Female Deities in the Mahābhārata

Ancient people worshipped God and continued through the ages, believing that God is above all other things. God is not a private idea of man that exists only in his notion, but is objectively real. In ancient India, it was believed that the favour of Gods can be brought by gifts. They believed that the one that is offered to God is sacred and that which is sacred is divine. It was stated that the God is himself the offering which was made to him. The worshippers' idea of God necessarily determines the spirit in which he worships. People worshipped God with adoration, thinking that worship without adoration is a worship only in name, or rather it is no worship at all. People prayed God in difficulties. Prayers offered at the time of trouble, were not the only prayers offered by the early man. Man's wishes are not limited since ancient times. So, to escape from calamity is not the only thing for which man is capable of wishing and praying. Prayers are offered to him thinking that man's cry reaches him. It is believed that God will listen to the prayers offered in the right spirit and bless the man to fulfill his desires or demands.

In the Mahābhārata, Gods are mentioned and their icons were worshipped at home and in temples. But names or descriptions of those Gods and Goddesses are not available,
but their information can be collected from the prayers offered to them. Some deities are explained below.

**Durgā:**

The Goddess Durgā is described as the Goddess of universe. According to the prayer of devotees, this Devi is worshipped in 64 forms as Āryadurgā, Vedagarbhā, Ambikā, Bhadrakāli, Bhadrā, Kṣemākṣemakari, Naikabāhu, Devi etc. Worshipping Devi is supposed to be more than 4000 years old in India. Since primitive times, Goddess Devi occupies an important place in religious literature.¹ Goddess Durgā is prayed by Yudhiṣṭhira while going to the beautiful city Virāta. She is born as the daughter of Nanda, sister of Kṛṣṇa. She does good to all and kills the asurās.² She is called "Kṛishṇā" as

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2. ययशोदगर्भसम्पूर्तां नारायणवास्तियांसे |
   नन्दपीयुपस्त जातां महायां कुलयिनीम् ||
   कंसनिर्माणकरीस्तुनां क्षयकरीम् ||
   शिङ्गत्रिविनिहिताश्चालकं प्रति गणिनीम् ||
   बासुदेवस्य भक्ती दिव्यमालयभूपिताम् |
   दिव्यम्यर्थते सदी सहस्रस्याचारिणीम् || - Mbh.विराट.6.2-4
   नमोर्तु वरदे कृष्णे कुमारि ब्रह्मचारिणी |
   बालकर्नसंदेशाकारे पूर्णचन्द्रिणिमाने || - Mbh.विराट.6.7
she appears lustrous in her black complexion. By the power of her Brahmacharya, she purified all the three lokas. So all Gods pray and worship her. To protect all the three lokas, she killed Mahishāsura. She is described as the Goddess of victory in wars. She blesses the man with son or wealth who prays her. For that man nothing is impossible in this world.

She is called by name Durgā, as she destroys sorrow when Yudhiṣṭhira prayed her in many ways, she appeared before him and gave him the boon for victory and acquisition of kingdom.

3. कृष्णच्छविसमां कृष्णां संकर्षणासमानाः। - Mbh.विराट.6.9
4. कौमारं प्रतास्थय बिनिमय पावित्रं लघुः॥ - Mbh.विराट.6.14
5. यौगि:क्यक्षणार्ष्य महिषासुराशिनि। - Mbh.विराट.6.15
6. जयं च बिजया चैव संग्रामेऽ च जयवधा॥ - Mbh.विराट.6.16
7. दुर्गा: तारायसे दुर्गी ततः चं दुर्गा स्मृता जनी:॥ - Mbh.विराट.6.20
8. उपमम्य्यु राजनामिन्द्र वचनमप्रभीत॥
   भूणु राजन महावाहो मदीयं वचनं प्रभो॥ ⊕
It seems that Goddess Durga might have given boon for victory in war to Yudhiṣṭhira because he was the follower of Dharma. If Duryodhana would have prayed the same Goddess for victory, he would not have been able to acquire the boon for victory, as Goddess Durgā was the destroyer of Rakshasas. In the Mahābhārata, Sri Kṛṣṇa insisted Arjuna to pray Durgā for victory in war. He prayed Durgā as Kumāri, Kāli, Kāpāli, Kapilā, Kṛṣṇapīngalā, Bhadrakāli and Mahākāli. She shows anger on her enemies, because of which she is called by name Chaṇḍi. She is called by name Tārini as she destroys the sorrows of her worshippers. She is famous by name Vijayā

9. शुचिर्मूर्त्वा महावाहो संग्रामाभिमुखेय स्थितः ।
पराजयाय शारुणा दुर्गस्तलोत्सवीरयो ॥ - Mbh.भीम्भ.23.2

10. नमस्ते सिद्धलोकोऽवद्य भद्रवासिनि ।
कुमारी काणि कापालि कपिले कृष्णपिघले ॥
भद्रकालि नमस्तुऽयं महाकालि नमोऽयं ते ।
चण्डक चण्डे नमस्तुऽयं चण्डी वर्षणिनि ॥ - Mbh.भीम्भ.23.4-5
and Jayā. She holds weapons in her hands such as Tṛiūśula and sword etc. As she took birth in the family of Naḍagopa, she is the sister of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. She is described as the killer of Mahiśāsura. She is called Kauśiki as she took birth in Kauṣika gotra. She loves the war, because she is the destroyer of evils. She is called by name Umā, Sākambhari, Sveta, Kṛṣṇa, Kaitabhanāsini, Hiranyākṣi, Virūpākṣi and Sudhumākṣi. She is also called as Sāvitrī, Swāhā, Swadhā, Kalā, Kāśṭhā, Sarasvati, Vedamātā and Vedānta. She resides in forests, in the houses of her worshippers and in pātāla. She always defeats the rāksasas in the war. She enlightens sun and

