

## 21. Significance of Ganesa worship

*No one knows all that has to be known.*

*There is none who knows nothing of anything.*

*Many there are, knowing something of some things.*

*Sai alone knows everything of all things.*

THE five-element body of man equipped with five senses has as its life-breath the five-lettered formula, enshrined in the *Namaka* section of the *Yajur Veda* "*Namah Si-vaa-ya*". It is a basic mantra which means "that which can save, when meditated upon." Every mantra has a seed-sound (bijaakshara) which precedes it and provides it with additional potency. Sound emanated first through the will of God. So the *bijaakshara* is fundamental for the *mantra* and its efficacy. The *Akshara* is sanctified by the *Vedas* or by the *Tantra* texts. The *bijaakshara* for the five-lettered *Namah Sivaya* is the *Vedic* sound, *OM*.

### **The sound OM arouses energising vibrations**

*OM* is how A, U and M are jointly pronounced. Each of these letters is devoid of spiritual force but, together, they arouse energising vibrations. 'Sivaaya' in the mantra means 'to Siva'. 'Siva' is That which confers good fortune, wealth, prosperity and happiness. *Pandits* have commented on this formula and explained it in various ways. They have interpreted *Na* as indicating *Nandivahana*, the God who has *Nandi* (the Bull) as *Vahana* (vehicle). They take *ma* as the pointer to another Name of Siva, *Mandaaramaalin* (wearing a garland of *Mandaara* flowers) and *Si* as *Surya* (the Sun which when it dawns on earth unfolds the Lotus of the Hearts of Beings etc). Each one allows his imagination to lead him along.

But, the formula contains a more universal and abstract concept. It has to be pronounced always with *OM*. The *namah* (prostration) is for *OM* which is denoted as having the Siva attribute (being the source of peace, prosperity and success, of *Mangalam* in short). The process of worship is best described by Pothana in the *Bhagavatha* he has rendered in Telugu.

Pothana speaks of "*Chethulara Sivuni Puja*" (worshipping Siva with the hands). By 'hand', he means, the 'five-fingered', representing the five-lettered mantra. Siva is the five-element-lord and so He has all the power and wealth the five can yield to man who is himself a composite of the five!

*The Vedas* assert, "*Atma Vai Putranaamaa asi*" (Oneself is the person known as son). One repeats himself in the son. Ganesa is therefore Siva Himself expressing certain aspects of Siva on certain occasions for certain purposes. Ganesa means the leader of groups. Ganapathi too means the same.

### **The elephant head is the symbol' of wisdom**

The elephant-head of Ganesa is a symbol of intelligence, discrimination and wisdom. The elephant is ever alert and eminently conscious of its surroundings. Its memory is strong and deep. It treads through the thick forest imprinting huge foot marks on the track. One such print can subsume the marks left by scores of other animals, both wild and tame. It moves majestically through thick jungles; its very passage blazes trail for other animals to go through. It is a path-maker, helping others without being aware of it, because it is its nature. Ganesa guides the stars, the communities of men and their homes. He is Lord of Obstacles, causing them when needed

and helping men to overcome them, when that boon will promote the well-being of the supplicant.

There is astronomical support also for the Ganesa festival, celebrated on the fourth day of the bright half of Bhadrapada month. A constellation with the appearance of the elephant-head becomes brightly visible on this very night.

Ganesa is the embodiment of *buddhi* (intelligence) and *siddhi* (achievement). He was approached by Sage Vyasa with a prayer to write down the Mahabharatha, even as he composed the hundreds of thousands of its verses! Ganesa agreed immediately; He brooked no delay, even to secure a writing tool: He broke his sharp-pointed tusk and was ready to start!

### **Lessons that Ganesa teaches men**

Ganesa can teach many a lesson to man. That is the reason for His being adored by people of all ages and professions. Take the problem of food. Thygaraja invites Ganapathi most endearingly, and delights in offering Him sweet *satwic* items of food---coconut kernal, sweet fruits of various types, steam-cooked rolls and balls of modak etc. The elephant feeds on grass, sugar cane, bamboo-shoots, and twigs and leaves of the banyan tree. Devotees offer Ganesa, while worshipping, leaves, grass blades and flowers gathered from meadows and valleys. Ganesa, the Elephant-headed, is adored as the source of Love, Faith, Intelligence, Guidance and Grace.

Take into consideration another role assigned to Ganesa. When Siva is moved to supreme ecstasy and it is expressed as the Cosmic Dance of Nataraja, Ganesa, Master of Tune and Time, leads other Gods, marks time on the *mrdangam* (drum). No wonder, the Gods are pleased when *puja* is offered to Ganesa even before any of them is propitiated.

Man is bound by three tendencies. The first is *Kama* (the longing to possess). When that longing fails, *Krodha* (anger) raises its hood. When the desire is fulfilled and the thing is gained the third tendency, *Lobha* (greed) overtakes him. If one's desire is beneficial, the Divine will shower Grace. Ganesa has no desire, no anger, no greed. His Grace is available for all who seek good and godly goals. Look at the vehicle which He has chosen, the mouse! The mouse is a creature that is led, even to destruction, by *Vasana* (the smell of things). Men are all victims of *Vasana* (Preferences and predilections stamped on our minds during the past lives). Ganesa smothers and suppresses the *Vasanas* which mis-direct man and create misfortune.

Since the mouse has been honoured so, it shares the worship offered to Ganesa. Association with Gods, as vehicles, ornaments, accessories or servants of Gods, endows objects, animals and men with specially sacred status. Elephants, Lions, Eagles, Snakes, Primates--all these and many more have been divinised thus.

This day is Ganesa festival Day. Since Ganesa leads when gods are invoked, installed and adored, this Festival leads the long line of festivals 'for other forms of God---Navarathri, Dipavali, Sankranthi, Sivarathri. The duty this Day is to contemplate on the Universal and Eternal Truth embodied in Ganesa and worship Him with purity and faith, praying for the Grace which can prevent lapses and promote progress in all efforts to achieve the highest goal.

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