Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
The Dasara Festival at Satara, India.—By LUCIA C. G. GRIEVE, New York City.

It is difficult for a mere European, brought up on a dictionary and accustomed to define everything accurately, to grasp the Proteanism, the fluidity, if I may so speak, of the Hindu divinity called for the most part simply Devi, the goddess, or Mai, the mother, or more simply still, Bai, the woman. Her names are legion: Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati, Jogeshwara, Kali, Bhawani, and many another, often strange and uncouth. But in the ultimate analysis, each female divinity, however different her attributes and forms of worship, is a manifestation of the same "eternal feminine," the goddess, the mother, the woman.

In every Hindu household in the Maratha country, Devi is one of the panchāittana, or set of five gods—the others being Ganapati, Vishnu, Sāmbh and Surya—represented by five small stones of appropriate colors and set on a tiny table in a particular order, according to the chief object of the householder's devotion. These are worshiped every morning directly after the Sandhya; but they may each and all be worshiped separately besides; and each has his particular day of the week and a high annual festival. Devi's days are Tuesday and Friday, when she is worshiped with red and yellow powder, marigolds, sweetened milk and a Sanskrit prayer.

Her great festival occurs in Ashwin (Sept.-Oct.) during the first ten days of the new moon, and is called Navarātra. Among the Maratha Brahmans are three classes: Deshastrhas or hill Brahmans, Konkonasthas or Brahmans of the western slope, and Karhādās, so called from their chief town. These last, being devotees of Kali, observe this festival with great solemnity. During the whole nine days they do not shave; and they arrange a little vessel, called abhishakpātra, so that water or oil may run continually on the head of the image of Devi. On the tenth day they kindle the hōm fire (with a Swedish safety match) in the presence of many Brahmans, and end the day with a great feast.

In every Hindu house this festival is observed. The image of Devi is set up on its little throne. Every day the worshiper
makes a wreath of flowers, usually marigolds, and placing one wreath on the neck of the image the first day, adds another each day. In front of the image a square is made of corn, gram or barley, mixed with dry earth. In the midst of this is set an earthen water-pot (gäger or ghat), and on this they hang a wreath of flowers, adding another each day. Every day cakes of wheat are prepared for offering; and if the family be sufficiently rich, a married woman, a Brahman and an unmarried girl are brought in to be fed and worshiped. Every day in Brahman households, a Sanskrit prayer, Saptapatti, is read after bathing, and the worshiper must not yawn nor leave his place on any pretence, nor make a mistake in a single letter. On the tenth day the worship is concluded by a great feast, in which the different castes follow different customs.

This tenth day, the Dasara, is the great day of the festival, and in Satara the greatest feast-day of the year. Shiváji, the liberator of the Marathas from the Mohamedan yoke, was a devotee of Káli, or Bháváni, and of course made much of her high festival. There was sound reason in this; for it occurred at the end of the rainy season when the crops were all in, and settled dry weather might be expected. Furthermore, this tenth day, the Dasara, commemorated the setting out of Ráma on his march against Rávana; and what more appropriate and auspicious day for summoning his army to march against foes, who were not only their enemies in religion, but, like Rávana, had frequently carried off their women? Assembling his soldiery, who were mostly farmers cultivating little patches of ungenerous soil on the rough hillsides, he personally inspected every man and horse and had an inventory made of all their possessions. Then their horses and arms were worshiped, and a day set for their departure to the predatory warfare which was their joy and strength.

During the latter days of Satara’s independence, when wealth had increased and valor departed, the Dasara procession was a grand sight. Starting from the Rang Maháh, or chief palace of the Maharaja, on the upper road, the procession, numbering as many as 75 elephants in their gay housings, with instruments of music, chanting priests, prancing horses and gorgeously apparaled courtiers and servitors, marched to the Poyiche Náka, or city limit, two miles away; and frequently the head of the procession had reached that point long before the rear
had started. Now a solitary unhappy elephant and a few ponies represent the kingly state.

But to the people, recalling as it does the great days of old, the festival is as dear as ever. On this day every house is whitewashed or painted; wreaths of marigolds are strung across the tops of the doors; and every man puts on a new white dress. Those who have horses wash them in warm water and give them an offering of food; wine, or eggs, or something supposed to be specially acceptable. A corner of the house is swept clean and washed with cowdung; and instead of swords and guns and other weapons whose use the Government has prohibited, axes, hoes and other farm-implements are carefully washed and placed on this spot, and are given offerings of flowers and sandalwood oil and red and yellow powder. Brahmins bring a drink offering, and other castes an offering of flesh; and after showing it to the tools they divide it up among the members of the family.

In the afternoon the horses have cloths, generally the housewife's best sari, strapped on their backs; wreaths of flowers are placed around their necks; and the ladies of the family lend their anklets and even strings of gold and pearls to adorn the horses' hoofs; and if there be a light-colored creature, patterns are traced on his flanks.

