

# A Study of Methods of Worship In Shakta Tradition With Special Reference To Chitpavan Clan.

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## Abstract:

The researcher aims to understand the methods practised by Chitpavan Konkanastha Brahmins. Chitpavan (Chitpavan Brahmins or Konkanastha Brahmins, meaning Brahmins residing in Konkan area) is a Hindu Brahmin **clan** in the Konkan region on the coast of the Indian state of Maharashtra. In *Chitpavan* clan *Shakti* is worshiped in many forms like *Annapurna*, *Durga*, *Gauri*, *ChaitraGauri*, *LalitaGauri* etc.

In this paper, researcher has studied different ways of worship of Shakta tradition especially in Chitpavan clan such as *Gauri*, Navaratri, Chaitra *Gauri* and *LalitaGauri*. *Annapurna* is worshipped in every house in Maharashtra. But *Gauri*, *Durga*, *Chaitra Gauri* have different names and various traditions all over Maharashtra. *Annapurna* is very gentle form of Shiva's wife Parvati with a pot in one hand and Ladle (पळी) in the other. In Maharashtra, every bride carries the *Annapurna* idol with her when she gets married, and it is worshipped in daily Pooja. A special ritual like Bodan is also performed for her. *Durgais* worshiped on the occasion of *Navtratri*. There are many stories associated with it. *Chaitra Gauri* is worshipped in the month of *Chaitra* and *Vaishakh*. This paper will be useful for a potential study of any other clan. Because at present there is no such published information based on research as far as any particular clan in Maharashtra is concerned is readily available.

**Keywords:** Shakta, Chitpavan, Shakta Tradition, Clan, Worship, Devi

## Introduction:

Chitpavan Konkanastha Brahmin is a Hindu Brahmin clan basically comes from the coastal area of Konkan region of Maharashtra. Initially they used to work as messengers and spies along with their primary occupation of farming. Some of them used to perform rituals like *Pooja*, *Havan* and *Jnana* etc. among their own community members and temples for living. The Chitpavan Brahmins have two sub-groups: the *Rigvedi* and the *Yajurvedi* and both of belong to the *Smarth* tradition. The community comprises fourteengotras (clans). These *gotras* are linked with sages.

Later after Balaji Vishwanath became Peshwa during 18th Century, this community became prominent and important part of his administration. In this paper a study of methods of *Shakti* worship and different traditions associated with it, in Chitpavan clan is done.

## Meaning of Chitpavan

There are some stories associated with the word itself.

- Some of the Experts have associated the word *Chitpavan* / *chittapavanta* to those who have been purified from cheetah.
- <sup>1</sup>A legend from *Sahyadri Khanda* of *Skanda Purana* further narrates that there were 14 corpses floating in the sea. Parshuram revived them and initiated them. However the legends from the later versions of *Sahyadri Khanda* has slight variation. It mentions that Parshuram needed *Brahmins* who could perform Vedic ceremonies for him because he thought he was defiled by the slaughter of *Kshatriyas*. So, he recovered a narrow strip of land from sea (now Konkan).

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<sup>1</sup>*Ishtadevata* – The deity you are worshipping for all your desires

- Historical evidences - While there is one more mention that Parshuram brought 14 people to Konkan and settled them as Brahmins and made them Brahmins. Historical evidence is given this way as to why they were thereon recognized as *Chitpavan* or *Konkanastha*.
- However, the renowned historian Rajwade has described the origin of Chitpavan from *Agni* and the one who became pure from the pyre (*Chitya*) has described it as Chitpavan. This reference of meaning of *Chitpavan* as "pure from the pyre" comes from mythological story stating the caste was actually created by the Parshuram from bodies of sailors whose ship was wrecked near Konkan region. Parshuram purified them on the pyre, restored to life, and taught them Brahman rites.

In the encyclopaedia (*ज्ञानकोश*), Dr.Ketkar has noted that there are 800 sub-castes of Brahmins in India. Chitpavan Konkanastha Brahmin is one amongst them.

The *Chitpavani* dialect is found in the Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency-Ratnagiri and Sawantwadi districts, published in 1880.

