important for shabda. In the Ganesha Atharva Upanishat, it says that “Tvam Vangmayaha” which means “Lord You are the form of speech. We know that speech is a very important part of life. The upanishat also says “Tvam chatvaari Vakpadaani”, which means that Lord is the four-fold speech. The four-fold speech as said earlier refers to Paraa, Pashyanti, Madhyama and Vaikhari. Paraa refers to all pervading energy, Pashyanti refers to the first movement of energy

experienced by the yogis, Madhyama refers to the crystallization of energy moving through medium (heart) to form concrete vocal expressions and Vaikhari refers to the specific vocal expressions (through mouth) which manifest in several forms such speech, music, mantras, etc. Also before chanting any Veda mantras in any pooja, first the invocation mantra on Ganapati is chanted. In that mantra, he is referred as "Brahmanaspati, which means that He is the Lord of the Vedas or the collection of Veda mantras. Also Lord Ganapati is prayed for the removal of any obstacles in proper pronunciation and flow of memory of mantras. Lord Ganapati's form especially when His trunk is towards His right, then it forms OM, which is Shabda Brahman. The Lord Ganapati has large ears, which refer to the universal listening ability of the Lord. He has large belly, which refer to as the large resource for sound (shabda).

Thus we see that Lord Ganapati is also Shabda Brahman.

Concluding Remarks

Thus we see that Lord MahaGanapati is revered as Supreme Being. His blessings are essential before undertaking any work either worldly or spiritual. He being the Lord of mind, Lord of all faculties and Lord of sound field as Shabda Brahman, His blessings will enable us to carryout the work successfully with joy. Let us seek the blessings of the Loving Lord MahaGanapati.

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