

VARALAKSHMI VRATA

The glory of performing the VARALAKSHMI VRATA, narrated directly by Lord Shiva Himself, is elaborately discussed in the Skanda Puranam. This is a festival to propitiate Shri Varalakshmi (Mahalakshmi) – the consort of Lord Vishnu, who is the abode of all mangalam (auspiciousness), prosperity and wealth. The Varalakshmi Vrata is to be performed on the Shravana shukla shukra varam ie, the Friday immediately preceding the full moon day (Pournima) in the auspicious month of Sravana. This Vrata is undertaken by the sumangalis (ladies whose husbands are still living) for good progeny, good health, and wishing long life for the husbands.

Lakshmi is symbolic of eight forces – wealth, earth, learning, love, fame, peace, pleasure, and strength. Each of these forces is called a Lakshmi, and collectively they are known as Ashtalakshmi. Worship of Varalakshmi is rendered equivalent to the pooja for Ashtalakshmi. Since she is ever ready to grant boons to her true devotees, she is usually referred to as “Varalakshmi”.

Pooja procedure : The rituals of worship during the Varalakshmi Vrata differ from region to region in south India, but they all have the same basic format. The performer begins the day with a holy purification bath, and wears clean clothes. The arena is decorated with kolam (rangoli). A geometrical design known as mandalam is then drawn on the clean surface of the floor (with the picture of a lotus upon it). A sacred pot (kalasha) is filled with pure water and placed on a plate filled with rice (akshata), topped with a bunch of fresh mango leaves, and a coconut (unbroken, with its kudimi on) smeared with turmeric powder is placed a top. Also, sandal paste and kumkum are applied to the kalasha, and a cloth is tied around it before placing it on the mandalam. Some people further beautify the kalasha with a picture of Varalakshmi drawn on it and decorated with jewels. Then, Goddess Lakshmi is invoked. Fresh flowers and grains are used in the worship, indicating growth and prosperity.

After performing the initial worship of Lord Ganesha (seeking removal all obstacles), prayers are offered to the kalasha. A dora (which consists of nine threads and nine knots) is placed on the right side of the Goddess. Now the main worship of Lakshmi begins, and lastly the worship of the sacred thread. Finally, it is tied around the right hand of the performer. Prayers in the form of Lakshmi Ashtottara shatanama and sahasranama are then chanted. Another sumangali is then chosen, and she is offered auspicious articles as gifts and food. The function concludes with the singing of several hymns and songs in praise of Varalakshmi.

Story of Varalakshmi vrata

Suka a pupil of Vyasa, addressing Saunaka and other maharishis said, “O Maharishis, once Lord Parameshwara, narrated to his consort Parvati Devi a Vrata, which bestows prosperity to all women who observe this Vrata with faith and devotion. I will briefly tell you this dialogue between the Lord and His consort, please listen with attention.

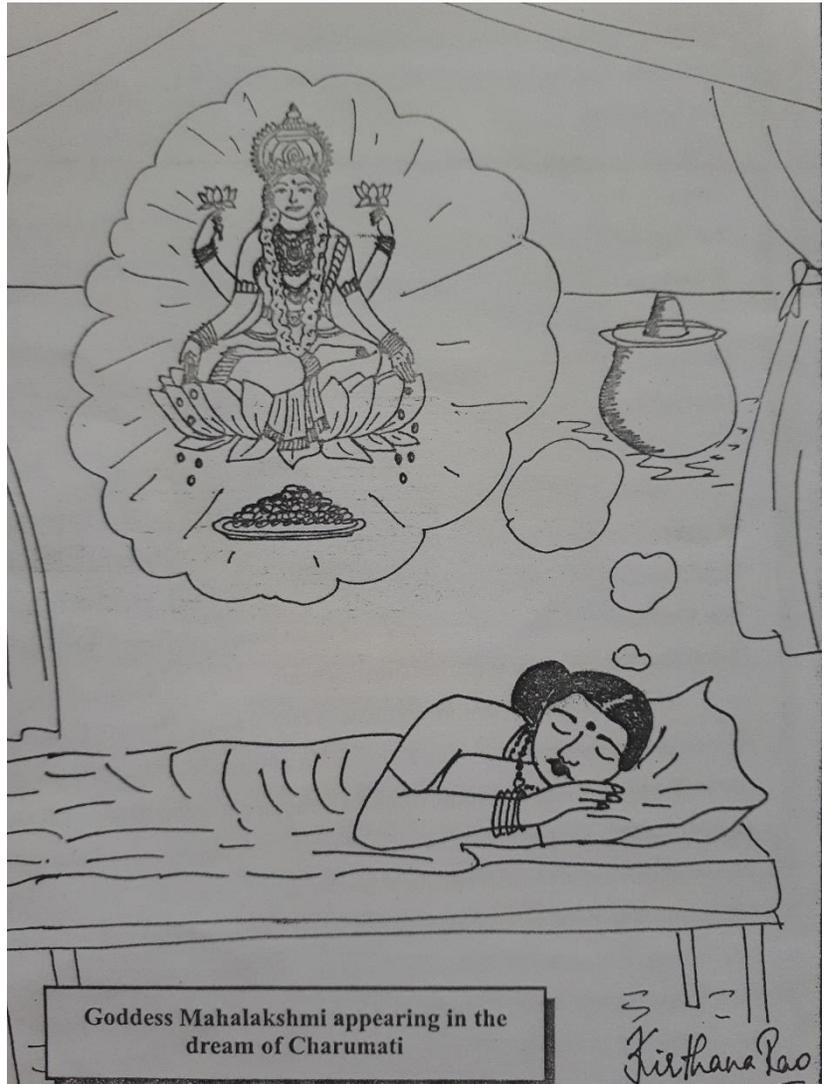
Approaching Parameswara, who was seated on the throne studded with diamonds, in Kailasa Parvata, Parvathi Devi prostrated before him and the following dialogue ensued :