*Shakti* worship is one of the oldest forms of worship in the world. The main reason for this is the importance of woman in human life. Especially as a mother, she nurtures everyone else. It is always considered her responsibility. Female images in the form of goddesses have been found in many excavations in India and outside India.

It is mentioned in the *Markandeya Purana* that when the predominance of *tamasi*, the evil or a cruel attitude, prevails on earth; then the goddess incarnates to protect good people (*sajjan*).

Worship is the contemplation or meditation of the deity done with faith or devotion. It includes chanting mantras, prayers, *pooja* etc. in daily worship. Rituals like *Yajna*, sacrificial fire (*होम*), *Bhajan* etc. are performed on some special occasion. While performing rituals related to deities, the environment becomes devotional and filled with positive energy. The deity's qualities, strength, character, etc. is given more importance in prayers while worshipping. Every religion has this type of *sadhana* and *aradhana*. *Aradhana* is the ritual of attaining desirable things (*Ishtafal*) like childbirth, health and prosperity etc. by the grace of *Ishtadevata*<sup>1</sup>. *Sadhana* is the ritual that gives strength to attain certain spiritual level. Therefore, the word *sadhana* in the broadest sense is rarely included in case of everyday worship. But it is believed that *sadhana* has emphasis on some difficult rituals and has great power. In simple words, Worship is the ritual of acquiring the grace of the desired deity. Chanting or just meditation is a separate worship without any ritual. The *Jnana Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga* and *Dhyana Yoga* are practised with some simple rituals.

Among the cults or sects in India in connection with the worship of Goddess, the Sampradaya of Goddess or Shakti worship or Matrudevata is very ancient. Panchdevopasna have a prominent place in theology. Devotion to the *Nirguna* or *Nirakar* Parattva by imagining the *Saguna* or *Sakar* symbol of devotion and spending one's whole life in its *pujan-kirtan* with the expectation of grace is a characteristic of the Indian devotional path.

There are many deities in the path of devotion but worship and devotion of Vishnu, Shiva, Surya, Ganapati and Goddess is wide<sup>2</sup> spread. The deity and his Shakti gradually evolved and in that course of development the Shakti attained divinity. Due to her aura i.e. halo, the *Shakti* received the title *Devi*.

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<sup>2</sup>Satvik – Pure, Virtuous

<sup>3</sup>Rajas – Desirous, Passionate

<sup>4</sup>Tamas – Ignorance, Darkness

The etymology of the word *Devi* is '*Divyatiiti Devi*'. '*Div*' also means 'to play'. It would mean that the Goddess is playing the game of creation-order-destruction of the infinite universe. Like other gods, Supreme Shakti also has various incarnations for the obedience of demons. It is believed that the goddess protected her devotees and even the gods by destroying many demons to uphold *Dharma*.

Her incarnations are in the form of *Satvik*<sup>2</sup>, *Rajas*<sup>3</sup> or *Tamas*<sup>4</sup> depending on the occasion. Similarly, her nicknames are also found differently. After killing a demon named *Durg*, she became *Durga*. After killing *Mahishasura*, she became *Mahishasurmardini*. These mythological stories are mainly found in *DurgaSaptashati* (*Devi Mahatmya* part of *Markandeya Purana*), *Devi Bhagavat*, *Brahmand Purana*, *Brahmavaivarta Purana* and many other Tantra texts.

In this way, many forms of Goddess are worshiped in many ways all over India. The present form of worship is a beautiful confluence of Vedic principles and Tantric worship.

Bodan, Gondhal, Gauri-Ganapati, Navratri and Dev Diwali are main Kulachar (family traditions) followed by Chitpavan Bahamans. Bodan, Gondhal, Gauri, Navratri and Dev Diwali are all come under Shakti Worship.

Tradition of *Bodanis* followed by Chitpavan clan only. Other traditions followed by Chitpavan Konkanastha community are Gauri Pooja at the time of Ganapati Festival, Mahalaxmi Pooja at the time of Navaratri, Chaitra Gauri and LalitaGauri at the time of Lalita Panchami. Annapurna is worshipped in every house in Maharashtra in every day Pooja. But Gauri, Mahalaxmi, Chaitra Gauri have different names and traditions in some parts of Maharashtra.

