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Dasara



Dasara, derived from the Sanskrit Dasha-hara meaning "remover of bad fate", is among the most important festivals celebrated in India. Different parts of India celebrate the festival in different ways. Some celebrate it as Navaratri, some as Vijaya-Dashami, and some as Dussehra, in worship of Goddess Durga or celebrating Rama's victory over Rawana. The celebrations vary from a day to nine days (for Navaratri) to a month (for Mysore Dasara). Bharatiyas have been celebrating the Navarathi festival from ancient times as a mode of worship of Devi, the Divine as Mother. They worship Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati during those nine days. Who are these three? They are the three forms which have fascinated man. Their esoteric significance is represented by three potencies or shakthis. They are: Karma, Upaasana and Jnana. The significance of Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati has to be rightly understood. The three represent three kinds of potencies in man. Ichchaa Shakti, will power, Kriya Shakti, the power of purposeful action, and Jnaana Shakti - the power of discernment. Saraswati is manifest in man as the power of speech, Vaak. Durga is present in the form of dynamism. Lakshmi is manifest in the form of will power. The body indicates Kriya Shakti. The mind is the repository of Ichchaa Shakti. The Atma is Jnaana Shakti. Kriya Shakti comes from the body, which is material. The power that activates the body that is inert and makes it vibrant is Ichchaa Shakti. The power that induces the vibrations of Ichchaa Shakti is Jnaana Shakti, which causes radiation of energy. These three potencies are represented by the mantra: Om Bhur Bhuvah Suvaha. Bhur represents Bhuloka, the earth. Bhuvah represents the life force, conscience in man. Suvaha represents the power of radiation. All three are present in man. Thus Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati dwell in the human heart. Men are prone to exhibit rajasic qualities like anger and hatred. They are the menacing manifestations of Durga. The extolling of the Divine in song and poetry and the pleasing vibrations produced by them indicate the power of Saraswathi. The pure qualities that arise in man such as compassion, love, forbearance and sympathy are derived from Lakshmi.

Vijayadashami



Vijayadashami is celebrated on the tenth day of the Hindu autumn lunar month of Ashvin, or Ashwayuja which falls in September or October of the Western calendar, from the Shukla Paksha Pratipada, or the day after the new moon which falls in Bhadrpada, to the Dashami, or the tenth day of Ashvin. It is the

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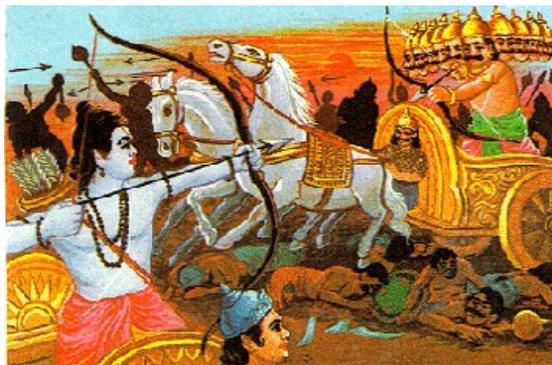
culmination of the 10-day annual Navaratri festival. In India, the harvest season begins at this time and so the Mother Goddess is invoked to start the new harvest season and reactivate the vigor and fertility of the soil. This is done through religious performances and rituals which are thought to invoke cosmic forces that rejuvenate the soil. On the day of Dasha-Hara, clay statues of the Goddess Durga are submerged in rivers. The pooja is performed with turmeric and other pooja items, which are added to the river in order to help the water yield better crops.

Dasha-Hara is the festival of Victory of Good over Evil. Buses, trucks and machines in factories are decorated. Dasha-Hara is also Vishwakarma Divas - the National Labor Day of India. Veda Vyasa is considered the foremost guru and Vijayadashami is also celebrated as Vyasa puja. Shastra pooja, or the worship of the weapon Shastra/Astra used by Goddess Durga, are worshipped on this day.

Victory of Prabhu Ramachandra over Ravana

On this day in the Treta Yug, Rama, also called Shri Ram, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu, killed the great demon Ravana who had abducted Rama's wife Sita to his kingdom of Lanka. Rama, his brother Lakshman, their follower Hanuman and an army of monkeys fought a great battle to rescue Sita. The entire narrative is recorded in the epic Ramayana, a Hindu scripture.

Rama had performed "Chandi Homa" and invoked the blessings of Durga, who blessed Rama with secret knowledge of the way to kill Ravana. On the day of Ashvin Shukla Dashami, Rama's party found Sita and defeated Ravana. Rama, Sita and Laxman returned to Rama's kingdom of Ayodhya on the same day. Since then, Rama's victory has been celebrated as Vijayadashami.



During the ten days of Dasha-Hara, Deities of Ravana, his brother Kumbhakarna and son Meghanad are erected and burnt by enthusiastic youths at sunset. After Dasha-Hara, the hot summer ends, especially in North India. The coming cold weather is believed to encourage infections. The burning of the effigies, filled with firecrackers containing phosphorous, supposedly purifies the atmosphere, while the temples perform Chandi Homa or Durga Homa, with the same intent. Many people perform Aditya Homa as a Shanti Yagna and recite Sundara Kanda of Srimalad Ramayana for nine days. These Yagna performances are thought to create powerful agents in the atmosphere surrounding the house that will keep the household environment clean and healthy.