11. कात्यायनी महाभागे कराठि विजये जये ।
   शिशिरपच्चबजाहे नानाभरणंशिते ॥ - Mbh.भीम्भ.23.6
12. आद्रुप्रगहिणे श्वशुलेटकवरविण ।
   गोपेन्द्रवनुजे ज्ञेषेन नन्दगोपुलोझने ॥ - Mbh.भीम्भ.23.7
13. महिषासूक्तिये निलये कौशिकिक पतिवारिणी ।
   आहसे कोकमुखे नमस्ते सत्तु राग्रिथे ॥ - Mbh.भीम्भ.23.8
14. उमे शाक्मभी झेसेते कुष्णे कैटमनाशिनी ।
   हरिण्याक्षि विन्यासक्षि सुनृद्दशक्षि ननोसत्तुते ॥ - Mbh.भीम्भ.23.9
15. स्वाहाकारः स्वाय चैव का त्यत् सतस्वती ।
   साधिने बेदमाता च तथा बेदान्त दुह्यते ॥ - Mbh.भीम्भ.23.12.
16. कात्यायणदुरंगु महामाना चाल्येधु च ।
   निलये वसिसि पालाले युधः जयिसि दानवान् ॥ - Mbh.भीम्भ.23.14
moon. Like this Arjuna prayed Durga and Goddess Durga appeared before him and granted him boons for victory in war.

**Navarātripuja:**

Navarātripuja (nine nights' worship) is done to Goddess Durgā. Though this is observed all over India, it is more prominent in North India than anywhere else.

As this festival is celebrated for nine nights, it is known as Navarātri and it continues up to Daśāmi, (the tenth night), it is called Dasara. This tenth night or Daśami is called Vijayadaśami, (victorious tenth) which is a festival of Indians. The Hindus believe that the Vijayadaśami (victorious tenth) was the day on which Devi Durgā killed Mahiśāsura and got

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17. तुषि: पुष्पश्वरितीदिसिद्धः चन्द्रातिदिविविविविधिनी।
    भूतिमूलिमतं सद्ये बीक्ष्याते सिद्धायांः।। - Mbh.भीम.23.16

18. ततः पार्श्वाय विशाल भक्तिः मानववत्सलः।
    अन्तरिक्षगतीवच गोविन्दस्यान्तः स्मिता।।
    स्वयंनेत्र तु कालेन श्रृंगोचार्यस्य पाण्डवः।
    नरस्त्वारसि दुर्घर्ष नारायणसहायस्यान्।।
    अजजयतं रंगोड़ीणामिपि व्रजस्थति: स्वयम्।।
    हितेषुमुक्ता वरदा क्षणानालविपीयत्।। - Mbh.भीम.23.17-19

victory. Sarasvati is considered as an transfiguration of Durgā. As people became less superstitious, they began to consider the story of killing Mahiśāsura as a metaphorical saying, to mean the killing of ignorance. So, the day of victory of Devi Durgā (same as Sarasvati) is considered to be the auspicious moment for the beginning of learning. On this day, even today, the warrior places his weapons, the man of literature his books and pen, the musician his musical instruments, at the feet of Devi and with devotion and worship receives them back from Devi on the Vijayadasami day at an auspicious moment. This is a festival celebrated everywhere in India under the sponsorship of the royal family as a state festival. But this festival is celebrated on a grand scale in Mysore as it is believed that Mahiśāsura had lived in Mysore.\(^{20}\)

**Umā and Pārvati**

Shankara's consort was the greatest among Goddesses and the best among devoted wives. When Shankara was not invited to Dakṣa's sacrifice, she wanted to do penance. When Shankara spoke of his greatness, she taunted to exite him saying that ignorant persons boasted like this before women.\(^{21}\) So, to

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20. Ibid. Page No.853

21. सुप्राकृति पुरुषः सर्वः श्रीजनसंसदिः।
स्तैति गर्भायते चापि स्वमात्मानं न संशयः॥ - Mbh.शान्ति.284.27
prove his capacity, Shankara created Virabhadra to destroy Dakśa's sacrifice. Pārvati created a woman Bhadrakāli to destroy Dakśa's sacrifice. Praised and prayed by Daksha, Shankara attended Daksha's sacrifice with Umā and bestowed boons on him.

In the Mahābhārata, Umā is pictured as a jewel amongst women, and the couple (Umā and Sankara) are considered as an ideal couple, from whom the world is created.

When Kṛṣṇa prayed Śiva, Umā appeared before him and told that Śiva had blessed him with a son by name Sāmabha. She too gave him boons that Kṛṣṇa would have 16000 wives.

