

GRAMA DEVATA - OUR VILLAGE GODDESS

Hinduism identified three principal deities. They are Grama Devata (Village Deity), Kula Devata (Family Deity) and Ishta Devata (Favourite Deity). A Grama Devata (Sanskrit: ग्रामदेवता, Gramadevata. (village deity) is the tutelary deity of a given locality in Hinduism, which is primarily worshiped in the villages of India.

Every Hindu family connected with a Rishi lineages, which reveals their Gotra. According to their deeds they were divided into varnas. Since then, according to the classes and varnas, the clan deity and clan Goddess of the family were determined in the Gotra. The presiding deity of the Gotra will be the family deity also called Kul Devi and Kul Devta. By worshiping these clan Goddesses (Kul Devi), the clan can be protected from supernatural powers and the clan can progress and achieve prosperity. The deities of each clan are different according to the lineage, gotra and varna of the sages. When people left the forest lifestyle and started settling in villages and cities, then instead of looking towards the sky, observed Sun, Moon, Stars and they started connecting with the earth. Attracted towards the mysteries of the earth. According to the time and place established, the founder of that clan made the regional Goddess Shakti, who helped that ruler during the crisis, his clan deity, which was accepted by the entire society. When each clan got divided into its branches, different clan deities were formed.

सत्यं बृहदतमुग्रं दीक्षा तपो ब्रह्म यज्ञः पृथिवीं धारयन्ति ।
सा नो भूतस्य भव्यस्य पत्न्युरुं लोकं पृथिवी नः कृणोतु ॥ (Atharva Veda 12.1)

Of diverse origins, Grama Devatas are regarded to protect the inhabitants of their villages from bandits, epidemics, and natural disasters when propitiated, failing which they are believed to cause these afflictions. People have believed that by keeping the village God/Goddess happy through worship, they will not allow any danger or trouble to come and will protect the village and the villagers in every way. Devotion and worship to local deities is an important religious practice for those who view them as the embodiment of respect and ideals.

The village deity, often an aspect of Goddess Durga, is referred to as Grama Devata. Worshipped as a form of Adi Shakti. The universal teacher and the advaitic master Adi Sankara who had established the Amnaya Peetham at Sringeri, is said to have consecrated four guardian deities for the protection of Sringeri village and the surrounding areas. These deities, Kalabhairava, Hanuman, and Kali as Durgamba and Kalikamba, are worshipped even today with regular pujas in the Vedic style.

The village deity is considered the most powerful among regional deities, residing in the hearts of all with devotion. People from various regions, living in villages, towns, and even in today's rural areas, identify themselves with village deities such as Palleturu, Tanda, and Palle Vasi. (The Markandeya Purana Chapter 7).

A Grama Devata is typically Goddess in India. In almost every village may be seen a shrine or symbol of the Grama Devata. The normal function of a Grama Devatas is guardianship of the village, but they are also believed to ward off disease and calamity. Some of the myths and folklore consisting of narratives or stories associated with the Grama Devata cult play a fundamental role in a society, such as strengthening beliefs in superstition and ritual while at the same time empowering women. The main characters in myths are chiefly goddesses who save people from a number of evils and ills, thereby portraying the strength of woman-kind in addressing mundane problems of everyday life. These deities, predominantly goddesses, possess both benevolent and malevolent features, to mark their roles as gentle to supplicants, and also fierce to wrongdoers. They are associated with agriculture, harvests, rain, and are regarded to be embodiments of fertility.

The story of Nagarikatha (civilization) among the Aryans tells us that it is the duty of women to safeguard the family, and women are primarily responsible for family protection. Men, on the other hand, are engaged in warfare. From the time of Aryan civilization, women have been worshiped as goddesses and have manifested as village deities. In various countries like Greece, Rome, Asia, Mexico, Egypt, and others, the representation of a Goddess deity is predominant. These deities are worshiped with specific names, and each deity is associated with the geographical and cultural context of the respective villages. Along with their cultural traditions, festivals, and rituals, they are revered by the people.

The reverence for Grama Devata is deeply ingrained in the ancient and profound Hindu culture in India, as reflected in various scriptures, Upanishads, Shastras, and the Devi Bhagavatam.

मित्राणि धन धान्यानि प्रजानां सम्मतानिव।
जननी जन्म भूमिश्च स्वर्गादपि गरीयसी ॥ (Ramayan)

Valmiki Ramayana describes in Sundara Kanda that Hanuman landed in Lanka of Sita and came to the entrance gates, when he was met by Lanka lakshmi, the city's guardian deity. She blocked his path into the city, and demanded to know who he was and what he was doing, thus fulfilling her role as a guardian. Hanuman who was on a dharmic mission gave the answer by striking a blow to her and entered the city.

The approach of worshipping the multifarious forms of divinity through grama devatas finds the sanction in Bhagavan Gita. Lord Krishna declares that worshipping him in whatever way is acceptable to him, as these several ways of understanding the Lord by the devotees are all their respective jnana yagnas or sacrifices of Knowledge.

Jñāna-yajñena cāpy anye
yajanto mām upāsate
ekatvena pṛthaktvena
bahudhā viśvato-mukham
[Bg. 9.15]

The Badi Devkali temple, situated in the heart of Ayodhya is one with a deep connection to this city and its patron god Ram. The Goddess Badi Devkali is recognised as the Kuldevi or Lord Rama's ancestral deity within the rich tapestry of deeply revered customs. The genesis of the Badi Devkali Mandir can be traced back to Maharaja Raghunath, an ancestor of Lord Rama. Legend has it that it was under the divine blessings of Badi Devkali that Lord Rama achieved victory in the epic battle against Ravana in Lanka. The temple, thus, becomes not only a place of worship but also a repository of divine blessings that echo through generations. It is also said that Ram's mother, Kaushalya, had a difficult pregnancy and used to frequently come to this very temple to seek the blessings of the holy mother. It is a place of divine feminine energy that captivates anyone who seeks blessings at the temple.

The Ekvira Devi temple is located in Lonavala(Village Diety), Western Maharashtra, India, close to the Karla Caves. To obtain the blessings of Ekvira Devi, who is revered as a goddess of protection and wish fulfilment, devotees travel to the temple. The history goes back to the period of Mahabharata. When Pandavas were in exile, they spent around 14 years in the forest. As part of this, they were required to stay hidden for a year. If they get caught, they are required to repeat the entire tenure. One day, Devi Parvati came into their dream. She asked them to build the temple. So, Pandavas honoured that. They built the mighty temple in the middle of the forest in no time which surprised the goddess. That also pleased Maa Parvati and she blessed them. As per her boon, no one could find them during the tenure of their exile.

The vision of **Gramadevata Foundation** is to "Connect, Communicate, and Coordinate" with the spiritual and cultural roots of Sanatana Dharma. The foundation aims to cultivate a sense of family and unity among Hindus worldwide by bridging the gap between modern life and ancient traditions. By leveraging technology and community-driven initiatives, the foundation envisions a world where every Hindu remains connected to their heritage, actively participates in spiritual and cultural activities, and contributes to the global Hindu community. ***Gramadevata Foundation's mission is multifaceted, focusing on empowering Hindutva through various platforms that cater to different aspects of Hindu life.***

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