

prapatti to be offered in a prescribed form and on a certain occasion.

Women will offer the Shreemangalchandika prapatti on the day of Sankranti (the 14th or the 15th of January). Why this day? That is because that was the day mata Mahishasurmardini with the purpose of destroying Mahishasur, first set foot on earth, in the Kataraaj ashram of rishi Kardam and Devahuti. Women will offer the 'Shreemangalchandika naimittik prapatti' after sunset on the day of Sankranti. This again because it was after sunset that the mahishasurmardini set foot in the Kataraaj ashram. If She were to come during the day, no man would have been able to bear her radiance and so She came after sunset, when it was dark.

Women will offer the prapatti on the day of the Sankranti, after sunset and outdoors in open space. Offering the prapatti on the day of Sankranti makes out of every woman, the protective soldier of her family on the one hand and the bodyguard of each of her family members on the other. Irrespective of whether she is a mother, a sister or a wife, she definitely becomes the protector of the family. How do we go about the prapatti? You cannot hire a hall as the prapatti has to be offered in open space and not within the four walls of any enclosed space. You can offer the prapatti on the beach, banks of a river, in the verandah, in the balcony of your home, in the open space between two chawls. The more the women doing it together, the better it is. Any woman above the age of sixteen can offer the prapatti. Besides it is not compulsory that the prapatti be done every consecutive year. However, if you wish to ensure the well being and welfare of your family, you ought to offer it every single year. Detailed information with the diagram will be made available to you. As part of the procedure, a representation of the site of the Katraaj ashram,

the site of Her (Mata Chandika) father's ashram will be symbolically recreated.

The detailed procedure is as follows:

Place a large 'Paraat' (a sort of large round metal tray) on a 'Chaurang' (wooden seat/stool) with some wheat grains in it. Then place a 'kalash' (कलश) or a 'kalashi' (कलशी/a vessel usually of copper or brass normally used to store water) with rice grains in it. Place a small platter (ताम्हण) on top of the kalash (or the kalashi) and mark or draw the two feet of the devi in it – Her right foot in vermillion (Kumkum) and the left in turmeric (Haldi). In the large tray that holds the kalash, place the photograph of Trivikram against the kalash. Women can surely offer the prapatti even if they are in their menstrual cycle. All that they have to do is place a little udi on the tongue and on the navel before beginning the prapatti. They need not worry about anything. The prapatti has to be offered only after a bath. The material needed for the prapatti poojan, will be placed in a platter that they will hold in the hand. Apart from the material for the poojan, the platter will also hold the अभिचारनाशक पुरचुंडी (*Abhicharnashak Purchundi*) or the 'abhichaarnashak sachet'. The 'abhichaar' is all wrong or vile deeds like 'Karni' (some refer to it as a sort of black magic) and the पुरचुंडी (*Purchundi*) is a tiny pouch or packet. This tiny sachet will contain salt, poppy seeds and camphor wrapped in the betel leaf to form a small sachet that is held together with a string. This tiny sachet is the abhichaarnashak sachet (अभिचारनाशक पुरचुंडी).

With the small platter (carrying the material for the poojan) the women will sing the aarti and the eldest among the group will actually do the aarti. We all are familiar with the aarti – 'Maatey Gayatri sinhaarudha bhagavati.... Ude, ude....'

Holding the small platter in the hand, go round the symbolic representation of the Chandika, i.e. around the site of the Katraaj ashram nine times reciting in a loud voice all along, the Gurukshetram mantra. Then to perform 'drushta' (नजर उतारना) with the abhichaarnashak pouch and pray to the Trivikram saying, 'My dear paramatma, With the help of Your Mother, please avert and destroy evil thought, intention or any evil power that may come my family's way and please bless.' Now offer this pouch in the sacred fire that will be created by lighting camphor and little twigs in a large tray or even in a pit. The fire created in this way is the Mahishasurmardini's aura of radiant energy. By way of this gesture what you are accomplishing is, you hand over all responsibility to the Trivikram; It is in fact a prayer that says, "Please rid us of all that stands in the way of well being, welfare and all that is appropriate." The Gurukshetram mantra will have already transformed the sacred fire into the aura of radiant energy. All that is evil, all ill will having gone into this aura, your household will have welfare and well being.

