

Durga Saptashati: The Primordial Source of Origin and Advent of 'Celebrity'

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Abstract

Celebrity has been a ubiquitous term in the disciplines of Advertising and Media. As per the existing relevant literature relating to the chronological corridor, Josiah Wedgwood, a famous potter in 18th Century A.D. only, is regarded to have become the first ever celebrity. However, the present paper, drawn on the advertising hues of a renowned Indian scripture - *Durga Saptashati*, composed thousands of years ago, attempts to bring a breakthrough in the historical archive pertaining to celebrity by declaring Almighty Goddess as the foremost celebrity, and thus establishing Durga Saptashati to be the primordial source of origin and advent of celebrity too.

Keywords: *Celebrity, Durga Saptashati, Primordial Source, Epistemology, Repertoire, Ubiquitous ; Delusion and hypnosis, Pedicel, Propagandistic Model.*

Introduction

Durga Saptashati has been one of the most widely read scriptures and a ceremonial store house of spiritual heritage. It has already attained the status of one of the most enduring religious classics globally. A particular portion of the well-known '*Markandeya Purana*', *Durga Saptashati* with 700 verses has not merely been a hymn with hortatory credentials depicting the heroic & boisterous battle-strategies of Almighty Goddess, being the supreme power and creator of the universe, but equally holds-forth an outstanding academic treasure covering the very etymon of diverse aspects of the contemporary behavioural sciences including the highly acclaimed Need-Hierarchy-Theory by Dr. Abraham Maslow. What goes beyond the repertoire, and remained so far unnoticed by the relevant scholarly radar is certainly some other unbelievable academic contributions made by this mythological text to the disciplines of Advertising and Media in respect to a pervasive hodiernal tenet covering the entire

morphology of a modern day ubiquitous term – 'Celebrity'. The existing literature under the epistemology concerning celebrity points out its history to be not older than the history of advertising itself, and equally concluding that Josiah Wedgwood, a famous potter in 18th Century, understood the value of celebrity endorsements for the first time and became a celebrity ("Potter to Her Majesty") as Queen Charlotte had started using wares made by Josiah Wedgwood. The Paper, however, intends to provide a new lead in the origin and advent of celebrity by bringing in light a highly sensitive episode under the very First Chapter of *Durga Saptashati*, compiled thousands of years ago on Indian soil, with a view to establish the new age of celebrity in operation with Almighty Goddess being the first ever celebrity, and thus declaring the above Indian text to be the primordial source of origin and advent of celebrity also.

A Glance on Pertinent Literature

Durga Saptashati:

It is indeed an unquestionable proposition that *Durga Saptashati* has been one of the most highly acclaimed Hindu Religious Text among the distinguished metaphysical tangibles dedicated to communicate the Glory of the Almighty Goddess. The text is spread in 700 *shlokas* (verses) within Thirteen *Adhyayas* (Chapters) (*Durgasaptashati Bhashateeka*, 1951). It is basically a pronouncement of the holistic personality of the Almighty Goddess, Who has been presented as carrying limitless *Shakti* (energy) and is considered to be the root cause of everything visible or known to us. *Durga Saptashati* relates the story of how the Goddess killed *asuras* like, *Madhu* and *Kaitabha*, *Mahishasura*, *Dhummralochana*, *Chand* and *Mund*, *Raktabeeja*, *Shumbha* and *Nishumbha*. However, the relevant episode describing the performance of the Goddess as a 'Celebrity' in actualizing the respective desires of both *Lord Brahma* as well as *Lord Vishnu* to kill the otherwise invincible *asuras* - *Madhu* and *Kaitabha*, by overpowering them through emitting waves of delusion and hypnosis makes a portion of the First Chapter itself (Verses 94-95).

Celebrity:

The dictionary meaning of celebrity is a 'very famous person'. Friedman, Termini, and Washington (1977) opine, "A celebrity is a person widely known to the public for accomplishments in domains unrelated to the product class". Rein, Kotler, and Stoller (1997) say, "A celebrity is a person whose name has attention-getting, interest-riveting, and profit-generating value". Rojek (2001) opines that 'celebrem' makes the Latin root for the term – Celebrity, which equally indicates both 'fame' and 'being thronged'. Celebrem considers a celebrity to carry 'singularity'. The French word *celebre* also ratifies the above explanation. Endorsing the commercial potency of the celebrities (in advertisements), Munshi Premchand (2008), quoting a newspaper editor –

