

The significance of the three main food offerings prepared for Amma in Aadi Madham



“Om Am Sham Shakambhari Devi Sakala Sthaavara
Jangama Rakshaki Dhana Dhaanya Vrithi Kaarini Namah!”

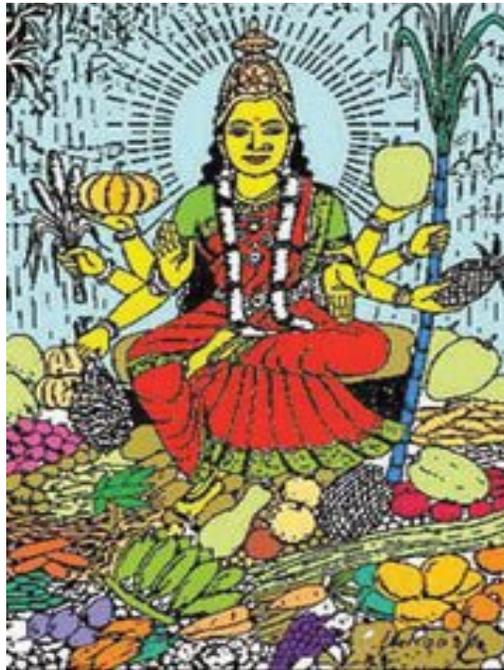
KINDLY NOTE:- This article pertains to a topic from another article released on www.dipika.org.za called “Shakambhari Devi (the Mother of Nourishments)”. This particular article is linked here, for your convenience <http://dipika.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Shakambhari-Devi.pdf>

The month of Aadi Madham is widely known as the Tamil month of Aadi (17th July – 16th August 2015). In this month, many Hindus of South Indian descent prepare foods with ingredients like pumpkin, herbs (generally drumstick), mixed vegetables, etc., for the Mother (Mata/Ammen). Ammen's devotees know Her just as Ammen/Marieammen, but Her other name is Mother/Ammen Shakambhari Devi. Mother Shakambhari is an incarnation of Devi Durga, the consort of Lord Shiva. In the times of famine, Mother Durga (in Her expansion, Mother Shakambhari) descended on this earth planet and distributed vegan food to the hungry. ("Shaaka" is derived from a Sanskrit word meaning vegetables and vegan food; and "Ambari" is derived from another Sanskrit word meaning "one who wears or bears"). In fact, the name Shakambhari comes from "shakam" joined with the root "bhri" ("shaka" meaning vegetables or food and root "bhri" meaning to nourish). Mother Shakambhari is mentioned in the 11th chapter of the Durga Path verses 46-49, as well as in Chapter 28 of the 7th book of the Devi Bhagavatam Purana, titled, "On the glory of Shakambhari/Shatakshi Devi".

The splendid form of Shakambhari Devi is described in detail in the Durga Path (Saptashati) in the 11th chapter. According to the Durga Path, Mata's appearance is of the colour blue (a picture of the Mother, with this description, is provided at the end of this article). Her eyes are like lotus flowers. Her navel is slightly below the normal

place with three curves. She bears breasts of a virgin. A lotus is carried in her hand, which is swarmed by bees. Another of Her hands carries arrows. Other hands carry flowers, roots and vegetables. The fruit symbolises the goddess of vegetation, who feeds us and aids in the prevention of disease. In another hand, she is carrying a bow - symbolising her fierceness. This is the appearance of Shakambhari Devi, Shatakshi or Durga Devi. This merciful mother removes grief and calamities and terrorizes the demons. The devotee of this Mother, through worshipping Her by hymns, meditation, japa and bhajans, attains the benefits of food, drink and infinite bliss.

This particular question seems to be one that is frequently asked - "why is pumpkin curry, drumstick herbs and mixed vegetable curry always prepared and offered together with sour porridge to Amma in this month?" A good question; and the answer lies in the pictures presented this article. To have a degree of understanding and context, kindly view the picture supplied below.



Notice the pumpkin in Amma's uppermost right hand, a variety of herbs, spanspek in her top left hand, corn, pineapple, bananas, snake gourd (chichinda), grapes, lime, green bananas, carrots, butternut, squash, bindi, mangoes, tomatoes, potatoes, brinjal, roots, etc. .