22. सोः सुज्जु: मन्त्रान् वच्चादृ: सूतं ठोंरं प्रहर्षणम्।
   यमूनां तनुयां व्यासं हि चराचरिंदं जयत।
   - Mbh.अनुशासन.14.23

23. मन्त्रकौलीति विख्याता देव्या: कोपादु विनिः स्मृता।
   - Mbh.शान्ति.284.54

24. तपस्तिच्चत्पाह मन्त्रान् मन्मेत्रैरु हरं।
   धर्मध्यक्षो विपाध्यक्षविशेषे: देव: प्रजायति।
   - Mbh.शान्ति.284.65

25. देव्या: कारणम् भाववजनिता: सर्वं भगवं: खिमो।
   - Mbh.अनुशासन.14.234

26. उपाचीमा नरिहिता सर्वं तत्सां निधि।
   दतो भगवते पुत्रं साम्यो नाम तवानं।
   - Mbh.अनुशासन.15.4
The next was a beautiful form of Kṛṣṇa and then was the love of his relatives. Another boon was that Kṛṣṇa would have the prosperity to be able to give food for seven thousand travellers daily.27

Pārvati shines in the court of Brahmā.28

 пурандрач ч дебендро вршо ёндо ём: ।
 महादेव: सहमोदत्र सदा गच्छति सर्वशः ॥ - Mbh.समा.11.51

Śiva and Pārvati were living in the Himalayas after their marriage. Devas informed Śiva that he should not beget son by the womb of Pārvati as the son born to them would be the most powerful in the whole universe. If Śiva produced son, the world can not bear it, and so they requested Śiva to withdraw

27. भाययमहादानि च भोजस्वः
तत्रु प्रियत्वम् च तथाक्ष्यं च ॥
प्रीति चाल्रां बान्धवानां सकाशाद्
ददामि तेऽहं वुपुष: काम्यतां च ।
भोजस्वति वै सततिं वै शतानि
गुहे तुम्यमलिनिनां च निब्यम् ॥ - Mbh.अनुशासन.15.7-8

28. पुरात्रच च देवेन्द्रो वर्णो घनदो यमः ।
 महादेव: समहोदत्र सदा गच्छति सर्वशः ॥ - Mbh.समा.11.51
from the act of producing a child. 29

Śiva agreed to it. But Pārvati did not like it and she cursed the devas that they would never have sons of their own wives. 30

Pārvati told the names of pativrata women to Śiva. 31
She taught Ganga the duties of women. According to Pārvati, the first and foremost duty of a woman is to treat her husband as God. She should always follow her husband in the path of Dharma. She should be well-versed in maintaining house-hold activities. She should always server her husband, even if her husband is poor or suffering from some diseases. She should always serve not only her husband but her parents-in-law also.³²

32. श्रुत्या दमत्यधर्मम् वै सहधर्मम् कृतं सुभम् ॥
 या भवेदं भर्त्यपर्यम् नारी भृगुसम्रावत: ॥
 देववत् सतं साधी भर्तरमुपस्वति ॥
 दमत्योरेष वै धर्म: सहधर्मकृत: सुभः ॥
 शुष्काय परिचार: च देवतुल्यं प्रकृर्वति ॥
 वद्या भवेन सुमन: मर्य: सा सहधर्मिणी ॥
 पुरुषाणिः चोकता या हि दुष्टेन चक्षुषा ॥
 सुप्रसन्नमुखी मर्य: नारी सा पतिब्रता ॥ - Mbh.अनुसार, 146.39-42
 कुष्ट्योत्सानसत्वितं गृहसुप्रस्वर्गं तत: ॥
 सुरसमुख्यन चैव गोवंकुलकुलेनपन ॥
 अक्षिकार्यपति मत्यं सदा पुष्पस्वरूपः ॥
 देवातिधिस्वरवान् निर्वाप्य पतिना सह ॥
 शापाज्ञासुभुआना यथा न्या यथाविद्धि ॥
 तुष्पुष्पजननं मत्यं नारी धर्मेण युज्यते ॥
 क्षच्छुद्वस्य: पादी जोपयस्ती गुणान्विता ॥
 मातापितृदत्ता मत्यं न नारी सा तपोधना ॥ ॐ
Lakṣmī:

In the Mahābhārata Goddess Lakṣmī is described as the Goddess of prosperity and happiness. She came out of the milky ocean during the churning of the seas. The celestial horse coming out from there after her was called her son. She is called the sister of Dhātā and Vidhātā - the sons of Brahma.

- Mbh.आदि.66.50-51

** Brahmāṇu ुर्वलानाधारों दीनान्धकुपणारस्तथा ||
बिभवर्येन या नारी सा पतित्रतमाणिनी || - Mbh.अनुसारण.146.48-52
पतिर्हि देवो नारीणं पतिबधुः पतिर्गति: ||
पत्या समा गतिनासति दैवतं वा यथा पति: ||
पतिप्रसादः स्वर्गोऽ तुल्यो नाय्यः न वा भवेत् ||
अह स्वर्गः न हिन्दुन्यं त्वत्यप्रीति महेष्वरे ||
बखायमध्यमः वा यदि वा प्राणातानम् ||
पतिप्रूप्याद दैर्घ्यः वा भ्याधिति वा कथित्वम् ||
आपो रितुसंस्थो वा ब्रह्मापादिति:पि वा ||
आपद्वमणुः पृथ्वी तत्कायमविषायः || - Mbh.अनुसारण.146.55-58
She is the daughter of Dakṣaprajāpati and was married to Dharmadeva when Bali, the king of Demons (Daityas) gave up good deeds, Lakṣmī left him and went to Indra. Indra divided her into four parts to reside in earth, flowing waters, fire

महाभारत संस्करण 2.14

33. नामतो धर्मपत्यरता: कीर्त्यमाना निवोध मे ।
   कीर्तिसंभूतिः पुरुषः श्रद्धा क्रिया तथा ॥
   बुद्धिभुजा मतिस्वेत पल्यो धर्मस्य ता दशा ।
   द्वारापेतानि पर्यर्थ विहितानि रथयमुखा ॥ - Mbh.आदि.66.14-15