After completion of the poojan procedure, recite the mantra "Om Aeem Hreem Kleem Chamundayaee Vichche" 9 times and offer the akshataa (whole rice grains coated with kumkum) at the Feet of the Chandika, offer fragrant flowers to the Trivikram and put out (quench) the fire with Neem leaves. Apply the kumkum of the Chandika's Feet to the forehead and if not, to the throat. Do it there and then. The kumkum cannot be carried home for family members. Only those present can apply it.

Now for the material required for the poojan. Drumsticks, bananas, cucumber or sweet gourd, coconut, carrots, radish or tondlee (tendli/तोंडली/the Indian ivy gourd), udid daal,

sesame oil, curds, turmeric, ginger, Jaggery, tamarind, sugarcane and fragrant flowers. Out of these, the fragrant flowers will be offered to the Trivikram, the banana is to be offered to the Chandika mata. All the bananas may be put together to make a common Prasad but must be eaten there and then. Please do not get a dozen bananas each. If ten women come together to offer the prapatti, these will add up to ten dozen bananas and so much Prasad eaten there will make it impossible to walk home, leave alone doing the nine pradakshina. The curds however, may be taken home and given to the men of the family. The women are not supposed to eat the curds. If the men at home are away or for some reason not available, offer it at the root of any tree. The sugarcane is to be carried home and eaten by all the women at home. The sugarcane does not mandatorily have to be eaten on the same day, it may be eaten later but do eat at least a little bit on the day of the prapatti. The rest of the prapatti poojan material (all except bananas, curds, sugarcane and fragrant flowers) may be used to make sambar and eaten with chapattis or rice by men and women alike. You may add the masala of your choice but do make it a point to add curry leaves for the sake of health and taste of course. But mind you no other vegetable (bhaji) will be prepared on that day. Chapatis and rice will both be eaten with this sambar. Is that clear?

All of this was the 'Mangalchandika prapatti' for women. Women who offer this prapatti become the soldiers of the Chandika and become able to protect their family and household and all their dear ones. Her son comes back late from school and the woman is worried, Her son falls in love with a worthless girl, she is worried, her daughter elopes with the wrong person, she is worried. The woman will be able to

protect her family and home in such conditions. She will do it, she will no more be helpless, she will not be vulnerable. She will be strong and capable of protecting her household. She will accomplish all of this provided however, that she recites the Gurukshetram mantra regularly and she offers this prapatti on the day of the Sankranti.

Now for the 'Shreerannachandika naimittik prapatti' for men.

This may be offered on any Monday of the month of Shravan. Just the one day (sankranti) for women and a choice of four or even five Mondays for the men! Why is that? That is because not only the energy centres of women but also their capacity to receive and absorb differ considerably from those of men. Besides, this is how Nature has made them both. The difference moreover, is to be traced to the hormones that are specific to the gender. The day of the Sankranti for the women and any Monday of the month of Shravan for the men, is an arrangement made in consideration of this difference and not meant to give any special facility to the men.

Do you know who is worshipped on the Monday of the month of Shravan? The Shivashankar for one, yes sure. Who else? Do you remember the other pictures that we include in the poojan. How many of you do all this in the first place? Whose pictures are these? Jeevatyaa and Narsimha. The poojan on the Monday of the Shravan is addressed to Nrisimha. The Nrisimha form is half lion and half man. Every man must have the firm belief that the Nrisimha is indeed the Trivikram and the Trivikram is the Nrisimha, they are one and the same. The men offer their prapatti after sunset but individually and separately whereas the women do it after sunset of course but as a group, collectively. The open space enhances the capacity of the women to receive and absorb