These three preparations - pumpkin curry, drumstick herbs and mixed vegetable curry - have always prepared since ancient times for Amma, and these are the reasons for this. For the benefit of those who may not know how to prepare these offerings, we are providing the method for doing so.

NB

- In the recipes provided below, garlic and onions are used as ingredients. However, some will not use garlic or onions, as some may argue that it's not

SATTWIC (mode of purity) - which it isn't, this is true. Garlic is a food (in the mode of ignorance) and onion is a food (in the mode of passion) according to Ayurvedic texts. So the onus is wholly upon oneself to use these ingredients or not. If you feel it's not acceptable then by all means omit that in the ingredients. One must remember that one has a choice.

- When preparing any offerings to Amma or to any deity for that matter, I always strongly suggest that: one must (of course) have a bath and wear clean clothes; talking is prohibited (one may cover his/her mouth with a cloth) as the saliva from one's mouth can easily enter into the offerings thus rendering the offerings soiled and unfit for Amma to consume; no shoes should be worn (unless it is only used in the kitchen area); when preparing offerings to Amma one should mentally chant (one should avoid chanting out loud – the only reasoning being that saliva could enter the preparations, and make them unclean to offer to Amma. Her mantras, for example “Om doom durgaayai namah”, etc. should be chanted during preparation, as the vibrations one expends, affects the offerings - which Amma will be accepting.

Kindly note the following recipes are leaning towards a South Indian flavor due to this month being the Tamil month of Aadi.

Do note:- The abbreviations below are as follows... tbsp (Tablespoon), tsp (teaspoon)...

1. PUMPKIN CURRY

The humble pumpkin is a very versatile vegetable. This vegetable gift from Amma, gifted when she descended to this planet should not be underestimated. Every part of this vegetable is used. My favourite being the herbs. The health benefits of the pumpkin are numerous and well-known, thus I won't go into detail.

Spicy Pumpkin Masala Curry



Ingredients:- 1 large piece pumpkin, 1 tbsp ghee, ¼ tsp mustard seeds, ½ tsp jeera seeds, 1 onion, ¼ tsp turmeric powder, ¼ tsp hing powder, ½ tbsp ginger/garlic paste, ½ tsp red chilli powder, ½ tsp dhania powder, ½ tsp sugar, 1 tbsp gram flour, fresh dhania leaves to garnish, salt to taste.

Method:- Firstly, remove the peel of the pumpkin and wash it. Dice pumpkin to small pieces. Add the ghee in a shallow pot and heat it on medium heat. Season with mustard seeds and jeera seeds - sauté for a minute or so. Add chopped onion and fry till translucent. Add turmeric powder, hing powder, ginger/garlic paste and sauté for a further 2 minutes. Add sliced pumpkin pieces and mix well. Add red chilli powder, dhania powder, salt and sugar. Stir well and add a little water. Close the pot with a lid and cook till the pumpkin is tender. In another pan, add a tsp of ghee. Add gram flour and roast till golden color. Add roasted gram flour to pumpkin curry and mix well. Keep stirring and then cover the pot with a lid for 2 minutes or until fragrant. Take the pot off the stove, and add finely chopped fresh dhania leaves. The spicy pumpkin masala curry is now ready for Amma to taste. It makes an awesome combo with roti, chapati, paratha and with rice varieties for Amma. Remember not to taste any of the offerings before they are offered to Amma.

PUMPKIN HERBS

Ingredients:- 1 bunch pumpkin herbs, 3-5 tbsp ghee (or as per one's preferences), ¼ tsp hing powder, 1 medium tomato (grated fine), 1 medium-sized potato, 1 onion, 1 tsp garlic paste, a pinch of sugar, salt to taste.