34. सत्ये स्थितार्थि दाने च ब्रह्म ब्रह्मव चि ।
   पराक्रमे च धर्मेऽ च पराचीमांसतो बलः ॥ - Mbh.शालिनि.225.12

35. स्थायायमि निन्यः देवन्द्र यथा ल्यिः निवोध तत् ।
   विभिन्ना वेदंद्रेण चतुर्थो विभज्जय माम् ॥ - Mbh.शालिनि.225.19

36. भूमिन्येष मनुष्ये भारीरी भूतवाहिनी ।
   सा से पादे तत्तत्त्वेष सम्पर्क हीति मे मितः ॥
   एष मे निहितः पादो योंध्यमृती प्रतिकिर्तितः । - Mbh.शालिनि.225.21-22

37. आप एष मनुष्ये द्रवन्तेऽपि परिचारिणीः ।
   तारसे पादे तत्तत्त्वेष पारस्परितित्तिसमु ॥
   एष मे निहितः पादो योंध्यमल्लु प्रतिकिर्तितः । - Mbh.शालिनि.225.23-24
and righteous persons.38

In the list of ideal devoted wives, she is said to be the wife of Nārāyaṇa or Viśnu. In her talk with Rukmini, she is declared as the wife of the master of the three worlds, seated on the lap of Nārāyaṇa with lustrous eyes and lotus like complexion.39 She told Rukmini that she resides in the wise, truthful and devoted persons.40 She herself declared that she did not live bodily in anybody but only as sentiment or emotion bringing success in the three Puruṣārthas, she resided in all auspicious things, stayed with housewives of good conduct.

नाहं शरीरं वसामि देवि
नैवं मया शाक्यमहाभिभाज्यम्।
भावेन यस्मिन् निवसामि पुंमनि
स वर्धते धर्मयजोत्पर्कमः।

- Mbh.अनुशासन.11.21

38. ये वै सन्तो मनुष्येऽधु ब्रह्मण्यः सामवदिनः।
ते ते पादं तितिश्चन्तामां सनातनिलिङ्कितुम्।
एष मे निहितं पादो यों सत्तु प्रतिष्ठितः। - Mbh.शान्ति.225.27-28

39. नारायणायस्याङ्गां ज्वलन्ती
द्युत्सा शिरं एकसमानवर्णम्। - Mbh.अनुशासन.11.3

40. वसामि निविन्य सुभोमग्न ग्रहयं दशे नरे कर्मिणं वर्तताना
अन्रोधने देवपरं कुत्त्वो हितिन्द्रियं नित्यवृद्धिःकसयं। - Mbh.अनुशासन.11.6
So, a devout wife is called Lakṣmī of the house. She left the wives of bad conduct.¹¹ She took birth as Rukmiṇī to make Kṛṣṇa happy.⁴²

The cows didnot allow her to reside in them due to her fickleness.⁴³ But on her request, allowed her to stay in their

41. प्रकृतियमानवन्देश्य कारिणी
सदा च महं: प्रतिकूलवादिनीम् ॥
परस्य वेदमानविषतमाजामेवविवधां तता परिवर्जियामि ॥
पापमचोक्वशक्लेहिन्नं च व्यपेतैव न कलह्प्रियं च ॥
निद्राभिमूलं सततं शापानगमेति च ततां परिवर्ज्यामि ॥
सत्यसु नित्यं प्रयत्नं गुरुस्यसुसा गुणाशिनिः ॥ - Mbh.अनुशासन.11.11-13

42. भ्रयस्तु भाष: संजोगं रत्नं पुःधीवले ।
भीषमकत्यं कुले साखी समयिणि नाम नामत: ॥ - Mbh.आदि.67.156

43. नाम भवानायं देवि न त्यां परिवर्ज्यामेति ।
आच्छद्या चलिष्ठितसि ततस्तवं कर्ज्यामेति ॥ - Mbh.अनुशासन.82.17
urine and dung. On the whole Laksṇī seems to be an incarnation of various good qualities, and emotions. However, Draupadi was said to be Laksṇī in her previous life and the Pāṇḍavas were Indras.

Aditi:

Aditi is one among 13 daughters of Dakṣa. Devas are sons born to Kaśyapa by Aditi and hence they are known as Āditeyas also. Kaśyapa had 21 wives who were Aditi, Diti,
Danu, Arista, Surasā, Khasā, Surabhi, Vinatā, Tamārā, Krodhavasā, Irā, Kadru, Muni, Pulomā, Kalakā, Natā, Danāyus, Simhikā, Pradhā, Viśvā, and Kapila. Of these the 13 wives Aditi, Diti, Kālakā, Danāyus, Danu, Simhikā, Krodhā, Pradhā, Viśvā, Vinatā, Kapilā, Muni, and Kadrū were the daughters of Dakṣa.47 Kaśyapa married all the 13 daughters of Dakṣa including Aditi and all living beings owe their origin to them. 33 sons were born to Aditi, 12 of them are called Dvādaśādityas, viz. Dhātā, Aryāmā, Mitra, Sakra, Varuṇa, Amśa, Bhaga, Vivasvān, Pūṣā, Savitā, Tvaṣṭā, and Viṣṇu.48

The Mahābhārata refers to Mahāviṣṇu as the son of Aditi, the wife of Kaśyapa. Viṣṇu entered the womb of Aditi as Vāmana (Dwarf). Aditi kept Mahāviṣṇu in her womb for 1000 years.49

48. भतां विश्वस्त्रेण शत्रोः: बर्णस्तेष्य एव च।
भणो विषयान् पूषा च सविता दशास्त्राः॥
एकादस्त्राः वच्चा ब्राह्मो विषयुर्मये।
जात्यज्जवतु सर्वेभामाविविधानं गुणाधिक॥ - Mbh.आदि.65.15-16