Onkarnath (a character in his novel, 'Godan'), adds, "Agar main aaj cinema-staron ke chitra aur charitra chapne lagun to mere grahak badh sakte hain". Gitlin (2001) writes, "The familiar stranger is by no means unprecedented in history. People have long imagined a world populated by figures who were not physically at hand and yet seemed somehow present." Turner (2004) adds, "The celebrity's fame does not necessarily depend on the position or achievements that gave them their prominence in the first instance. Rather, once they are established, their fame is likely to have outstripped the claims to prominence developed within that initial location". Mead (1934) feels that some personalities within any society happen to be novel by dint of their unique qualities on the counts of beauty, achievements, courage, look, wisdom, etc.

Relevant mainstream literature talks about three major approaches - Subjectivism, Structuralism, and Post-Structuralism, in order to throw light on the exact nature of a celebrity. Subjectivism emphasizes the putative singularity of the individual characteristics of a celebrity. Rojek (2001) writes, "In these accounts, celebrity is explained as the reflection of innate talent. Talent is understood to be a unique, ultimately inexplicable phenomenon. While it may be refined and polished through discipline and practice, its singularity is presented as a wonderful gift of nature". Weber (1947) suggests the concepts of 'charisma and charismatic authority' giving rise to extraordinary personal qualities are believed to be endowed in a celebrity. In context to Structuralism approach, Morin (1960) carries the view that celebrity-power is nothing but the manifestation of the buried desires of the people. However, on Post-structuralism approach, Dyer (1986), thinks that a celebrity is just like a star who follows extraordinary ways of thinking and behaving in our social system.

Taxonomy of Celebrity:

Rojek (2001) proposes, “Celebrity status comes in three forms: ascribed, achieved and attributed. Ascribed celebrity concerns lineage: status typically follows from blood-line. In contrast, achieved celebrity derives from the perceived accomplishments of the individual in open competition. They are celebrities by reason of their artistic or sporting achievements. In the public realm they are recognized as individuals who possess rare talents or skills. However, in some cases achieved celebrity is largely the result of the concentrated representation of an individual as noteworthy or exceptional by cultural intermediaries. When this is so, it is attributed celebrity”. In regard to the various categories of celebrities, Monaco (1978) recognizes three categories - “The 'hero' is someone who has actually done something spectacular to attract attention in the first place (e.g., astronauts). The 'star' is the second category and they achieve prominence through the development of a public persona that is more important than their professional profile. The third category is the 'quasar' – the person who has become the focus of attention initially through no fault of their own, and through a process over which they can have very little control”.

Influence of Celebrity:

Several research findings have come forward with reasons for an extensive employment of the celebrities. Quoting Atkin and Block (1983), and Sherman (1985), Erdogan et al. (2001) mention, “Because of their high profile, celebrities may help advertisements stand out from surrounding clutter, thus improving their communicative ability”. Kamins et al. (1989) submit, “there are several reasons why a well-known endorser may be

influential. First, such a spokesperson attracts attention to the advertisement in the cluttered stream of messages. In addition, celebrities are traditionally viewed as being highly dynamic individuals with attractive and likeable qualities”. One of the more acclaimed Source Credibility Model contends that the perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness of an endorser by the audience determines the effectiveness of a message, Hovland et al. (1951) and Ohanian (1991). The another highly referred Source Attractiveness Model suggests that an endorser's familiarity, similarity plus liking by the audience decides the degree of effectiveness of the message, where liking is nothing but a reflection of the attraction and affection for the source on account of his / her personality and look (McGuire, 1968). According to the works carried out by Baker et al. (1977) and Chaiken (1979) it has become evident that a physically attractive communicator happens to be better forceful towards changing the beliefs. Rojek (2001) adds that any person could be made a celebrity, and any event could be turned to a celebrity event. As per the views expressed by Gill (1954) novelty has got a high place in the technique of attention, and that our minds are always fascinated by things that are novel and unfamiliar.

Historical Account of Celebrity:

Gills (2005) comments, “The use of celebrities in advertising has a history as long as that of the industry itself”. Erdogan (1999) opines, “Celebrities are involved in endorsing activities since late nineteenth century”. Erdogan et al. (2001) write, “Although celebrity endorsement has a historic presence in Great Britain, the number of celebrity campaigns has increased markedly in recent years”. According to Dukcevich, Josiah Wedgwood, a famous potter in 18th Century, understood the value of celebrity endorsements for the first time and became a celebrity (“Potter to Her Majesty”) as Queen Charlotte had started using

wares made by Josiah.