Method:- Cut and wash the herbs and the soft stems and leave aside. Cut and dice the potatoes, then wash and leave aside. Add the ghee in a pot and heat it over medium heat. Add chopped onion and fry till translucent. Add hing powder, garlic paste and cook for a further 2 or so minutes. Add the diced potato and mix well. After about 5 minutes add the pumpkin leaves. Add salt and sugar and stir well. After about 3 minutes add the tomato and then close the pot with a lid and cook till the pumpkin herbs are tender. Take the pot off the stove. The pumpkin bhajee is now ready for Amma to taste. It makes an awesome combo with roti, chapati, paratha and with rice varieties for Amma. Remember not to taste any of the offerings before they are offered to Amma.

PUMPKIN FLOWER FRITTERS

Wash the flowers of the pumpkin (about 10) well and keep aside.

Ingredients for the paste:- 150g chickpea flour, 15g cake flour, 1 small-sized onion grated, 1 tsp coarsely ground dhania seeds, ½ tsp coarsely ground jeera, 3 green chillies (finely bruised/crushed), a pinch of hing, a tsp kalonji (a.k.a Nigella Sativa) seeds, fine salt, ½ tsp paprika, ½ tsp baking powder, fresh dhania leaves (chopped), 25g diced spring onions, oil for frying and water.

Method:- Sift all the dry ingredients into a large mixing bowl. Add the remaining ingredients to the above. Mix in enough water to make a batter similar to the consistency of thick flapjack batter. Heat some oil in a large frying pan. Dip a pumpkin flower in the batter and place in the hot oil. Turn over when the fritters are golden brown. Once the other side is golden brown, remove and drain on absorbent paper. Remember not to taste any of the offerings before they are offered to Amma.

OTHER WAYS TO USE PUMPKIN:-

- One can bake the seeds and add spices.
- Slice the pumpkin into half moon shapes and add spices and bake.
- Pumpkin soup.
- Pumpkin bread, muffins, pies...
- Pumpkin ravioli – Do note instead of an egg use yoghurt. ¼ cup yoghurt = 1 egg.
- Pumpkin risotto.
- Pumpkin pudding (halwa).
- Kaddu ke Pakode - grated pumpkin and potatoes mixed with singhara flour and spices and fried golden. (The possibilities are endless, and all equally interesting.)

2. DRUMSTICK HERBS

Binomial name (a.k.a.) - Moringa oleifera, Sanskrit - Muragee, Hindi - Sehjan ki phali, Tamil – Murungakkai.

Many parts of the moringa tree are edible. Traditional uses of the moringa as food vary widely, for example: the immature seed pods, called "drumsticks", are popular in Asia and Africa; the leaves are eaten, mature seeds (oil pressed from the mature seeds), roots and the flowers. Many experts have advocated moringa as "natural nutrition for the tropics."; "the nutritional properties of moringa are now so well known that there seems to be little doubt of the substantial health benefit to be realised by consumption of moringa leaf powder in situations where starvation is imminent". Comments like this have made moringa much more popular. Always choose fresh leaves – that do not look wilted or old. Check if there is sign of discolouration or yellowing. Ensure there are no black spots on the leaves.

Simple drumstick herbs curry

Ingredients:- Drumstick leaves - 2 cups tightly packed, 3-4 tbsps ghee, ½ onion sliced, 3-4 cloves garlic, a pinch or two of hing powder, ¼ tsp turmeric powder, 2-3 red chilli (dry), ¼ tsp sugar, salt to taste.

Method:- Carefully separate the leaves from stalks. It's always advisable to leave a tiny bit of stalk in the leaves, but be cautious to not include the long sticks as well. Wash, drain and keep aside. Heat the ghee in a kadai (deep cooking-pot). Add finely chopped garlic, onion, hing, chillies and let it braise for a little while. Add the drained leaves, then after 30 seconds add turmeric powder, salt and sugar. Keep stirring to mix the salt

for a minute, it will retain water, which helps in the cooking of the leaves. Cook on low heat for around 5 minutes. The volume will reduce as it is cooking. So as it cooks, the water that oozes out from the greens will evaporate, which helps the greens cook. Once the leaves are cooked, turn up to high heat to evaporate the excess water.



*** You may add raw scrambled paneer to the herbs (like the picture above) and this is added at the end. Simply add the scrambled paneer and let it simmer. Remember not to taste any of the offerings before its first offered to Amma.

