

## Maa Brahmcharini — The second manifestation of Maa Durga

Maa Brahmcharini is the second manifestation of Maa Durga who is worshipped on the second day of Navratra. Here word "Brahm" refers to "Tapa". So Brahmcharini means Tapa Charini - The one who performs Tapa or penance. It is said that the "Vedas", "Tatva" and "Tapa" are synonyms of word "Brahm". The form of Brahmcharini is tremendously effulgent and extremely majestic.

**Brahmcharini**  
She holds a rosary in her right hand and Kamandalu in her left. She personifies love and loyalty. Mata Bhrmacharini is store-house of knowledge and wisdom. Rudraksha is her most adorned ornament. When she was incarnated as the daughter of Himalaya, then influenced by the instructions of Devrishi Narada, she practiced very hard penances in order to obtain Lord Shiva as her divine consort. Due to her unearthly penances she was termed as Brahmcharini. She spent one thousand years, only on fruits and beet-roots. One hundred years she spent only by eating leafy vegetables.

For a sufficient period of time observing complete fast she suffered tormenting of nature like torrential rains and scorching sun and biting cold, under the open sky. After such a difficult routine she lived only on dry Bilva Pattaras (leaves) fallen on the ground for three thousand years. She kept herself engrossed for twenty-four hours in worshipping Lord Shiva. After that she gave up eating even these dry leaves. For several thousand years she went on without any food and water. Because she gave up eating dry Bilva leaves so she was known to be Aparna as one of her epithets.

After the hardship of penance for several thousand years her body became extremely lean and thin. She was reduced to skeleton only. Her penance, sharpened as it was, caused great disturbance in all the three worlds. The whole universe was shaken. The Gods, the Rishis, the Siddhas, the Munis all eulogised her penance as an unprecedented virtuous action.

Ultimately Lord Brahma through an oracle addressed her and said to her in a very pleasant manner-O Goddess, so far nobody has ever practiced such an austere penance. Only you could have done it. This wonderful deed is being praised in all the four quarters. Your desire would be fulfilled. You will decidedly get Lord Shiva as your divine consort. Now stop your penance and go home. Your father would be shortly coming to take you back.

Legend states that in a previous birth she was Parvati Hemavati the daughter of Himvan. Once when she was busy in games with her friends, Naradaji came to see her and on reading her hand/palm-lines Narad Muni stated that, "You will get married with a naked-terrible 'Bhole Baba' who was with you in the form of Sati, the daughter of Daksh in previous birth. But now you have to perform penance for him."

There upon Parvati told her mother Menaka that she would marry none except Shambhu, otherwise she would remain unmarried. Saying this she went to observe penance. That is why her name is famous as Tapacharini - Brahmcharini. From that time her name Uma also became familiar. She is the one who practices devout austerity. Filled with bliss and happiness, she is the way to emancipation - Moksha. 'Brahma' here refers to the meditative aspect of Brahmcharini and is always depicted as pious women or Sannyasin.

She is also worshipped as Goddess Tara and is associated with the pious form of Goddess Shakti. She is believed to be that aspect of Mother Goddess, which was present in Sati and Goddess Parvati, when they both did intense austerities to get Lord Shiva as husband.

During the penance Mata Parvati did in order to gain Lord Shivji as her consort for thousands of yrs. without eating even leaves she was called 'Aparna'. Seeing her body her mother uttered U-ma and so she is also called 'Uma'.

Her worship increases sacrifice, good deeds and restraint in humans. Rudraksha is her most adorned ornament. In some regions, Goddess Chamunda Swarup of Durga is worshipped on the second day of Navratra.

In this form she is believed to have killed the demons Chanda and Munda. There is a famous Chamunda Mata Temple at Jodhpur.



## NAVRATRA SPECIAL RECIPE

### Kaddu Khus Khus ka Halwa



**Ingredients**  
2 kg Yellow pumpkin (kaddu)  
8 tbsp Poppy seeds (khus khus)  
½ cup Sugar, or to taste  
Seeds of 6-8 green cardamoms (elaichi)  
1 tsp Saffron – dissolve in 1 tsp hot water  
½ cup ghee  
250-300 gm Khoya – grated  
2 tbsp Chironji  
2 tbsp Raisins (kishmish)