In the Indian context, however, India Today (1985) mentions that the advent of celebrity endorsements came-up with the sports persons and stars of Hindi cinema jumping into this territory, and Farokh Engineer (Indian cricketer) started endorsing for Bryl cream. Russi Karanjia modeled for Vimal because Dhirubhai Ambani asked him to do so and he didn't get a penny. India Today further adds that the product (Lux) is in tune with the people who endorse it. It's a perfect example of synchronization. Subsequently, a number of other film and sportspersons including, Jalal Agha for 'Pan Parag', Kapil Dev for 'Palmolive Shaving Cream', Tabassum for 'Prestige Pressure Cookers', and Sunil Gavaskar endorsing 'Dinesh Suitings' could be visible on the media. On not-so-commercial front, character actor Iftekhar and aging tragedian Dilip Kumar were used in commercials made for the railways. Evergreen tycoon J.R.D. Tata had also agreed to appear and appeal. Brand Equity (1998) writes, "From 1942 to 1990, HLL (now, HUL) never paid any of the leading ladies in Indian cinema to endorse Lux. Only flowers on their birthdays and HLL product gift hamper four times a year". Mishra (1987) writes that during the early 20th Century, a majority of the advertising text carried a patriotic orientation, yet a good number of them were seen to have the testimonial / endorsement by the famous personalities of the period like, Annie Besant, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, etc. During the aforesaid period, several of the prominent personalities from important walks of life such as spirituality, social issues, nation building, etc., and including Sri Ramakrishna Paramhans, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Munshi Premchand and Indira Gandhi (Jha, 2001, 2009).

Goddess as per criteria for a Celebrity-An Academic Analysis

A meticulous appraisal of the contents of the classical epic - *Durga saptashati Bhashateeka*, 1951, in its First, Second, Fifth and Eleventh Chapters brings forward all those traits, of course in their superlatives, possessed by the Goddess that as per the existing literature decide the qualifying criteria for a person to be called as a celebrity. According to the contents provided in above narrated literature, such traits and qualities basically include High Profile, Highly Dynamic, Talent, Charismatic, Novel & Unfamiliar, and Physical Appearance & Attractiveness.

The following verses from the aforesaid chapters provide for a rock solid support to the claims made above in respect to Goddess, already carrying and endowed with various traits of the highest possible order, making a person a celebrity.

अतुलं तत्र तत्तेजः सर्वदेवशरीरजम् ।
एकस्थं तदभूनारी व्याप्तलोकत्रयं त्विषा ॥ १३ ॥

(You are that outcome of the unique fiery splendor produced from the bodies of all the Gods which subsequently merged into one feminine form, and whose illumination pervades throughout the three worlds. Verse 13 : Chapter Second).

शङ्खिनी चापिनी बाणभुशुण्डीपरिघायुधा ।
सौम्या सौम्यतराशेषसौम्येभ्यस्त्वत्तिमुन्दरी ॥ ८१ ॥

(Loaded with a spiral shell (of a sea-mollusc), bow, arrows, slings, steel mace and other weapons, You are mild, gentle and the ultimate of attractiveness and unsurpassed beauty. Above and beyond that, You are supremely superior to everything. Verse 81 : Chapter First).

ताभ्यां शुम्भाय चाख्याता अतीव सुमनोहरा ।
काप्यास्ते स्वी महाराज भासयन्ती हिमाचलम् ॥ १० ॥

नैव तादृक् क्वचिद्रूपं दृष्टं केनचिदुत्तमम् ।
ज्ञायतां काप्यसौ देवी गृह्यतां चासुरेश्वर ॥ ११ ॥

(O Lord ! there is certain exceedingly beautiful woman whose heavenly beauty is shedding lustre on mount Himalaya. O Lord of the *asuras* ! such an unsurpassed beautiful face could have never been visible to anybody at any place, please find out her whereabouts with a view to own her. Verses 90-91 : Chapter Fifth).

मयूरकुक्कुटवृते महाशक्तिधरेऽनये ।
कौमारिरूपसंस्थाने नारायणि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥ १५ ॥

(O *Narayani* – the female form of Lord *Narayan* (*Vishnu*) !surrounded by peacocks and cocks, You are sinless and carrying a Great Energy. Assuming the form of Ever Pure (*Kaumari*), O Goddess, You are the institution and abode of beauty, we bow to You. Verse 15 : Chapter Eleventh).