Notes:- One usually doesn't add curry leaves in a stir fry - or any dish - with greens (eg. spinach, methi, herbs, etc.). Adding sugar helps to retain the green colour. I prefer treacle sugar instead of brown or white sugar. If too much of the stalks are left in the curry, it's not good for your stomach.

OTHER METHODS TO USE DRUMSTICKS

Drumstick (pods) curry; the flowers are boiled in water, thus the water is infused with the healing properties of the flowers to make moringa tea. Even the leaves are boiled in water thus the water is infused with the healing properties of the leaves and is used for health purposes; drumstick leaves are used in dals, kormas (a dish consisting of vegetables braised in a spiced sauce made with yoghurt, cream, or nut/seed paste) and sambhar (a lentil-based vegetable stew consisting of a broth made with tamarind). Drumstick leaves are often fried with paneer. Some are added to various kinds of curry dishes by mixing with coconut, poppy seeds, and mustard seeds. Tender drumstick leaves, finely chopped, make an excellent garnish for any vegetable dishes, dals, sambhar and salads; dry or powdered moringa leaves - if added to one's diet - will improve one's nutrition. Bread, muffins, pastry, rolls and cakes can be prepared with mixing moringa oleifera powder with wheat, maize, and rice flours. The glories and benefits of the Moringa tree are incredibly vast.

3. INDIAN MIXED VEGETABLE CURRY

Ingredients:- 2½ tbsp butter ghee, 1 tsp jeera (cumin) seeds, 1 tsp mustard seeds, ½ medium onion sliced, 1-2 green chillies - sliced in half lengthwise, ½ tsp curry powder, 1/5 tsp hing, ¼ tsp ground turmeric, 1-2 medium tomatoes, ¼ tsp dhania powder, salt - to taste, 2 medium carrots, peeled and chopped, 2 medium potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks, 1 cup julienned cabbage, 100g green beans sliced, half a green/yellow pepper, finely sliced, 10g fresh ginger, peeled and grated, 50g shallots, peeled and halved, 60g desiccated coconut, soaked in water to just cover, 2 small handfuls frozen peas, 12 fresh or dried curry leaves, 5-6 tbsp plain yoghurt, garam masala, dhania leaves.

Preparation method:- Heat the ghee in a large non-stick pan. Add the jeera seeds, mustard seeds, ginger, hing, onion, curry leaves and chillies in the pan and cook until the onions are soft and beginning to turn slightly brown. When the onions are cooked, add the turmeric powder, curry powder and dhania powder. Stir for 30 seconds and then add the carrots and potatoes. Cover the pan and cook over a low heat, stirring often. If necessary, add a little water to prevent the vegetables from burning. After about 15 minutes, add the green beans, peppers and cabbage. Add tomatoes, mix well and then add salt to taste. Cover the pan again and cook for a further 5-10 minutes until all the vegetables are tender. Meanwhile, place the shallots and coconut (complete with its soaking liquid) into a blender. Blend to a fine paste before adding to the pan, along with the peas. Cook for a further five minutes, all the while stirring thoroughly. After this, take the pan off the heat. Allow to cool slightly, then add a little garam masala on top of the curry and then garnish with dhania leaves. Finally, add yoghurt at the end as per one's preferences.

With regard to the above recipe, and by referencing the picture of Amma provided above in this article, we have used the following ingredients - potatoes, carrots, cabbage, green beans, bell-pepper and tomatoes. You can add cauliflower and brinjal to the above recipe. A simplistic recipe is provided in this article for those who may not know how to prepare this offering, or find difficulty in doing so. Remember not to taste any of the offerings before they are offered to Amma.

A few bonus recipes and information on the humble Jack-fruit.

Panasa (Jack-fruit) a.k.a. jack tree, jakfruit. In the Srimad Devi Bhagavatam 8th book chapter 24 "On the worship of the Devi", Lord Narayan explained that Devi loves PANASA (jack-fruit). Keep in mind that this is an optional preparation and does not form part of the three main (compulsory) dishes listed above – however, more preparations for our merciful Mother are always welcome.