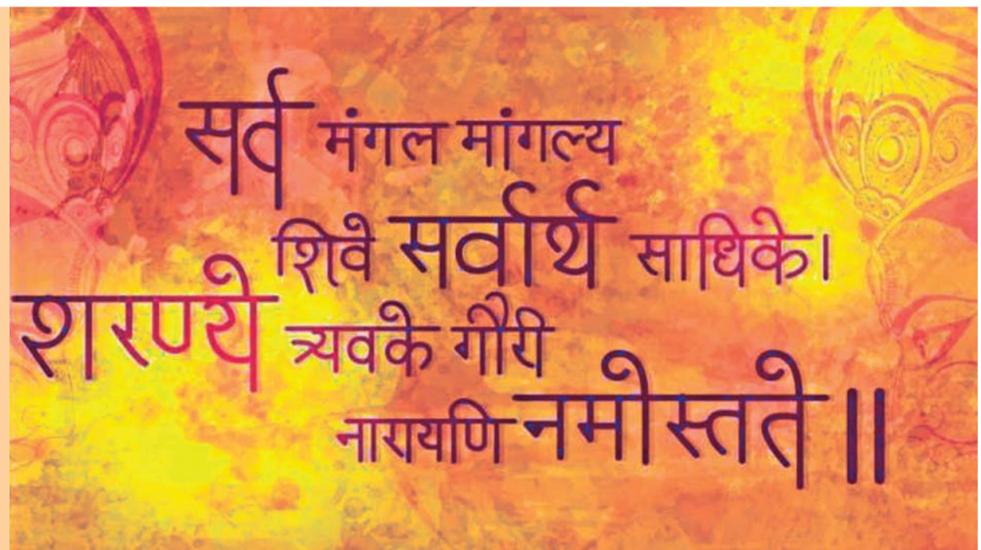
**Garnish**  
1 Silver leaf (vark)  
A few green pistachios – blanched and sliced

**Method:**  
Peel & chop pumpkin into small pieces. Clean and wash the poppy seeds well. Place the pumpkin in a cooker with ¼ cup water and give 2 whistles, remove from heat. Place the cooked pumpkin in a kadhai and mash it with a kadehi. Add the poppy seeds, crushed cardamom seeds and saffron. Cook on medium heat till water evaporates and the pumpkin turns dry. Add the sugar and stir till dry. Cook, stirring for 5 minutes. Add ghee and cook for 10 minutes on low heat to get a rich brown colour. Add the khoya, raisins and chironji. Mix well. Serve hot garnished with vark and pistachios.

## Mantras dedicated to each of the nine forms of Goddess Durga

Navratra, a festival dedicated to Goddess Durga is spread over nine days. The festival is celebrated four times a year but the Sharadiya (autumn – sometime in the months of September and October) and the Chaitra (spring – sometime in the months of March and April) are other most famous. The other two are Ashadha and Magha Gupta. This year Chaitra Navratra begins on March 18 and culminates with Rama Navmi on March 25. This year Saptami and Ashtami Tithi fall on the same day (March 24) and hence both Kalratri and Mahagauri Pujas will be conducted on the same day. Moreover Ashtami stretches over March 25. Each of the nine days is dedicated to one of the nine forms of Durga. Each avatar of the Goddess has a specific significance, form and appearance. You can worship each of the nine Goddesses by chanting these simple Mantras this festive season. Check out specific mantras for each of the nine days:

- Day 1 – Maa Shailputri**  
Om Devi Shailaputriyai Namah
- Day 2 – Maa Brahmcharini**  
Om Devi Brahmachariyai Namah
- Day 3 – Maa Chandraghanta**  
Om Devi Chandraghantayai Namah
- Day 4 – Maa Kushmanda**  
Om Devi Kushmandayai Namah
- Day 5 – Maa Skandamata**  
Om Devi Skandamatayai Namah
- Day 6 – Maa Katyayani**  
Om Devi Katyayanyai Namah
- Day 7 – Maa Kalratri**  
Om Devi Kalaratriyai Namah
- Day 8 – Maa Mahagauri**  
Om Devi Mahagauriyai Namah
- Day 9 – Maa Siddhidatri**  
Om Devi Siddhidatriyai Namah



## What is the scientific reason behind fasting during Navratras?



Besides religious perspective there is a scientific overview of fasting, fasting helps the human body to perform 3 main metabolic activities;

**Detoxification**– since Navratra is a biannual festival; first, at the beginning of summer and second, at the beginning of winter. These are two juncture of seasonal change, this is the period when the human body is vulnerable and susceptible to fall sick; therefore it's necessary to have a light diet and help the body cells to produce antioxidants which help in removing the waste products to avoid causing further hazards to the body.

**Mindfulness** – fasting gives our digestive system time to rest. During fasting human body consumes fat as primary source of energy because of lack of carbohydrates in diet and the metabolic end product of fat is ketone bodies, ketone bodies are the energy source of brain and it promotes more acetylcholine release from nerves which finally increases one's concentration and calculating ability and it stimulates the release of serotonin which is the hormone for happiness.



**Self-discipline**– fasting brings the human body and mind to a more disciplined and ideal state which is difficult to achieve in daily life activities without fasting, this, in turn, helps in weight loss too.

## ASTRO SPEAK

**ARIES**  
MAR 21 - APR 20

In an effort to be the brightest and best star on the stage, Aries, you might actually be driving away the most important members of your audience. Make sure that you aren't putting on different masks with different people just so you can appease those you're with. Others can see right through any disguise you try to put on. Trying to deceive others is simply a sign of disrespect.