49. कश्यपस्त्रायमन: श्रीमानादिव्र गर्भवारित:।
पूर्णः कर्ष्टतरुं नुमस्तुर गर्भमुत्तमम्॥ - Mbh.वन.272.62
श्रीवामनुशारात्रं विष्णु गर्भवत्वमानवे।
अद्वित्यात्मानायासात्पि धारे सुदुर्म्वचव॥
Narakasura, who turned to be a curse and menace to the three worlds consequent on the boon he got from Vishnu attacked Devaloka, and carried off Indra's royal umbrella and Aditi's ear-rings. Mahaviṣṇu incarnated himself as Śri Kṛṣṇa killed Narakasura in the battle and got back the ear-rings.50

Once, desirous of children, Aditi cooked food sitting herself in the entrails of Mount Myanaka.51 Dharmaputra, in the course of singing the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa after the great war, refers to Viṣṇu having taken birth seven times in the womb of Aditi.52
Swāhā :

According to Devi Bhāgavata, when Brahmā created this world. Gods were in misery as they were not getting sufficient food. With the request of Gods, Brahmā said that the havis offered by Brahmins will be their food. Then Brahmā mediated on the Mūla-Prakṛti. She appeared before him and asked him what boon he required. Then Brahmā said that, the fire is not powerful enough to digest the havis offered by Brahmins in the fire so as to convert them as food for the Gods. He further told that the fire would become powerful to digest the havis only if Goddess Mulapraķṛti's esteemed self would reside in fire as the power of digestion. Only the havis offered, with the mantra (spell) ending with her glorious self, could be digested by fire and taken to the Gods as food. But that Goddess said that her desire was to get Śri Kṛṣṇa as her husband. She did penance to Śri Kṛṣṇa, who appeared and said that she will take birth as the daughter of king Nagnajit in Varāha Kalpa (a world-age) and then she will become his wife. He further told that, at the moment, she would be the wife of Agni under the name Swāhā, and become the power of digestion, and part of the mantra (spell). He also told that she and Agni will be worshipped together by all. From that day onwards, Swāhādevi became the wife of fire.53

In the Mahābhārata, Swāhā is described as the daughter of Prajāpati Dakṣa. She was in love with Agni (fire God).

स्वाहा तं दक्षदुहिता प्रथम कामयते तदा।
सा तत्स्य छछलन्यैवत्तिरात्रमृति भविष्यति॥

- Mbh.वन.224.39

She went to Agni in the form of Angirā wife of Śiva.54 Agni accepted Swāhā in the form of Śiva.55 She became the mother of Skanda, by whose grace she got constant companionship of Agni. In all offerings to Agni, Swāhā's name is uttered.56

**Indrāṇi:**

Indrāṇi descended from Viṣṇu. Pulomā was an asura born to Kaśyapa by his wife Danu. Indra married Śaci, the daughter...
of Pulomā and hence Śaci is called Indrāṇī also. She is called Pulomī also as she was the daughter of Pulomā. In the Mahābhārata, Goddess Indrāṇī is stated to be a devoted wife of Indra. She had to face calamities as human women experienced. Indra left heaven by the fear of Brahmahatya as he killed Vṛtrāsura, and hid himself in the petal of a lotus flower.57 Evil forces began to appear. Indrā, who had hidden in the lotus stalk in the shape of water-snake, was not at all visible as the petals had closed over him. It was at this critical moment, that king Nahuṣa had completed hundred horse-sacrifices and became eligible for the throne of Devendra. The enemies attacked heaven as it had no king.

Then due to the absence of the king of heaven Indra, all Gods became afraid and were searching for a new king to protect themselves.58 They decided that Nahuṣa would be their

57. प्रतिक्रियाशास्त्रमु चेष्टामानं द्वोरणः ।
   तत: प्रणवे देवेन्द्र ब्रह्महर्षयामन्यादिति ॥ - Mbh.उष्ण.10.46

58. अराजकं जगत् सर्वभूतं युक्तं ॥
   ततो भीतामर्गवत् देवा: को नो राजा भवेदिति ॥
   देवि देवर्युक्तमा देवराजविनाकृत: ॥
   न स्म कादनं देवानां राज्ये वै कुले मतिम् ॥ - Mbh.उष्ण.10.49-50
king due to his dharmic inheritance.\textsuperscript{59} He gained mastery over all the things which were mastered by Indra, like Apsaras, Vishwāvasu, Nārada and Gandharva.\textsuperscript{60}

Once, he saw Śachi, wife of Indra, (Indrāṇi) and wanted to gain mastery over her also.\textsuperscript{61} Knowing this, she went to Brahma and asked him to protect her from Nahusha. Gods prayed Nahusha not to force Sachi to become his wife as she was the wife of the other Indra.\textsuperscript{62} But Nahusha did not agree

\textsuperscript{59} nf f¥^RT: I
\textsuperscript{60} wrosw
\textsuperscript{61} rromT ^ft
\textsuperscript{62} to Tcdt m ^ II

\textsuperscript{59} ऋषयोधारवर्न सर्वं देवार्च त्रिभवेश्वरः ।
अं वै नहुः: श्रीमान् देवराज्येश्विनिभिक्षताम् ॥
तेजस्वी च यज्ञक्षेत्र धार्मिकरसैव नित्यदा ।
ते सत्वं त्वदुवर्नं सर्वं राजा नो मह पारिष्व ॥ - Mbh.उपोग.11.1-2

