

MANGALA GOWRI

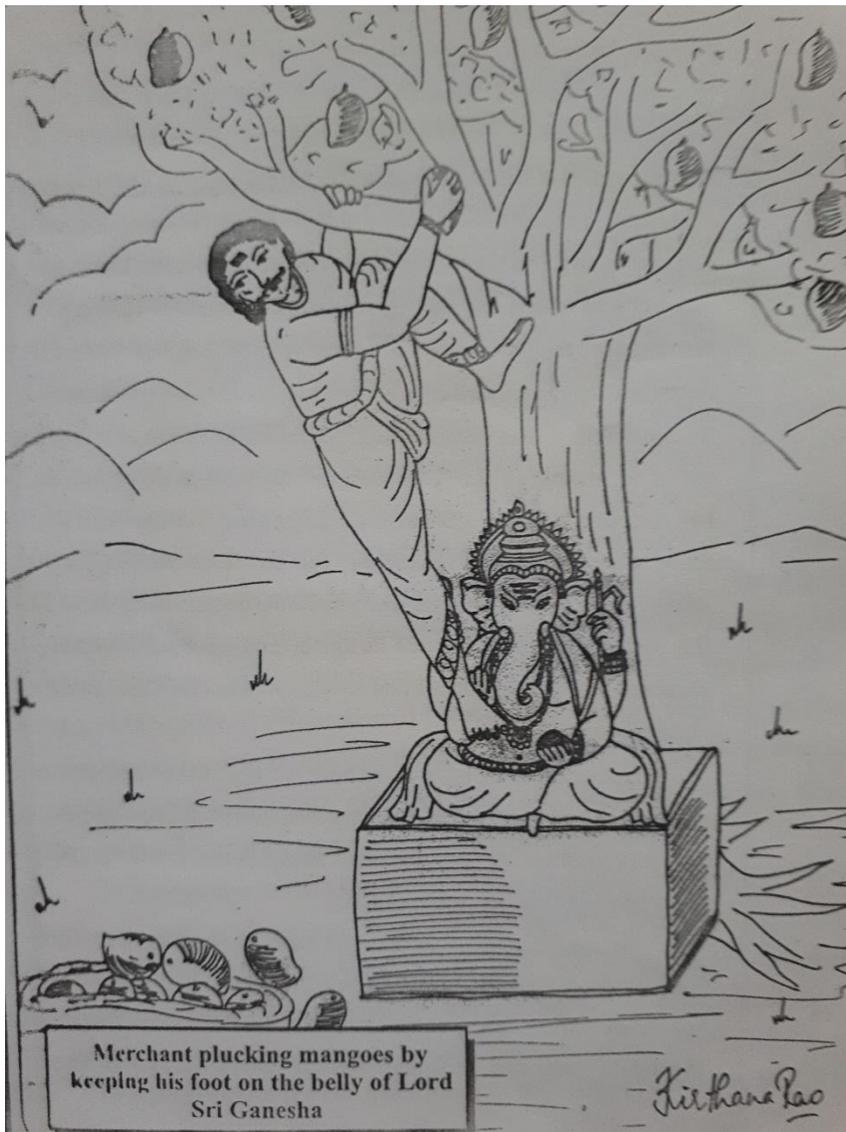
It is customary to observe this pooja on every Tuesday of the month of Sravan, by newly married girls, starting in the year of marriage and continue it for five consecutive years. It is supposed to confer “Sowbhagya” and longevity to their husbands.

Pooja Procedure : Devi pooja is performed with sixteen different forms of flowers. Haldi kumkum, kajal, comb, blouse bits, betel leaves and nuts, coconut, mirror, some rice and dakshina are placed in a plate and given as dana (gift) first to the mother and later to five suhasins. Vaayana dana is given to a Brahmin. Silence is observed on this day. In the night, arathi is performed using 16 wicks of cotton and bhajans and sankeerthan are performed the whole night. Visarjana of the devi is performed the next day.

Story of Mangala gowri pooja

Long long ago, there lived a merchant in a small town. Although he had all comforts, he was sad and restless because he had no children. One day a Bhairagi (a saint) came to his house shouting “Allakh” and asked for alms. The merchant’s wife brought alms. He refused to accept it from the childless couple. She told her husband about this. He hit upon an idea. He told his wife to hide herself behind the door and when the Bhairagi comes the next day shouting “Allakh” nicely drop some gold coins into his begging bowl. She did as told. The Bhairagi angrily retorted, “you lady, you have broken my vow”. So saying, he cursed her, “you will be childless till your lifetime”. She fell at his feet and begged pardon. The Bhairagi relented and spoke to her husband thus : “Go to a nearby forest riding on a blue-cloth covered horse and wear blue clothes. As you proceed the horse will halt at a particular point. Get down. You will see the temple of a Goddess. Go and pray there. Your prayers will be answered”. The merchant did as directed. The goddess appeared before him and asked him, what he wanted. He sobbed before her saying, “O Mother, I have plenty of wealth and comforts, but I have no children. Bless me with progeny”. The goddess was pleased with his prayers and said, “You will be blessed with a child, but you have to choose between three options. One, a male child who will be wise but short-lived, two, a male child who will be long-lived but blind for life or three, a female child who will be widowed at a young age”. The merchant pondered over the matter and finally preferred a wise but short-lived male child. Then, the goddess directed him to go behind her temple, where he will see a Ganesha idol and a mango tree, and asked him to climb up the tree by placing his foot on the pot-belly of Ganesha, and pluck a mango fruit, climb down, go home and give it to his wife to eat it.