PARVATHI DEVI : “O, Lord, by observing which Vrata, tell me, women will be endowed with all good things in life”.

PARAMESWARA : O, Manohari, I am glad you enquired about this Vrata. Women are ordained to observe this Vrata with faith and devotion. By doing so, they will be nicely rewarded. The Vrata should be observed on the Friday preceding Sravana sukhla paksha pournima”.

PARVATHI DEVI :
“Lord, How should this Vrata be observed? What are injunctions that go with it? Which goddess is to be worshipped? In days of yore, who all were benefited by it? I am eager to know all about this”.

PARAMESWARA :
“O, Katyayani, listen. In Magadha, there was a town called KUNDINI, such was the splendor of this town that one will be wonderstruck to see houses built of gold. Even the compound walls were also built of gold. In this town of plenty there lived a Brahmin lady, CHARUMATHI. She was a great pativrata, looked upon her husband as next only to God, washed his feet every day in the morning, offered him



Goddess Mahalakshmi appearing in the dream of Charumati

flowers, then attended to the needs of her in-laws and kept them all in good humour. Her devotion to her husband and her family earned her the blessings of Goddess Mahalakshmi, who appeared in her dream and spoke to her thus “O, Charumathi, I am pleased with your devotion. I am Varalakshmi Devi. I came to give you darshan. Worship me on the Friday preceding Sravana sukla paksha pournami. I will confer all riches”. Charumathi, in her dream prostrated before the Goddess, sang hymns in praise of her and said “O, Jagat janani, let your grace fall on every household which worships thee with faith and devotion. Because of my good deeds in my previous birth, I had the good fortune to touch your feet”.

“So be it” so saying Goddess Varalakshmi disappeared.

When Charumathi woke up from her dream, she could not find the Goddess but recapitulated the whole episode and faithfully retold it to her family members, who were delighted. They instantly decided to observe this Vrata at the next opportunity and were looking forward for the Friday preceding the Sravana Sukla Paksha Pournami.

The next year when the auspicious day arrived Charumathi gathered all her lady friends in her house and made of elaborate preparations for the pooja like decorating a mantap, placed a wooden plank inside and on it spread a plantain leaf and put some raw rice, placed a Kalasa, invoked the goddess Varalakshmi and all gathered there performed the pooja. “Dora” (thread) pooja was also done by placing a yellow cord with nine fine cotton threads, bound together, one for each lady present. At the conclusion of the pooja, each lady had the “Dora” tied around her right wrist, holding a coconut and some flowers in hand. Suhasinis and Brahmins were honoured. Finally, pradakshina followed. At the end of the first pradakshina, a jingling sound of anklets was heard. To the surprise of every lady, there was a pair of gold anklets in each one’s leg. When the second pradakshina was over, each one saw a pair of diamond studded gold bangles in her hands. When the third pradakshina was over, they were pleased to find themselves wearing rich jewellery and silk sarees. All these must have been due to the grace of Goddess Varalakshmi they thought.

A further surprise was awaiting them. At the entrance of Charumathi’s house, there were stationed as many chariots, horses and elephants as the number of ladies gathered there to take them back home. Soon the ladies left for their homes delighted. They showered praises on Charumathi, who was indirectly responsible for the chain of events.

So concluding, Prameswara continued :

“O, Parvati, this Vrata can be observed by women of all castes and whosoever observes this Vrata is sure to attain the grace of Varalakshmi.