In these degenerate days, if the horse belongs to a white man, the owner is supposed to worship the animal by giving a coin to the horse-boy; and this particular form of worship is not confined to Hindus but shared by Mohamedans and outcastes. Even the Sahib's cats and dogs have their wreaths of marigolds on this great day.

Early in the afternoon, the gaily dressed horses, and litters containing images of the gods, in small irregular processions, are brought to the Raj-wada, or chief market-square. Here booths are erected for the sale of cakes and sweets, and especially of great bundles of branches of kānchan, mountain ebony. Athletic sports of all sorts are carried on, interspersed with songs and recitations called kīrtans. A large male buffalo, reda, has been fed up for ten days, or even as many months. At the appointed time he is led out in front of a temple of Bhāvānī, and after the proper ceremonies some descendant of Shivājī's family, always a man with the surname of Bhonsle, strikes off the beast's head with a sword. Two strokes may
be given, but the act is more meritorious if only one suffices. The meat is then cut up and distributed to any who will take it. Goats and hens are sacrificed by the farmer caste.

The sacrifice of these animals on this day is common throughout the Maratha country and in many other parts of India. Indeed, the Dasara festival is a national one, and on it soldiers of every faith worship their arms; but beyond that, its significance and mode of observance are different in the different parts of the country.

As soon as twilight begins to fall, the great procession is formed in front of the Rang Mahal. Bhavani, Shivaji’s sword, which he considered an incarnation of the goddess, and which is now kept in a small temple in the Rani’s Palace, is placed on a palanquin and leads off, followed by the Rajah’s elephant and ponies, the Rajah or his representative in an open carriage, the bloody sword with which the reda was slain, and the usual oriental rabble. Crowds of people of all sorts line the route, and congregate especially at the Naka, or sentry-box marking the city limit. For Satara is an unwalled town, Shivaji believing, like the King of Sparta, that soldiers are better than bricks for defence.

In former days the procession went farther, for the purpose of worshiping an apta or kanchan tree, the mountain ebony, which was then cut down and the leaves distributed to the crowd. This object has now been lost sight of; the procession merely passes a little beyond the city limit and then turns and goes back. Throughout the Maratha country, everyone, to keep the festival properly, must walk at least beyond the limits of his town or village, to commemorate the starting out of the army on that day. When the procession has passed the Naka, a man comes running through the crowd with his arms full of kanchan branches, which he distributes to the hundreds of eager hands reached out to him. The recipients pull off the leaves and bestow the mon their friends and acquaintance, saying, “This is gold!” This little ceremony is eminently Hindu; kanchan, besides being a name for the ebony and champak trees, also means “gold,” and the leaves of the kanchan, which in size and shape resemble gold coins, are called “soni,” the ordinary word for gold. This giving of “gold” leaves is said to represent the distribution of money among the crowd “in the brave days of old.”
The deepening darkness is put to flight by colored lights, sky-rockets and other fire-works; and the crowds return home to feast and make merry.

This festival has in some places a darker side. The Karhadā Brahmans are strict worshipers of Devi; and her most acceptable sacrifice is a human being. This caste is perhaps one of the last vestiges of the dreaded Thugs who used to infest India; but in some respects their organization is quite different, though on that I need not dwell. The Government has attempted to suppress this sect, but has not fully succeeded. A favorite sacrifice is a son-in-law, who is invited to the house of his wife’s parents and there poisoned. The best sacrifice is a wedded wife, and in return Kali promises her devotees great wealth. The proper method of conducting this sacrifice is to invite the lady to visit her mother-in-law for the whole ten days’ festival. There she is made much of, given presents, bathed in perfumes, clad in fine new garments, and wreathed with flowers. Meanwhile, in the god-room, a hole has been dug in the floor in front of Devi’s image, the sacred hōm fire is kindled, prayers are said into the hole, and a lighted lamp set in each corner. At the right moment the unsuspecting victim is brought in and suddenly thrown into the hole, and the earth piled in on top. While I was in Satara an attempt was made to perform this sacrifice in a nearby village; but at the last minute the girl discovered the plot, and, escaping, fled to her father’s house, where she was protected against her too religious friends.

Since the British Government is so inconsiderate and oppressive as to interfere with these little family matters, the usual method now is by poison; and such masters in the poisoning art are the Hindus that the dose may be administered many days previous to the intended death of the victim. It is even said that as long as six months before the festival, poison may be given which will cause the victim to die on the proper day. Though currently believed, this is not easy to credit; and by its nature is a matter not susceptible of investigation.

Next after their kindred-in-law, the best sacrifice is a Konkon Brahman; and in such dread do the Konkonasths hold their Karhadā fellow-castemen, that they would rather die of starvation than risk taking food at their hands.