The merchant got up the mango tree, began to pluck the mangoes one by one, himself ate a few of them and began to put others in a gunny bag below to take home. When he got down, he was perplexed to find only one mango in his bag.



The Ganesha idol spoke to him, “You young man, you have made me tired by resting your foot on my pot-belly and wanted to take home a large number of mangoes. Fate ordains otherwise. Be satisfied with one mango, go home and give it to your wife”. He realized his mistake, went home and gave that one mango to his wife. She ate it and soon she gave birth to a male child. There was rejoicing all round. At the right age of eight, Upanayanam was performed and at ten, when marriage was thought of, the merchant remembered a custom of his family that every prospective bridegroom has to go to Varanasi (Benares), study scriptures and marry after his return.

Soon the boy left for Varanasi with his uncle. En route, they rested under the shade of a tree. They saw a number of girls playing and also quarrelling. One girl was seen scolding another fair girl using abusive language and calling her, “You widow, you widow”. The fair girl was seen replying, “My mother worships Mangala Gowri sincerely. Nobody in our family will become a widow. I being the daughter, how come you scold me calling a widow. I will never be a widow”.

The uncle, who overheard this conversation, rightly concluded that this was the fittest girl for his nephew, for my marrying, his short life will be spared and his lifespan may be prolonged. They both overstayed in that town on that day.

The next day, they found that the marriage of the fair girl, whom they saw last was being arranged with another boy. At the last minute, due to some hitch, the bridegroom left in a huff. While searching for some prospective bridegroom in a dharmasala, the girl's parents found his uncle with his nephew. They soon arranged for a marriage of this nephew. The newly married couple slept near a "Gowri Hara". The boy presented his wife a ring and in turn the parents gave him a plate of laddus. That night the bride had a dream where she saw Goddess Mangala Gowri telling her, "O, newly married one, tonight a cobra will come to bite your husband, place of bronze vessel nearby. The cobra will get inside the vessel to drink the milk. Quickly tie the mouth of the vessel with a blouse bit. The next morning, present the vessel a 'Vana' (gift) to your mother". She did as directed. The next day, her husband left for Varanasi. At home, her mother opened the vessel, found a garland inside, took it out and put it round her daughter's neck. Immediately behind, she saw a boy standing and claiming that he had bought the garland as a gift for her daughter and he should be married to her. However, the girl denounced him as she could not be convinced that he is the right person.

In despair they were searching for the real bridegroom and thought of a plan. They went to the dharmasala, invited every Brahmin boy passing that way, washed his feet, offered sandal paste and were keenly watching every body to trace the right person.

Meanwhile, the uncle and the nephew were on their return journey from Varanasi, halted at that town, but suddenly the nephew swooned and fell down. To his dismay, the uncle found Yamadhutas putting a noose round the boy's neck and dragging him off because his life span was over. Suddenly, goddess Mangala Gowri appeared on the scene and brought back the boy to life. The uncle and the nephew began cooking their own food as it is the custom in their family not to partake 'Paarana' food cooked by others. However, they were persuaded to come to the Dharmasala as it was a charity oriented place. Their feet were washed, sandal paste offered as per custom and while doing so, they noticed, the place of laddus with the nephew. In no time, he was identified by the bride as her husband and showed him the ring. The couple were reunited in marriage and left for their hometown.

At home, the merchant's wife was overjoyed to see her son back with a bride, who is now her daughter-in-law. She was all praise to her daughter-in-law, because it was on account of her family performing Mangala Gowri pooja, her son who was destined to be short-lived had a rebirth. The family lived happily thereafter.

It is a custom in Maharashtrian families, for a newly married bride to perform "Mangala Gowri Pooja" on every Tuesday, consecutively for 4 times and after the final pooja to give 'Vana' (gift) in the form of a vessel to the mother. In return, the mother gives her daughter another such 'Vana'. This pooja is continued for the first five years after marriage. It is strongly believed that by

performing “Mangala Gowri Pooja” they will be sumangalis (suhagans) till their life time.

The Marathi School and the Maharashtra Association Building Trust, Chennai.