Jackfruit Curry:- **Preparation Time:** 25 mins, **Cooking Time:** 10 mins, **Total Time:** 35 mins.

Ingredients:- 400g Jackfruit, 50g (25-30) cashew nuts, 300g (4-5) tomatoes, 2-3 green chillies, 1 inch (2.5 cm) piece ginger, 2-3 tbsp ghee, 1-2 pinches hing, ½ tsp jeera seeds, ¼ tsp turmeric powder, 2 sprigs curry leaves, 1 tsp dhania powder, ½ tsp red chilli powder, salt (as per taste), ¼ tsp garam masala, fresh dhania.

Method:- Rub cooking oil on your hands and on the knife. Cut off the skin of the jackfruit. Wash the jackfruit and cut into 1 or 2 inch (2.5 to 5 cm) pieces (I would advise one to include the seeds as well). Boil the jackfruit in a tall pot adding water, salt and a few drops of cooking oil. Once the jackfruit is soft, empty the ingredients into a large colander and keep aside. Soak the cashew nuts in lukewarm water for ½ hour and then make a fine paste (similar to a 'smooth' peanut butter consistency) – keep aside. In a separate, large flat pan add ghee. Bring the cooking surface to medium heat. Add the ghee, then, add chillies, ginger, curry leaves, hing, jeera seeds, turmeric powder, red chilli powder, dhania powder and cashew nut paste. Sauté for 2-3 minutes or until the ghee starts separating from the masala. Add the boiled jackfruit in pan and sauté for a 2 more minutes. Add water as per one's preferences. Then add salt (to taste) and mix well.



After it boils once, cover the pan and cook for a few more minutes as per your desire on low heat so that all spices get absorbed in the jackfruit. Turn the heat of the cooking surface off and garnish with a little garam masala and dhania to the curry. Empty the curry in a serving bowl and garnish with more dhania leaves. The jackfruit curry is now ready for Amma to partake. (I personally like to add more oil or ghee as Jackfruit curry tastes better with excess oil – just for this curry). I don't think Mata is on a diet :) Remember not to taste any of the offerings before they are offered to Amma.

Karkati (cucumber) In the Srimad Devi Bhagavatam 8th book chapter 24 “On the worship of the Devi”, Lord Narayan explains that Devi loves Cucumber and yoghurt. Keep in mind that this is an optional preparation and does not form part of the three main (compulsory) dishes listed above – however, more preparations to the Mother are always welcome.

Cucumber Raita Recipe

Ingredients:- 1 medium cucumber, 1 tsp jeera seeds, 2 cups plain full cream yoghurt, 1 clove garlic, peeled and grated, 2 tsps of fresh dhania or mint leaves, chopped and cayenne or paprika to garnish.



Preparation:- Wash the cucumber and then grate it. Squeeze out the excess cucumber juice. In a flat pan toast jeera seeds for a few seconds over high heat. In a bowl, stir yoghurt until it's smooth. Mix it with the toasted jeera seeds, garlic and dhania or mint leaves. Combine mixture with the grated cucumber, sprinkle with cayenne or paprika, and chill before serving. Remember not to taste any of the offerings before they are offered to Amma.

Koozhu (Fermented Ragi {millet} Porridge)

Koozhu is the Tamil name for porridge prepared from millet. In India, finger millet is locally called by various name including ragi, kezhvaragu, keppai and nachani.

F.Y.I... MILLET AND MAIZE are not the same. Millets have many useful applications in the world of food, especially for gluten-free cooking and beneficial for those who has gluten or wheat intolerances and allergies. Millets are part of the grass family Poaceae, as is maize, but they are all small-seeded cereals. Maize produces its seeds on separate female inflorescences called "ears," while millets produce their seed at the top of the plant, very near the male inflorescence. In Tamil Nadu, parts in India and other places, koozhu is consumed for breakfast or lunch. Koozhu (the drink) has many health benefits. It is made of millet (ragi) which is very healthy. It is fermented and its properties are increased many fold by this process. Also, koozhu has a cooling effect on the body and is thus suitable for consumption during the hot summer period. Consuming a glass of koozhu is known to satisfy hunger for approximately 8 hours. It is filling and very healthy. Koozhu is often consumed at Marieamman temple festivals across Tamil Nadu. Koozhu is a particularly traditional and ancient recipe of South Indians - which is prepared most often during Aadi Madham. This month is considered to be auspicious for the spiritual worship of Amma as she is said to be very powerful during this month. During this month, Koozhu is prepared and offered to Marieamman during pooja in Tamil Nadu by native Tamil people in India. In English, it is known as "porridge of finger millet".