The word Bodan comes from Sanskrit word *Vardhan* meaning Growth. The Bodan is offered when you make addition to your family (*VanshVrudhhi*). After marriage or after the arrival of new baby the Bodan is offered to *Devi* (*Shakti*) to seek her blessings for the whole family.

Bodan (Fig.1) is an important *Kulachar* (Family Tradition) of the Hindu *ChitpavanKonkanastha Brahmin* clan. According to the tradition of their clan, Bodan is performed annually, triennial or after ceremonies like wedding or thread ceremony. The Bodan is usually performed on Tuesdays, Fridays or Sundays. Apart from *Adhik, Poush or Chaitra*, this tradition of the Goddess can be performed at any time. Fig.1, 2 and 3 below give detail account of the process performed and the preparation.



Bodan performed in Chitpavan Family (Fig.1)



Preparation before performing Bodan



Preparations for Devi Annapurna

In some *Chitpavan* families, tradition of *Gondhalis* also followed. It is performed after the marriage ceremony in the family. The newly married couple performs puja of their *Kuladevata* (Female family Deity) and seeks her blessings. This *Gondhal* and *Pooja* is performed at night. At the end *Pooja* prayers and *Arati* of Deity is performed.

Along with *Ganesh*, at the time of Ganesh festival, Gauri (also known as *Mahalaxmi* in Vidharbha region of Maharashtra) festival is celebrated. This is a three-day festival. *Gauris* arrive at home, on

the first day. The next day the Lunch is offered to them with variety of sweets and on the third day it is said that they return to their home. In Chitpavan Brahmans, Gauris are worshipped in the form of 5 riverside stones. They are treated with lots of love. It is said that they represent the daughters arriving at their parents' place. Therefore daughters are invited for lunch.

*Navratri* festival is a nine day festival that starts on *AshwinPratipada*. And ends on *Vijaya Dashami* i.e. *Dassera*. It is the nine-day festival of goddess *Durga*. *Panchamrut*<sup>5</sup> *Pooja* of Devi is done, followed by *Arati*. People<sup>3</sup> exchange leaves of *Aptatree* as symbol of gold. During *Navratri* women and girls celebrate *bhondla* by singing songs in honour of the Goddess. In Chitpavan families they invite *Kumarika* (girls under the age of 8 years) and *Suwasini* (married woman) during these 9 days. Also perform *Mahalaxmi Pooja* on *Ashtami* and some families also perform *Bodan to Devi* on the 10th day i.e. *Dassera*.

### Background:

One of the strong reasons to select this topic; there is a need to study if there is any change in the traditional worship of *Shakti* in Konkanastha Brahmans because of the migration of people from Konkan area to other parts of Maharashtra mainly in 18<sup>th</sup> Century. There are many traditions related to *Shakti* in various forms in Maharashtra. Therefore, it is interesting to study the change if any, or the traditions are followed as they have come from the earlier generations.

### Objective:

To Study Methods of Worship in Shakta Tradition in Chitpavan Clan.

To find out if any change has happened in the methods of Shakta Worship in Chitpavan clan due to migration and change in thinking pattern.

### Literature review:

1. In his Marathi Book *Devi Kosh*, Pralhad Prbhudesai has discussed many aspects of Devi in the chapter *आदिशक्तीचे स्वरूप*. According to him, it is found that the mother deities worshiped in India did not originate as human beings. Many such examples can be given for e.g.

- Adishakti produces a goddess to help the devotees
- Many originated from the glory of the gods and came to destroy the demons on earth
- Meenakshi and Draupadi are originated from the fire element in the Agni Kunda.

Regarding *Sharadiya Navratra* there is a mention in the book that *Mahishasurmardini*, a unique form of Goddess *Durga* has been worshipped in India since ancient times. Book also tells that the information about *Sharadiya Navratra* festival is given in detail in *Kalika Purana*.

There is a mention in the book about the different names associated with *Navratra* in different parts of Maharashtra and he has discussed some different traditions also. E.g. in the Vasai area, *Vajreshwari Devi*, who is the *Kuldevi* is worshiped for nine days. The goddess is worshiped by drawing her image with a *Gandhor kumkum* on a wooden plate.