\textsuperscript{60} विश्वासुनारदशन गन्धवाप्सरसां गणना।
शतवं: पदु च देवेन्द्र मूर्तिमन्त्र उपस्थिता।॥
मात्रत: सुरमिर्मित्ति मनोकं: सुखदीतिल।।
एवं च क्रीडलस्तन्य नहुपथयु दुरातमन् ॥ - Mbh.उपोग.11.15-16

\textsuperscript{61} सम्प्रान्त वर्नं देवी श्राकर्मण महिषी प्रिया।
स तां संदर्भ दुहातमा प्राह सर्वत: समास्त:।
इन्द्रश्च महिषी देवी कर्मानं नोपतिश्रीति ।
अहिम्निष्ठसिमि देवानां लोकानां च तथोऽस्तः।॥ - Mbh.उपोग.11.17-18

\textsuperscript{62} चर्चा पत्नी ता देवी प्रसीदय गुरुर्वः॥
निर्वर्ध यन्: प्राणात: परदारम्मिष्टिनात्।
देवराजोपसि भद्रे ते प्रजा चर्म्य हायल्य।॥ - Mbh.उपोग.12.3-4
with this. Then she was forced by the Gods to go to Nahusha and accept him as her husband, as he was the present Indra. She worshipped Nishā and Upashruti, as she was a devoted wife and righteous.

Upashruti appeared before her and with her grace, she found Indra hiding in the lotus stalk. Indrāṇi, (Shachi) was helped by the Goddess Upashruti, as Indrāṇi was a devoted wife following Pativrata Dharma.

63. इन्द्राद्व निशाः अश्रुसा देवीपि महाशुद्धिः।
वृणोविरुम चरोहा भरुत्वे चर्विणनि॥ - Mbh.उषोग.12.13

64. पवस्या मित्रव नालं च विशेष सहिता तथा।
विस्तलन्तुप्रविष्टं च तत्रापसबच्चलनं॥ - Mbh.उषोग.14.11
After consulting Indra, with his advise, she made Nahusha make sages draw Indra's chariot struck by his foot, the enraged sages destroyed Nahusha.

Thus, Indra regained his place again due to Indrāṇi's cleverness and help.

Vinatā and Kadrū:

Kaśyapa, son of Brahmā, married Viantā and Kadrū and being so much pleased by their services he gave them boons. Kadrū got the boon to have 1000 Naga (serpent) sons, and Vinatā to have two sons more powerful and vital then the sons of Kadrū.

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65. र्षियाणेन विण्येन मामृण्मि जगापते ।
एवं तव वशी प्रीता भविष्यामीति तं वद ॥ - मभु.वयोग.15.4

66. वाधाने कृत्वा चाहयो तेन स्वर्गांत्रितमः ।
ध्वेर्त पाप परित्रहः क्रिणणुष्णो महीतले ॥ - मभु.वयोग.17.16
After this, Kaśyapa went into forest again for tapas. After a period Kadrū gave birth to 1000 eggs and Vinatā to two. Both the mothers kept their eggs in pots so that they were in the right temperature. After 500 years the pot broke up and Kadrū had 1000 sons. Vinatā felt pained at this and opened one of her pots. A child only half-developed emerged from the egg and he was Aruṇa.

Aruṇa got angry at the haste of his mother and cursed his mother to live as a slave of Kadrū for 500 years. He also asked her to wait for 500 years so that the birth of another physically deficient son like himself might be avoided.
After pronouncing this curse, Aruṇa rose to the sky, and sat on the chariot of sun. So, Aruṇa first appears in the east every morning.

The sun and the moon betrayed to the Devas Rāhu, who waited at the entrance of Devaloka to snatch off the Nectar (Amṛtam), got at the churning of the sea of milk (kṣīrābdhi). Rāhu often swallows the sun and the moon. That phenomenon is called the eclipse (of the sun or moon, Surya-grahaṇa and Chandra-grahaṇa) -
Emerged by these frequent attacks of Rāhu, the Sun-God began once to burn like anything, as to destroy all living forms. Devas were frightened by this and took refuge in Brahmā. Brahmā called Aruṇa and asked him to stand as charioteer in front of the Sun-God every day so that the Sun's intensity might be reduced. From that day onwards, Aruṇa has been functioning as the charioteer of the Sun.

\[ \text{Mbh.Ādi.24.6-7} \]

Sukanyā:

Sukanyā, was the daughter of Śaryāti. One day, Śaryāti with his wives and children came to the forest for a picnic. Sukanyā, came to the place where Cyavana sat doing penance.
There was an unusual radiance around the heap of earth. Out of curiosity, Sukanyā started striking down the earth. Then from inside, came Cyavana's voice advising her not to crumble down the earth, as she was doing the same. Sukanyā ignored the advice and searched for the source of the voice. She then saw two points of glow and taking a thorn gave two pricks at those points and left the place with her companions.

Those glow-points were the eyes of Cyavana. As a result of this, Cyavana felt insufferable pain when his eyes were thus pierced through. Soon, the country of Saryāti began to experience the bad effects of this evil-deed. People were disabled from passing either urine and faeces.

