

The Almighty Mother

नवदुर्गास्तोत्रम्
प्रथमं शैलपुत्री च
द्वितीयं ब्रह्मचारिणी ।
तृतीयं चन्द्रघण्टेति
कूष्माण्डेति चतुर्थकम् ॥



Prayer to recite:

Solitary hymns

What to offer:

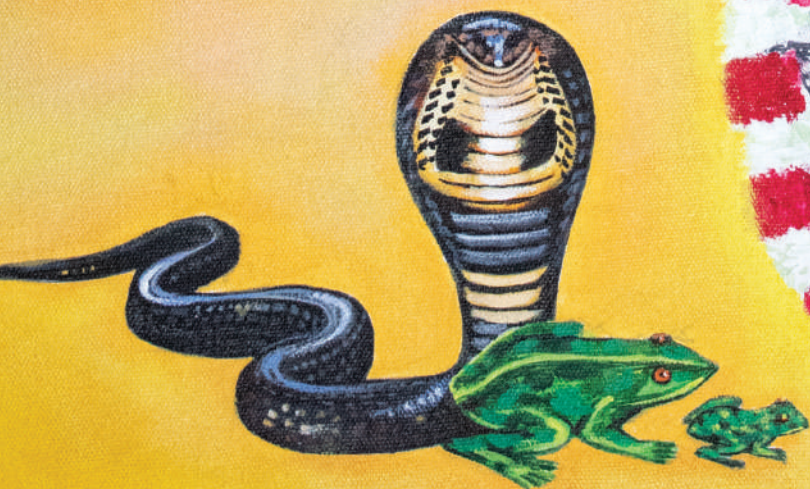
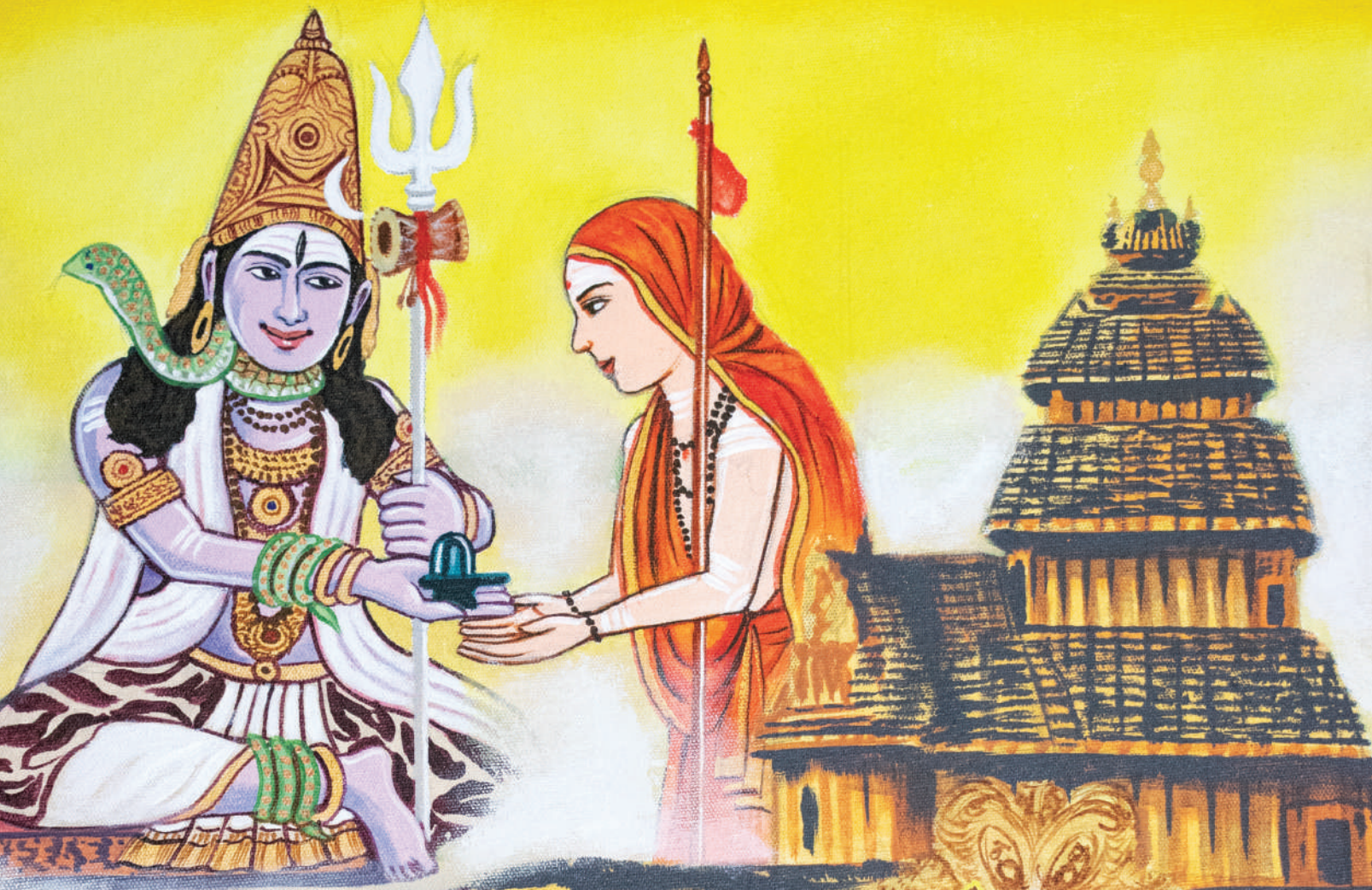
Rose, lotus, haldi and kumkum