Koozhu is also called the "Poor person's food", since it can be prepared easily as there is no need for many ingredients – it is simply a mixture of three ingredients – curds, cooked millet and an onion to taste, which is generally easily affordable. Generally, people in India prefer Koozhu to soda as it is healthier than soda or any other cooldrink.

Benefits of Koozhu

- It is beneficial to one's health and it is a cooling drink which helps to regulate the body's temperature. As such, it is preferred during summer times.
- It contains significant amounts of iron, vitamin B, proteins, amino acids, phosphorus, magnesium and potassium which are essential to good health.
- It contains calcium which helps in bone strengthening.
- It is easily digestible, and people who have digestion problems can have this drink and overcome that problem with spectacular results. It can be consumed as breakfast.
- It is beneficial in weight loss as koozhu is made out of ragi (millet); it contains an amino acid named tryptophan which helps in reducing weight as well.
- It is beneficial in reducing high blood pressure and asthma.
- It is rich in proteins and helps in muscle growth and repairs skin.

Ingredients:- 500ml of water, ½ tsp salt, 1 small onion finely chopped, one shallot finely chopped, ½ cup maas (sour milk), 1 cup millet flour {ragi flour} (add a ¾ cup water must be of a 'thin' consistency or a 'runny' state).



Method:- Mix ragi flour with enough water (in this recipe, 1 ½ cups of water is suggested) to form a thin mixture. Leave it overnight in an air tight container or for 5-6 hours to ferment. Now, once the water is rapidly boiling, add millet flour, mix with a spoon until mixture starts thickening and bubbling. Then add the salt. Cook for further 15 minutes. If the porridge is too thick, one can add more hot water to make it the consistency of one's choice. Garnish with sour milk, onion and shallot. The more millet flour used, the longer it is required to soak for. The above should make approximately 4 cups.



[Kanaka Durga Temple, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh, INDIA](#)

In the picture provided above Amma is decorated with potatoes, anar (pomegranate seeds), karela, bell peppers, okra (bindi), chichinda (snake gourd), a variety of herbs, cabbage, bananas, plantains, pumpkin, brinjal, limes, papaya, baby tomatoes, etc. .

Question:- Why is a banana leaf used as a base for the foods we offer to Amma?

Answer:- Our awesome ancestors commonly used banana leaves to eat food in place of plates. There are numerous benefits for this. Placing the offerings on the banana leaf, after being heated for consumption, awakens the digestive acids from the banana leaf,