Sukanyā went to her father and confessed what she had done.
Then Śaryāti apologised to Cyavana and requested him to pardon his daughter. He compelled Śaryāti to give his daughter in marriage to him.\(^70\)

The king Śaryāti was shocked to hear this for Cyavana was not only ugly but blind also. But Sukanyā agreed to be the wife of Cyavana. Sukanyā, after becoming the wife of Cyavana did all that she could make her husband comfortable and happy.\(^71\)

One day, Sukanyā came across the Āśvinidevas. They requested her to select one of them as her husband. They advised her to forsake her old and blind husband. She wisely

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70. अहानाद ताव्या यदि ते कृत्त तत्त शन्तृमहसि।
ततोऽश्वीनमहीपां च्यवनो भार्धवस्वदव।
अपमनादनं ब्रह्मां हानवा दशपुर्णया।
श्वीद्वस्यासममुकं लोभमोहविलक्ताम्।
तां मेव प्रतिबाहां राजनु दुहितं तत।
श्रेष्ठोमीति महीपां सस्यमेतद् व्रीभिमि ते। - *Mbh.* वन.122.23-25

71. प्रतिग्रहा च तां कन्या भगवान् प्रससाद ह।
प्रासप्रसादो रजनै व सतेन्यः पुर्भप्रकल्पन।
सुक्त्वध्वनि पषि लघ्व तपस्विनानन्दिता।
नित्यं पर्यसत्रु प्रीत्या तपसा नियमेन च।
अश्रीनामितिशीतां च शुभंसुकुमितेक।
समारपयति खिण्यं च्यवनः रा शुभानन। - *Mbh.* वन.122.27-29
convinced them the error of their request by logical argument. Aśvinikumaras then told that they were the physicians of the devas. They could give back eye-sight to her husband and made him as beautiful as one of them. By saying so, they appeared before her as three lovely young men identical in appearance, difficult to be distinguished from one another. When Sukanyā stood before the three and selected her real husband.72

**Arundhati:**

Arundhati was the wife of sage Vasiṣṭha. In the Mahābhārata, it is told that her beauty suffered a set-back as she got suspicious about the character of Vasiṣṭha and misunderstood her chaste husband.73

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72. यद्यपयोभिमाणाति स वृणीययुजोभने।
सा समीक्ष्य तु तान्तस्यमुद्धरणं स्त्यितान्॥
निश्चित्य मनसा अवद्ध्या देवी यद्य स्वयं पतिम।
लच्छा तु च्यवनो भायं वयो रूपं च वास्तितम॥ - Mbh.वन.123.20-21

73. वैशास्वीपिनं चैव भृद्धौस्वेगकारिच।
सुब्रतत्व चापि काल्याणं सर्वभूतेनु विभुता॥
अहृतती महात्मानं वसिः पर्यस्तवृत्।
विभुद्भर्ममात्यन्तः सदा प्रयत्तिते रतम॥
सर्विष्यं धीरस्यमेने च तं पुनिम॥
अपस्यायेन सा तेन ध्यामाणयम्भा।
लख्यलक्ष्या नामिन्या निमित्तमिच पर्यति॥ - Mbh.आदि.132.27-29
This incident is justified by the following sloka -

\[ \text{न स्त्रीणा विषये फिनिच्छदमुन्त पुरुषान्तरस्।} \\
\text{सापत्तकमुन्ते लोके नायकर्विनाशान्त॥} \\
\text{- Mbh.आदि.132.26} \]

Arundhati hold a place in Brahmā's assembly with other Devis like Prthvi, Surā and Śaci.\(^74\)

She holds a prominent place among all other chaste women in devotion to her husband. She had spiritual power because of her chastity and service to her husband.\(^75\)

She was offered an honourable seat by the seven great sages. The seven sages left their other six wives.\(^76\)

Arundhati was blessed by Śiva, because of her fidelity to serve the guest. This story is narrated in the Mahābhārata.

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74. \(\text{पुष्पी गां गता देवी ही: स्वाहा कीर्तितं च।} \\
\text{सुरा देवी श्रीच चैत तथा पुश्करस्मयं॥} - \text{Mbh.भाग.11.42} \)

75. \(\text{पत्नीस्तुर्मतं कृत्वा कामयामार्य पालकं।} \\
\text{विद्यर्घरन्त्वतं: कर्तुः न गंगितं तथा॥} \\
\text{तत्त्वात्प्रभावेण महत्स्वपश्चोदनं च।} \\
\text{शर्क्षवसर्वं दुः मिथिकसम्भवे रेतं: कुर्ष्टं॥} - \text{Mbh.वन.225.14-15} \)

76. \(\text{अथ सर्वं: श्रुता जातं धुतं महाज्ञसमं।} \\
\text{तत्त्वं: शर्दु तथा पत्नीर्विना देवीमहर्ष्यस्त॥} - \text{Mbh.वन.226.8} \)
Once, the seven great Rṣis were staying at the Himalayas. Munis suffered much without either roots or fruits to eat as it did not rain consecutively for twelve years. Arundhati started doing penance, and as a result, Siva appeared before her disguised as a brahmin. At that moment, she cooked food with some cheap roots and served the guest with it. As a result, it rained profusely all over the area.77

Then Siva appeared before her in his original form and from that day onwards, it became a sacred spot.

She lived with hunger and thirst for twelve years and cooked food with cheap roots and hence, made severe penance. Siva was pleased with this, and have her the boon that the place where Arundhati did penance came to be known as Badarapachana. The man, who lives there for three nights and makes penance, that man gets the fruit of twelve year's fast.78

77. इन्द्रवन्त भोजयन्ति तानि ब्राह्मणप्रियकाम्यव।
अभिधित्व वा सममेणात्मनं यस्तविनि॥
दिव्यवा सम्मोह: पुण्यः कथा: शुभाय सा तदा॥
अतीतश्रेष्ठवा महायाजीयो वृद्धवशार्चिकी॥
अनन्तन्त्यं पुचमन्त्याय वृद्धवन्त्याय बन्ध: शुभाः॥
दिनोपम: स तस्यद्व तानिसतीति: सुदारणं॥ - Mbh.श्ल.148.41-43

78. भगवान, यदि मे प्रीतस्ताथि स्यादिदमहुतम॥
सिद्धेवार्धितिं नामं वदराचनम्।

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77. In the Indra's forest, they all slept at the place where the Brahmanas like to stay.
78. If I desire, that which is auspicious shall come to me.