Prime festivals:

Navratri and Dussehra,

At Kamakhya temple: Ambuvachi festival, At Annapurna temple: Akshay Tritiya,

At Mahalakshmi temple: Kiranotsav



■ Dakshinamnaya Sri Sharada Peetham, Sringeri

The First Glimpses of Maa Saraswati

Mythologically, Maa Saraswati, daughter of Brahma, the god of creation, is the mother of lore, light and creativity.

On the bank of the Tunga in Karnataka's Chikmagalur, is a beautiful pilgrimage centre known as Sringeri Sharadamba Temple, founded by Jagat Guru Shri Adi Shankaracharya, the 8th century high pontiff of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy. Shri Shankaracharya chose the serene hilly terrain for his ashram (matha) because he was touched by an enchanting moment that he experienced there. When he was passing by this place, he saw a hooded cobra standing tall. It was not in a charging pose; it stood still and waited peacefully. As Shri Shankara leaned forward to observe the cobra more meticulously, he saw that it had spread its hood to protect a spawning frog from the scorching heat of the sun. When Shri Shankara was still processing this unusual sighting, a young girl named Bharathi (believed to be the incarnation of Goddess Saraswati) expressed her wish to stay there. So, Shri Shankara was inspired to set up the first of his four centres (mathas) at this spot because he could feel the sanctity of the place that eliminated natural adversity between the predator and its prey.

To commemorate 'the-snake-guarding-the-frog sight', a shrine (stone sculpture) named Shri Kappe Shankara has been installed near the Tunga riverbed. The Kappe Shankara moment is believed to be the one when Shri Shankara received the first glimpses of Maa Sharada. It is also believed that Lord Shiva gave a sphaatik shivlingam to Shri Shankara at the spot where the matha is built.

Inside his first matha, the Sringeri Sharadamba Temple, there was an idol (in sandalwood) of Maa Sharada in perpendicular posture. The monumental temple is a fusion of the Dravidian and Chalukya styles of architecture. He is also believed to have built four other temples nearby — Kalbhairava temple, Durga temple, Anjaneya temple and Kali temple.

Later, when the temple was reassembled during the Vijayanagara Empire (14th to 16th centuries), a golden idol of Maa Saraswati in her lotus pose was installed inside the sanctorum.





■ The Tale of Lord Shiva's Sati Devi

Srimad Bhagavatam (Bhagavata Puran), Shiva Puran and Devi Puran say, Daksha Prajapati looked around the universe for suitable grooms for his beautiful daughters. He was unable to find a match for his youngest and the most beautiful daughter, Sati, who was free-willed and fiery. She herself chose an ash-smeared hermit, Lord Shiva, who resided on the snow-clad Kailash, as her husband. Daksha did not approve of her choice, but she was determined and got married to Shiva.

A few years later, Daksha hosted a grand yagna ceremony and invited his entire family except Lord Shiva and his daughter Sati. When Sati came to know of it, she went to the grand ceremony to verify the fact. On learning that Daksha had indeed ignored Lord Shiva, she was enraged and eliminated her outer shell (the body which associated her with Daksh, her father) by offering herself to the sacrificial fire.

Then, a great confrontation followed, and Lord Shiva's wrath engulfed the entire universe. He began his raudra tandav (the dance of destruction) with Sati's mortal remains in his hands. Daksha begged for forgiveness, and other deities urged Lord Vishnu to intervene. To cease the raudra tandav, Lord Vishnu used his Sudarshan chakra. The chakra pierced through the mortal remains of Sati Devi and broke her outer shell (body) into 52 pieces, which fell across the earth at different spots. It is believed that the 52 Shakti Peethas are the spots where these pieces fell. Of these 52, 18 are considered highly auspicious as these are the spots where the vital parts of Maa Sati's body are believed to have fallen.