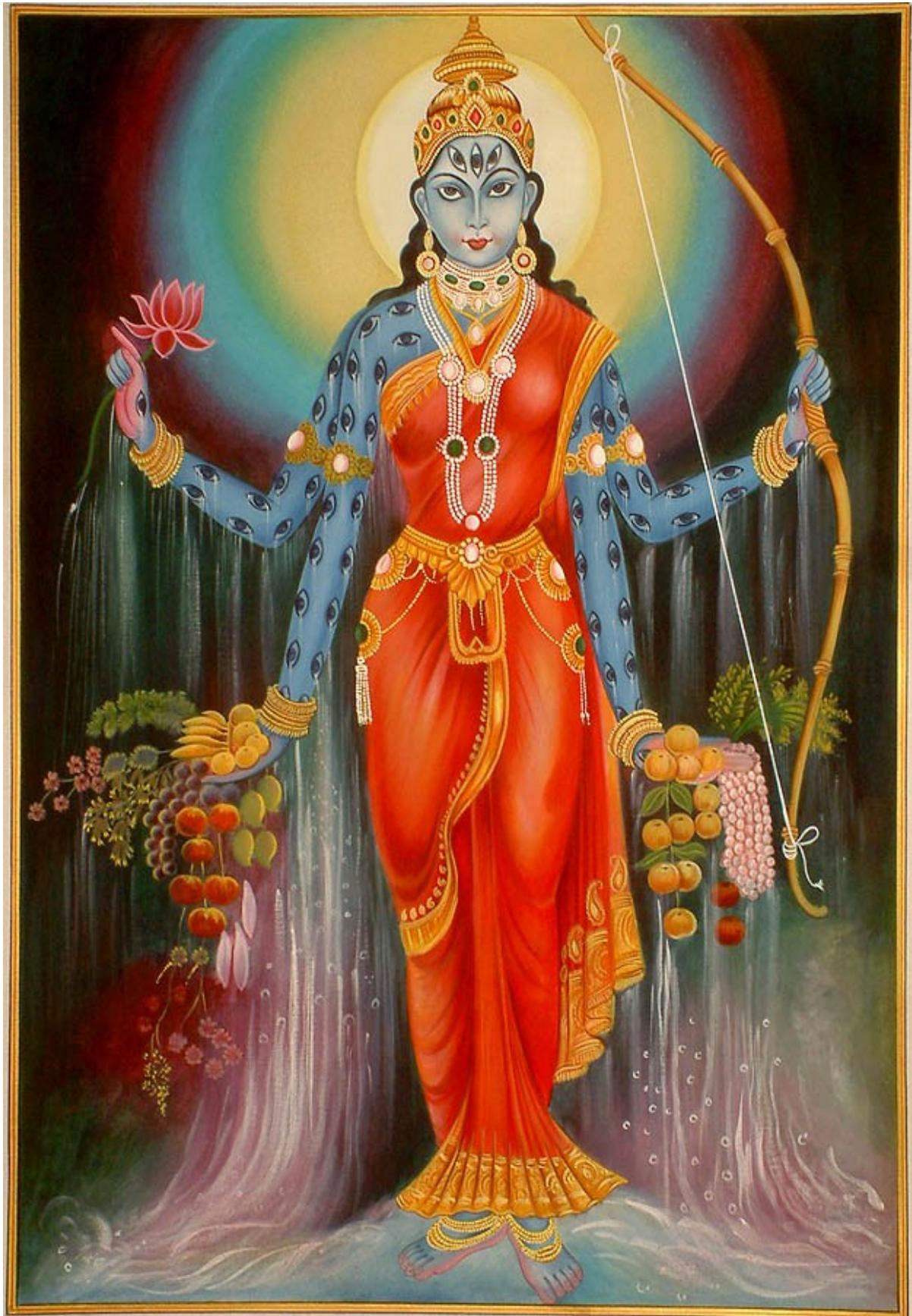
which aid in digesting the offerings that Amma is going to consume. Also, after placing the food heated for consumption on the banana leaf, the leaf swelters, thus releasing the chlorophyll. Not only that, a flavour is produced at that time, that awakens the six tastes in Amma. Amazing, isn't it? :) One should sit thankfully in front of the food. When thanking, one should remember about that plant and how it was cultivated. Secondly, when thanking the chef, the method of preparing the food should come to one's mind. Thirdly, as the food is being dished out, we can see the server doing this, and thus will show them gratitude. Next we thank Amma Shakambhari/Marieamman, and then three aspects - the environment, the condition and the situation comes to mind. Thus, one has now thought about the food four times before eating it. Now our body is completely fit to digest the food that we are going to eat. That is why it is advised to refrain from talking whilst eating. One must try to refrain from eating food while talking or when watching television. The body will react according to the vibrations depicted in the various scenes that are seen. This will negatively affect the body. The two aspects of mind and food, were top priorities for our former generations. However, in this day and age, a new mindset and way of life seems to have been adopted. Some may disagree with these points, however the basis for these points have been proven and make sense, among other things. Eating on a banana leaf helps in the reduction of diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, cholesterol, cancer, ulcer, heart diseases, piles, etc. . If anyone in your family is suffering from any of these diseases mentioned above, please read this and share with others.

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