

Raksha Bandhan

Raksha Bandhan is a festival to celebrate the relationship of brother and sister. It is a day when siblings pray for each other's well-being and wish for each other's happiness and goodwill. Raksha Bandhan falls on the full moon day of the month of Shravan (August-September).

The name 'Raksha Bandhan' suggests 'a bond of protection'. On this auspicious day, brothers make a promise to their sisters to protect them from all harms and troubles and the sisters pray to God to protect their brother from all evil. Sisters tie the silk thread called Rakhi on their brother's wrist and pray for their well-being and brothers promise to take care of their sisters.

Legends

The incident is from the epic Mahabharat and concerns Krishna and Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas. She had once torn a strip of silk off her sari and tied it around Krishna's wrist to staunch the bleeding from a battlefield wound. Krishna was touched by her action and declared her to be his sister, even though they were unrelated. He promised to repay the debt and then spent the next 25 years doing just that. Draupadi, in spite of being married to 5 great warriors and being a daughter of a powerful monarch, trusted and depended wholly on Krishna. Krishna repaid the debt of love during the 'Vastra-Haran' (literally 'clothing-theft') of Draupadi, which occurred in the assembly of King Dhritarashtra when Yudhishthira lost her to the Kauravas in gambling. At that time, Krishna indefinitely extended her saree through divine intervention, so it could not be removed, to save her honor. This is how he honored his rakhi-vow towards Draupadi.

According to a legend the Demon King Bali was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu had taken up the task to guard his kingdom leaving his own abode in Vaikunth. Goddess Lakshmi wished to be with her lord back in her abode. She went to Bali disguised as a woman to seek refuge till her husband came back.

During the Shravan Purnima celebrations, Lakshmi tied the sacred thread to the King. Upon being asked, she revealed who she was and why she was there. The king was touched by her goodwill for his family and her purpose and requested the Lord to accompany her. He sacrificed all he had for the Lord and his devoted wife.

Thus the festival is also called Baleva that is Bali Raja's devotion to the Lord. It is said that since then it has been a tradition to invite sisters in Shravan Purnima for the thread tying ceremony or the Raksha Bandhan.

According to another legend, Raksha Bandhan was a ritual followed by Lord Yama (the Lord of Death) and his sister Yamuna. Yamuna tied rakhi to Yama and granted immortality. Yama was so moved by the serenity of the occasion that he declared that whoever gets a rakhi tied from his sister and promised her protection, will become immortal.

According to another legend when Alexander the Great invaded India in 326 BC, Roxana (or Roshanak, his wife) sent a sacred thread to Porus, asking him not to harm her husband in battle. In accordance with tradition, Porus gave full respect to the rakhi. On the battlefield, when Porus was about to deliver a final blow to Alexander, he saw the rakhi on his own wrist and restrained himself from attacking Alexander personally.

Another story related with Rani Karnavati of Chittor and Mughal Emperor Humayun, which dates to 1535 CE. When Rani Karnavati, the widowed queen of the king of Chittor, realised that she could not defend against the invasion by the Sultan of Gujarat, Bahadur Shah, she sent a Rakhi to Emperor Humayun. Touched, the Emperor immediately set off with his troops to defend Chittor. Humayun arrived too late, and Bahadur Shah managed to sack the Rani's fortress. Karnavati, along with a reported 13,000 other women in the fortress, carried out Jauhar on March 8, 1535, killing themselves to avoid dishonor while the men through the gates open and rode out on a suicidal charge against Bahadur Shah's troops. When he reached Chittor, Humayun evicted Bahadur Shah from fort and restored the kingdom to Karnavati's son, Vikramjit Singh.

The Significance

Previously, Rakhi festival encompasses the warmth shared between the siblings but now it goes way beyond it. Some people tie Rakhi to neighbours and close friends signifying a peaceful co-existence of every individual.

In today's scenario, the day has a different angle. The occasion involves a pledge of life-time practice of moral, cultural and spiritual values. The values and the sentiments attached to the rituals of this festival are worth inculcating by the whole human race, the sentiments of harmony and peaceful coexistence. The festival of Raksha Bandhan assumes all forms of Raksha or protection, of righteousness and destroyer of all sin.

Rakhi Rituals

On the day of Rakhi, sisters prepare the pooja thali with diya, roli, chawal, rakhi thread and sweets. The ritual begins with a prayer in front of God, and then the sister ties Rakhi to her brother and wishes for his happiness and well-being. In turn, the brothers grant the love

with a promise to stand by his sister through all the good and bad times. The brothers give gifts to their sisters which show their physical acceptance of her love.