**LIBRA**  
SEP 24 - OCT 22

You should be feeling emotionally strong today, Libra, although you could find that an idea runs through your head that asks you to slow down and take things one step at a time. The internal dialogue could drive you crazy if you aren't careful. The most important thing to do now is simply follow your heart. Do what you love to do, and associate with the people you love and respect the most.

**TAURUS**  
APR 21 - MAY 20

Go ahead and make a list today, Taurus. Powerful emotions are likely to lure you from your current path unless you have some sort of concrete plan to fall back on. Put idle hands to use by delegating tasks to the people around you. You'll be amazed at the little blocks of time you have when you stay on task and keep yourself and everyone else around you in motion.

**SCORPIO**  
OCT 23 - NOV 22

Make the effort to get to a body of water today, Scorpio. Whether it's the ocean, a river, or lake, the sense of expansion and comfort that you'll find there will be extremely healing. Know that you are the greatest healer you have for yourself and that you have incredible power to share this gift with others, too. Augment this healing energy with a return to nature.

**GEMINI**  
MAY 21 - JUN 20

If you look carefully today, Gemini, you're apt to notice aspects of people that you never noticed before. There could be a frenzy of activity that catches you in its net and takes you away. Look to other people for guidance as you go along. When you ask for help, you'll get it. At the same time, you'll learn a great deal about the people who end up helping you.

**SAGITTARIUS**  
NOV 23 - DEC 22

You may find it hard to connect with your emotions today, Sagittarius. It could be that it's difficult to find a bit of quiet time when you can really sit down and listen to your inner voice. There are distractions all around that are pulling you in many different directions. Keep in mind that these forces aren't necessarily acting in your best interests.

**CANCER**  
JUN 22 - JUL 23

Be careful about becoming too stubborn today, Cancer. This is one of those days in which you're asked to build a structure in a very windy area. If you insist on using the most rigid materials, you'll find that the structure you build ends up snapping in two. If, however, you construct your building with flexible materials, it will bend in the wind and last far longer.

**CAPRICORN**  
DEC 23 - JAN 20

You may find that your heart is bouncing back and forth like a tennis ball today, Capricorn. One minute you could be drawn one way, while the next minute you're drawn in a completely different direction. Instead of trying to fight this feeling, take advantage of it. Consciously or unconsciously, what you're really doing is exploring. Try new things until you're sure that you've found what you need.

**LEO**  
JUL 24 - AUG 23

It's a good thing you have a flexible attitude, Leo, especially today. Your adaptive powers could be put to the test as you find yourself surrounded by fickle emotions and stubborn attitudes. Don't get too hung up on getting straight answers from people today, for they're apt to be just as confused as you about certain issues. Play it cool for now and ride the waves easily to shore.

**AQUARIUS**  
JAN 21 - FEB 23

You may find that your heart is bouncing back and forth like a tennis ball today, Aquarius. One minute you could be drawn one way, while the next minute you're drawn in a completely different direction. Instead of trying to fight this feeling, take advantage of it. Consciously or unconsciously, what you're really doing is exploring. Try new things until you're sure that you've found what you need.

**VIRGO**  
AUG 24 - SEP 23

You could be frustrated by others' lack of commitment today, Virgo. You could try to make plans with people but they keep changing their minds about what they want to do. Perhaps they're emotionally insecure and afraid to take the next step. Don't let other people hold you back. Make plans and stick to them. Other people will fall into place accordingly. You don't need to prod them.

**PISCES**  
FEB 20 - MAR 20

You could think that your life is too boring for anyone else to care about, Pisces. Don't fall into a well of self-pity and convince yourself that there simply isn't enough excitement in your life and never will be. Believe that you have the power to cure any such down-trodden feeling that you might have at this time. Consider joining a spiritual support group where you can honestly share your feelings.

## What do 9 nights of Navratras stand for?

As per the Kalpas (Puranas), there are three dimensions of Shakti (the feminine energy): Mahakali (strength or power), Mahalakshmi (wealth, passion and material well-being), and Mahasaraswati (knowledge, dissolution, transcendence of the limitations of the mortal body). They are believed to represent the cosmos as the Earth, the Sun and the Moon.

They are also symbolic of the 3 gunas (virtues/qualities):

- Tamas (inertia),
- Rajas (activity, passion)
- Sattva (knowledge, purity), respectively.

Therefore, the first three days are dedicated to Durga or Kali, the next three to Lakshmi, and the last three to Saraswati.

The tenth day is called Vijayadashmi (or Dussehra) where 'Vijaya' means victory – of good over evil, the victory of Lord Rama over the ten-headed demon king, Ravana.

Ravana's ten heads represent ten negative qualities – Kaam (Lust), Krodh (Anger), Lobh (Greed), Moh (Attachment), Ahankar (Ego), Bhay (Fear), Irshya (Jealousy), Jadta (Inertia), Dvesh (Hate), and Paschataap (Guilty). Hence, this day also signifies victory over our own minds.