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She explained the secret principles of ethics to Devas.\textsuperscript{79} Then all Devas became happy and Brahmā blessed Arundhati that her penance will continue for a long period.\textsuperscript{80}

From Mahābhārata, it is known that Arundhati and Vasiṣṭha did tapas at the sacred Sarasvati tīrtha and entered into Samadhi.\textsuperscript{81}
Sāvítrī:

She was the daughter of Sun-God. She shines in the palace of Brahma. She is the sovereign deity of the mantra Gāyatri. She was worshipped by king Ashwapati for eighteen years. She rose up from the sacrificial fire of king Ashwapati and gave him the boon of a daughter who became famous by the same name, Sāvítrī. This princess was the wife of Satyavan.

Once, Brāhmaṇī Satya rejected Sāvítrī's request to kill a deer in the sacrifice. As a result of this, she entered the sacrificial fire and went away to Rasātala or lower worlds.

82. सावित्री दुर्गंतर्णी वाणी स्पर्शविधा तथा ।
 मेधा भूति: श्रुतिकृतवै प्राप्ता बुद्धिर्यंस: क्रमा ॥ - Mbh.भा.11.34

83. एते निमयभवनार्थं वयं विहर्वेदत्र तु ।
 पूर्वं िन्द्रहस्ते वर्णं सावित्री दुःधिमयम्यात ॥
 रूपिणी तु तदा राजनं दर्श्यामारसं प्रत्युष्ट ॥
 अश्लीलोतमुक्त समुन्धाय हर्षिन महतान्नता ।
 उवाच चैवं वरदा वचनं पारिष्ठं ततदा ॥ - Mbh.वन.10-11

84. प्रसादात्िव तमातु ते स्वयम्भविषितादुभूिव ।
 कन्या तेजतस्विनी सूर्य किष्णवेश भविष्यति ॥ - Mbh.वन.293.17

85. सावित्रया प्रीतया दता सावित्रया हुतया छापि ।
 सावित्रीचाव नामात्यस्तकृतिप्राप्तात्था पिता ॥ - Mbh.वन.293.24

86. ततस्तु यहां सावित्री साक्षातं सन्यासन्यात् ।
 निमन्त्रयन्ती प्रयुक्ता न हन्त्या सहवासिनम् ॥
Sarasvati:

She shines-forth in Indra's court. In the Mahabharata, she is described as the wife of Manu. Sarasvati advised Tārakṣya about offerings to deities, gifts etc. In her talk with Tārakṣya she told him that mental faith was her form. She got nourishment from sacrificial offerings and became endowed with beauty and highest knowledge.

87. संवत्सरं देवस्य विष्णुस्तथैः प्रीतीवन्।

88. यथा भूम्यं भूमिनिवेश्यां च पुरुषः।

89. परं लोकं गोप्रदर्श्यानुषंति

In the Mahābhārata, it is said that during Tripuradahana (burning of the city of the Tripuras) Sarasvati served as a
passage for the chariot of Śiva to advance easily.90

Once, Yājñavalkya worshipped Sun-God and wanted to gain the knowledge of mantras of Yajurveda. Then Sun-God asked him to open his mouth in which Sarasvati along with Vedas entered his mouth.91 Then the auspicious Sarasvati appeared before Yājñavalkya wearing ornaments and consonants who could compose Shatapatha Brahmana.92 She

90. योक्ष्याणि चक्रुःहातां रोहकांस्त्र कण्ठकान्।
धर्मः सत्वं तपोदर्भिः विहितात्तत्र तथमः॥
अधिश्रुता भक्तोऽसीत्, परिस्थ्या सरस्वती।
नामावण्वीशच चित्रबााचा पताका: पवनमेतता:॥ - Mbh.कण.34.33-34

91. तत: प्रणम्य शिरसा मयोक्ष्यस्यपथा वरः।
यजृष्टि नौपुकारानि क्षिप्रमिच्छामिः बेदितुम्॥
ततो मां भगवानाह वितरिपामि ते त्रिद तस्तस्तातह वामूता शरीरेऽ ते प्रवेष्यति॥
ततो ममाह भगवानायं रः विवृतं कुरं।
विवृतं च ततो मेसत्वं प्रविष्टं च सरस्वती॥ - Mbh.शान्ति.318.5-7

92. कृतस्य शतपथं चैव प्रणोथ्यसि ब्रजस्वरः।
तस्यान्ति चापुरावम् बुखिस्तव भविष्यति॥ - Mbh.शान्ति.318.11
appeared before him sounding the word "Om".93

Thus, Sarasvati was an important Goddess of learning according to the Mahābhārata. She was considered as the mother of Vedas. Even today also, people worship the Goddess Sarasvati with the same belief. In the Mahābhārata, she is not referred to as the goddess of fine arts carrying Veena and seated on a swan. But this is seen in the idol of Sarasvati now a days and is described in later literature also.

93. ततः प्रवृत्तातिपुष्मा स्वर्य्या अनभृष्टिः।
    ओऽझारामादिः कुल्ला मम देवी सतस्वतः॥ - Mbh.राज्य.318.14