Even some slightly different traditions are listed in *Devi Kosh*, e.g. in *Buldhana* in *Wadala Navratra* is called *Bhavani Navratra*. They celebrate it for eight days instead of nine and Pigs are sacrificed. Also, *Kher Mata Devi* is worshiped in the *Shivani* area from *Warhad* during *Navratra*. Grains are sowed in a pot on the first day. It is believed that the grain yield is supposed to be good if the grains get good sprouts.

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<sup>5</sup>*Panchamrut* contains 5 ingredients, yogurt (*dahi*), milk, honey, Sugar, and ghee. It is considered to have health benefits like balancing the *Pitta Dosha*, improving immunity, enhancing brain function, memory and creative abilities

A detailed information with references is given about *Chaitra Gauri* tradition. He tells that the worship of *Chaitra Gauri* is mentioned in *Devi Bhagavata*. Initially pooja used to take place in the four months of Chaitra, Ashadh, Ashwin and Magh from Shukla Pratipada to Navami. Over a period, only Chaitra and Ashwin Pooja tradition survived, and the other two fell behind. *Chaitra Gauri Katha* also comes in *Gatha Saptshati*

In Maharashtra, *Chaitra Gauri* is celebrated in the form of Haldikunku for a period of one month *Vaishakh Shuddha Pratipada till Akshay Tritiya*. On that day women are invited and given *Prasad*, some small gift and Haladi-Kunku. This ceremony is held in the house where *Chaitra Gauri* is installed in the form of idol of deity or only face mask and decorated with flowers and garlands.

2. In his Marathi book *Bharatiya Murtishastra ( भारतीयमूर्तिशास्त्र)*, N. P. Joshi has mentioned in *Shakti* Part 1, that Shakti worship is practised from Vedic period. It can be considered the oldest forms of worship. In human life, role of woman is very significant. She takes care of everyone else in the family. She always considers it as her responsibility.

3. In his Marathi book *Aamhi Chitpavan (आम्हीचित्पावन)*, M. S. Dixit has elaborated some stories associated with the word *Chitpavan*. The book has referred to the opinions of some experts who have associated the word *Chitpavan / Chitpavan* to those who have been purified from cheat. The book has also mentioned the belief that *Chitpavan* was given shelter in Chiplun area of Konkan by Parshuram. It also narrates the story from *Skanda Purana* about 14 corpses floating in the sea. Parshuram revived them and initiated them.

The definitions of some key words taken from the internet are as follows:

**Shakta sect**- Although the *Shakta* sect is a part of the entire Shaivite sect, its distinctiveness is evident. The Shaivite sect is *Shiva*-oriented while the *Shakta* sect is *Shaktipradhan*. Most of the texts are composed as a dialogue between *Shiva* and *Shakti*.

Dictionary meaning of **tradition** is a custom, belief or way of doing something that has continued from the past to the present. The word **tradition** itself derives from the Latin word *tradere* literally that means to transmit, to hand over, to give for safekeeping. Even if it is commonly believed that traditions have come from ancient history, many traditions have also been invented later on purpose.

**A clan** is a group of people united by actual or perceived kinship and descent. Clans preceded more centralized forms of community organization.

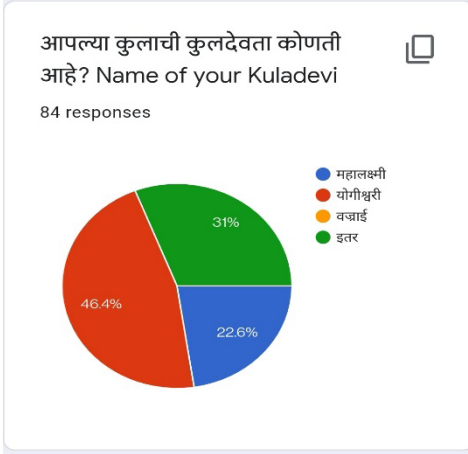
### Methodology:

Quantitative method is used to gather data about **methods of Worship in Shakta Tradition in Chitpavan clan**.

