

Navratri

Navratri is a major festival among hindues. Navratri is dedicated to Goddess Durga and her nine forms. The festival is a festival of nine nights. These nine days have great religious significance as Goddess Durga had destroyed the evil forces.

Navratri festival is observed twice a year, once in the month of Chaitra and then in Aswayuja. It lasts for nine days in honour of the nine manifestations of Durga. During Navaratri devotees of Durga observe a fast. Brahmins are fed and prayers are offered for the protection of health and property.

The festival is celebrated with true devotion and purity all over the country. People from various sections of the society irrespective of caste and creed celebrate this festival by visiting temples and offering pujas at the Mother's feet.

Significance

In Navratris on first three nights Durga or the destructive aspect of the divine mother is worshipped. On the succeeding three nights, her protective aspect of Lakshmi and on the last three nights, her knowledge aspect or Saraswati are worshipped. The significance of this order is that first durga destroys all the evil thoughts in the minds of her devotees; then lakshmi implants divine qualities in the devotees' minds and finally saraswati gives true knowledge to her devotees. The tenth day known as Vijaya Dasami, celebrates the victory of knowledge over ignorance of goodness over evil.

Legends

According to a Puranic legend, the mighty demon Mahishasura defeated the gods and their king, Indra.

They then approached Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar, who decided to destroy the demon. So they all combined their energies, and gave rise to Shakti and appealed to Goddess Durga to come to their aid.

Equipped with lethal weapons and riding a fierce lion, the Goddess in all her awesome majesty, destroyed the evil one without much ado. The 10th day, on which the goddess kills Mahishasura, is celebrated as Dusshera or Vijayadashami as the victory of good over evil. Dusshera (tenth day) is one of the significant Hindu festivals, celebrated with pomp and fervor all over the country.

On the tenth day, the Vijayadashmi day, big effigies of Ravana, his brother Kumbhkarna and son Meghnadh are placed in vast open spaces. Rama, accompanied by Sita and his brother Lakshmana, arrive and shoot arrows of fire at these effigies. The result is a deafening blast, enhanced by slogans of triumph.

Nine days of Navratri

First Day

The first day is dedicated to the Goddess Durga is called Shailputri, the daughter of the Himalayas. She is a form of Shakti, the companion of Lord Shiva.

Second Day

The second day is dedicated to the Goddess Durga is known as 'Brahmacharini'. The name is derivative of the word 'Brahma', which means 'Tapa' or penance. She is also a form of Mata Shakti.

Third Day

The third day is dedicated to the goddess Chandraghanta, the symbolic representation of beauty and bravery.

Fourth Day

The fourth day is dedicated to the goddess Kushmandas, the creator of the entire Universe.

Fifth Day

The fifth day is dedicated to the Goddess Skand Mata, the mother of the chief warrior of the Gods army the Skanda.

Sixth Day

The sixth day is dedicated to the goddess Katyayani with three eyes and four hands.

Seventh Day

The seventh day is dedicated to the Goddess 'Kalratri', meant to make the devotees fearless.

Eighth Day

The eighth day is dedicated to the Mata Rani or 'Maha Gauri', represents calmness and exhibits wisdom.

Ninth Day

The ninth day is dedicated to Durga also referred as Siddhidatri. It is believed that she has all the eight siddhis and is worshipped by all the Rishis and Yogis.

Different ways of celebration in different parts of India

In whole of India, it is celebrated in different ways. The vibrant festivities last for ten days, of which nine nights are spent in worship. But the celebrations vary from place to place.

Gujarat and western India

The most famous Navaratri celebrations are held in the western states of India (Gujarat and Maharashtra). Traditional dances in the form of Dandiya and Garba take place almost everywhere. The dancers move around in a circle, with different steps around a lamp, which signifies the Eternal Light of the Durga.

Generally Gujarati men and women wearing colorful dresses dance around in a circle by clapping their hands or decorated sticks to the rhythm of the devotional songs. After worshipping and 'Aarti', 'Dandiya raas' is performed all through the night.

In Maharashtra, celebrations are slightly different. Navratri is dedicated to Goddess Durga while the Vijayadashami is dedicated to Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge. Here, this day is considered auspicious to start education, buy new homes, and start new ventures.

West Bengal

In West-Bengal, Navaratri is celebrated in the form of Durga Puja. This festival is essentially religious in nature. Celebrated with true devotion, huge idols of the Goddess Durga posed as killing the demon Mahishasura are worshipped everywhere in West Bengal. Huge 'pandals' are set up every where and devotees in large numbers visit to worship Goddess Durga. Men and women and children all dressed up in new clothes visit different 'pandals' to offer prayers to the Mother Goddess.

Himachal Pradesh

In the Kulu valley of Himachal Pradesh, the hill-folk celebrate Dusshera with a grand mass ceremony. On the day of Dusshera, village deities are taken out in elaborate processions.

Tamil Nadu

In Tamil Nadu, the first three days are dedicated to the worship of Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity. During this time they perform puja every night and regular cleaning is maintained all throughout because it is believed that Lakshmi would not enter if the place is dirty. The next three days are devoted to Saraswati, the Goddess of learning and arts and the last three days to Shakti (Durga).

Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh

In Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, women arrange 'Bommali Kolu', a special placing of dolls in various costumes decorated with flowers and ornaments on specially prepared steps. Nine young 'kanyas' or virgins are offered new clothes and sweets as the goddesses and married women share flowers, kumkum and snacks among themselves.

The Dusshera of Mysore is also quite famous where decorated elephants lead a colourful procession through the gaily-dressed streets of the city. During Navaratri Chamundi, the royal deity of the Mysore royalty is worshipped with pomp and religious fervor.

Punjab

Navratri is celebrated in Punjab by fasting for seven days. On the eighth day or Ashtami, the fast is broken by worshipping young girls (Kanjak puja) who are believed to symbolize the Goddess herself. This festival is predominantly linked with harvest. The young girls are offered puris (sort of deep-fried Indian bread), halwa (a dessert primarily made of flour and sugar), chanas (Bengal gram) and red chunnis (long scarves).

Rituals performed

During Navratri devotees do fast all the nine days. Devotees worship Goddess Durga for good health and prosperity. During this period, a pot is installed (ghatasthapana) in a holy place at home and a lamp is kept lit in the pot for nine days. Navratri is also considered auspicious time for starting new ventures.

Devotees worship Goddess Durga by reciting Durga Sapatshati or Durga Kawach. They also go for devi darshan in temples of Goddess Durga. In North India there is huge rush in Shaktipeeths like Mansa Devi, Maa Chintapurni, Vaishno devi, Jawala jee etc.