Role Performance by the Goddess as a Celebrity -An Evaluation

A specific portion in the First Chapter of *Durga saptashati Bhashateeka*, 1951, clearly suggests the role played by the Goddess as a celebrity in as much as overpowering the thought-process of *Madhu* and *Kaitabha*, making them fully congruent to the purpose plus desire of Lord *Vishnu* and thereby extending Him a much needed favour towards His intention of killing both the *asuras* and saving the life of Lord *Brahma* as well. The actual context narrating the epitome of the pertinent episode depicts that two *asuras* - *Madhu* and *Kaitabha*, had come into being out of the refuse of Lord *Vishnu's* ears when He was sleeping at the end of a *kalpa* (a longer period of time regarded to be the length of one cycle of the cosmos from creation to dissolution). Finding *Brahma* sitting over a lotus with its pedicelemerging from the navel of *Vishnu*, the *asuras* started disturbing & torturing

Brahma, and further attempting to devour Him. Seeing and facing both the violent and aggressive *asuras* and *Vishnu* under sleep, *Brahma*, in a state of complete restlessness as well as acute helplessness extolled the Goddess (*Mahamaya*) with extreme devotion and dedication to protect Him from these two unbeatable demons with Her superior powers. On awakening, *Vishnu* saw these two red-eyed evils, full of unprecedented heroism and power, and in look-out to slay *Brahma*. *Vishnu* stood up at once and started wrestling with them; the struggling fight continued for 5000 years with no conclusion. However, Goddess, at the ongoing prayer by *Brahma* to come forward for His rescue, and finding *Vishnu* so far failing to overpower the invincible demons, influenced them by throwing waves of delusion and hypnosis and thus was successful in persuading them by making their thought-process compatible to the actual task of finishing them through *Vishnu*. The deluded *asuras* then told *Vishnu* to ask a boon, which turned out to be nothing but only a reward of the potential to kill them by Him.

पञ्चवर्षसहस्राणि बाहूप्रहरणो विभुः ।
तावप्यतिबलोन्मत्तौ महामायाविमोहितौ ॥ १४ ॥
उक्तवन्तौ वरोऽस्मत्तो त्रियतामिति केशवम् ॥ १५ ॥

(Lord *Vishnu* stood up at once and started wrestling with *asuras* ; the struggling fight continued for 5000 years with no conclusion. *Asuras*, brimmed with wild behavior plus invincible might, got deluded by the Goddess, and asked *Vishnu* to seek a *vardaan* from them. Verses 94-95: Chapter First). *Vishnu*, further, brought both the *asuras* on the lap and finished them.

Conclusion

As per the available literature pertaining to the epistemology for celebrity, Goddess (*Mahamaya*) has been found of being endowed with the highest

possible quotient on the continuum of all the various prescribed traits signifying a celebrity - High Profile, Highly Dynamic, Talent, Charismatic, Novel & Unfamiliar, and Physical Appearance & Attractiveness. Further, it is also an undisputed proposition in the mainstream literature that any person could be made a celebrity, and any event could be turned to a celebrity event. It is also agreed upon that physically attractive communicator happens to be better forceful towards changing the beliefs. Actually speaking, the primary purpose behind employing a celebrity is to accelerate and ensure the compliance of a persuasive message by the target audience. This may involve resorting to any or all the various suggested models of persuasive communication by the celebrity (source) – Rhetorical, Propagandistic and Negotiation (Kotler, 1979) in bringing the thought & decision-process of the target audience fully congruent and compatible to the very objective of the message. Goddess as a celebrity is found to be deploying a mechanism similar to modern day 'atmospherics' under the Propagandistic Model in attaining success for the intended task. Also, the pertinent event depicting the Goddess to perform as a celebrity, talks of a period existing at least before the writing of *Markandeya Purana* of which *Durga Saptashati* makes a part, and *Markandeya Purana* itself happens to be thousands of years old. This certainly denotes a period that existed much more prior to the presently available timing (18th Century A.D.) mentioned in the relevant literature- treasure indicating the beginning and advent of celebrity in the world. It thus seems worth mentioning that the cult of celebrity begins with the Goddess and moves through the various ascribed and achieved types to reach to the forms of today's host of attributed celebrities from among the 'common man' by virtue of the cultural intermediaries.

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