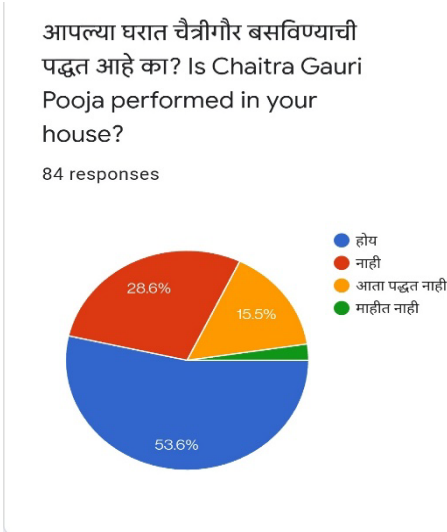
The Survey method was used to gather data by asking questions to people who have desired information. The survey was web based and duration was 20 days. A formal questionnaire of 13 questions was prepared in the form of google form. 84 people responded. The respondents were asked questions on the methods and traditions they practice. The sample was collected randomly. The sample represented the wide range of age group from 45 to 75 with a few younger generation respondents.

### Data analysis and Findings:

The survey results indicated following things:



Almost half i.e. 46.4 % respondents have *Yogishwari* as their *Kuladevi* (family Deity) where 22.6% have *Mahalaxmi* and 31% have other goddesses as their *Kuladevi*.



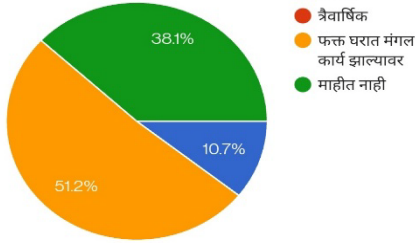
Just over 50% respondents are performing Chaitra Gauri Pooja. But in case of total 47% of the respondents, Chaitra Gauri worship is either not performed, recently stopped performing or they don't know about it.

On occasion of *Navaratri*, on *Durgashtami* (8<sup>th</sup> day of *Navaratri*) 34.5% respondents have tradition of *Ghat (घट) Poojan*, 20% have idol worship tradition and 33.3% respondents don't know whether their family follows this tradition. The responses are mixed. This shows that current generation is unaware of some traditions in their Clan.

In case of *Lalita Gauri*, only 15.5% have tradition of *Lalita Panchami Pooja* and 78.6% respondents don't have the tradition. It tells us that practice of this tradition is now discontinued in many houses.

घरात कुळधर्म कुलाचार म्हणून बोडण किती वेळा केले जाते? Is 'Bodan' performed on regular basis in the house? How often?

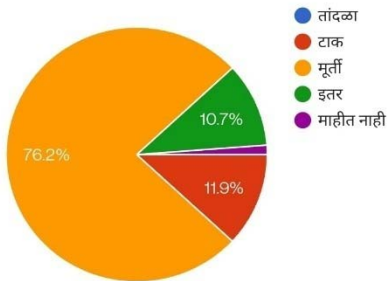
84 responses



More than 50% respondents have tradition of Bodan only after marriage or after the arrival of new baby. It is not done on regular basis like once in a year or once in three years etc.

आपल्या घरात रोजच्या पूजेमध्ये कोणत्या स्वरूपात देवीची पूजा होते? In what form is the Goddess worshiped in our daily Pooja?

84 responses



In everyday worship, 76.2% respondents worship *Devi* idol where only 11.9% worship Tak (टाक - stamped figure on metal)

### Conclusions:

Research indicates that 53.6% of the respondents have stopped performing traditional *Chaitra Gauri* Pooja due to lack of knowledge and also due to lack of time as currently almost all women are working women. Same is the case for *Lalita Panchami* Pooja. This tradition has discontinued because of unawareness.

Tradition of *Bodan* is followed by most of the Chitpavan families may be because it comes under *Kulachar*. In some cases, *Bodan* is performed by traditional method with some minor changes. Some of them are also considering environment over tradition and perform Pooja, but skip actual ritual and they give donation instead.

Maximum number of respondents (76.2%) prefer idol for everyday Pooja and worship. This may be because it is convenient as you can clean it easily.

## Limitations and scope:

This study is limited to Methods of Shakta Traditions in detail in Chitpavan Clan only.

So, there is a scope for further detail study in Shakti worship in other clans as well as consolidated comparative study of all the clans together.

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