These rituals are intended to rid the household of the ten bad qualities, which are represented by ten heads of Ravana as follows:

- (1) Kaama vasana (Lust)
- (2) Krodha (Anger)
- (3) Moha (delusion)
- (4) Lobha (Greed)
- (5) Mada (Over Pride)
- (6) Matsara (Jealousy)
- (7) Manas (Mind)
- (8) Buddhi (Intellect)
- (9) Chitta (will)
- (10) Ahankara (Ego).

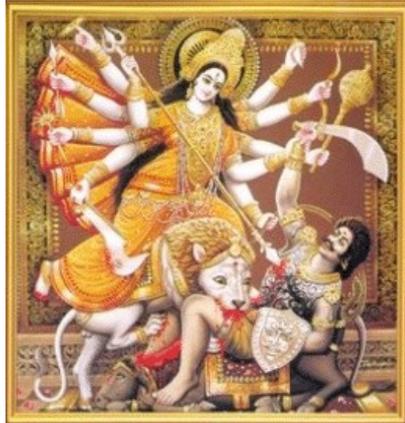
Some householders perform Yagnas thrice daily along with Sandhya Vandana, which is also called Aahavaneeya Agni, Grahapatya Agni or Dakshina Agni. In addition, the Aditya Homa is performed with the Maha Surya Mantras and the Aruna Prapathaka of the Yajurveda. These mantras are believed to keep the heart, brain and digestive functions in balance in the absence of adequate sunlight in the winter months.

Victory of Durga Mata over Mahishasur

Some of the demons, or Asuras, were very powerful and ambitious and continually tried to defeat the

Devas, or Gods, and capture Heaven. One Asura, Mahishasur, in the form of a buffalo, grew very powerful and created havoc on the earth. Under his leadership, the Asuras defeated the Devas. The world was crushed under Mahishasura's tyranny, the Devas joined their energies into Shakti, a single mass of incandescent energy, to kill Mahishasur. A very powerful band of lightning emerged from the mouths of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva and a young, beautiful female virgin with ten hands appeared. All the Gods gave their special weapons to her. This Shakti coalesced to form the goddess Durga. Riding on a lion, who assisted her, Durga fought Mahishasur. The battle raged for nine days and nights. Finally on the tenth day of Ashvin shukla paksha, Mahishasur was defeated and killed by Durga.

Hence Dasha-Hara is also known as Navaratra or Durgotsava and is a celebration of Durga's victory. Durga, as Consort of Lord Shiva, represents two forms of female energy - one mild and protective and the other fierce and destructive.



End of Agnyatvas of Pandava

In the age of Dwapar Yuga, Pandava - the five acknowledged sons of Pandu, by his two wives Kunti and Madri - lost to Kauravas in a game of dice, and both spent twelve years of Vanavas, or exile to the forest, followed by one year of Agnyatavas. The brothers hid their weapons in a hole in a Shami tree before entering the Kingdom of Virat to complete the final year of Agnyatvas. After that year, on Vijaydashmi, they recovered the weapons, declared their true identities and defeated Kauravas, who had attacked King Virat to steal his cattle. Since that day, Shami trees and weapons have been worshipped and the exchange of Shami leaves on Vijaydashmi has been a symbol of good will and victory.

Kautsa's Gurudakshina

Kautsa, the young son of a Brahmin called Devdatt, lived in the city of Paithan. After completing his education with Rishi Varatantu, he insisted on his guru accepting Guru Dakshina, a present. The guru said, "Kautsa, to give 'dakshina' in return for learning wisdom is not proper. Graduation of the disciple makes the guru happy, and this is the real Guru Dakshina." Kautsa was not satisfied. He still felt it was his duty to give his guru something. The guru said, "All right, if you insist on giving me dakshina, so give me 140 million gold coins, 10 million for each of the 14 sciences I have taught you."

Kautsa went to King Raghu. Raghu raja was an ancestor of Lord Rama, famous for his generosity. But just at that time he had spent all his money on the Brahmins, after performing the Vishvajit sacrifice. King Raghu asked Kautsa to return three days. Raghuraja immediately left to get the gold coins from Indra. Indra summoned Kuber, the god of wealth. Indra told Kuber, "Make a rain of gold coins fall on the "Shanu" and "Aapati" trees round Raghuraja's city of Ayodhya."

The rain of gold coins began to fall. King Raghu gave all the coins to Kautsa, and Kautsa hastened to offer the coins to Varatantu Rishi. Guru had asked only 140 millions, so he gave the rest back to Kautsa. Kautsa was not interested in money, considering honour to be more valuable than wealth. He asked the king to take the remaining gold coins back. But the king refused, as kings do not take back the daan (gift).

Finally Kautsa distributed the gold coins to the people of Ayodhya on the day of Ashvin shukla dashami. In remembrance of this event, there has been a custom of looting the leaves of the Aapati trees, and people present these leaves to one another as gold.

Simollanghan - crossing the border - War Season

In ancient times kings used the feast of Dasha-Hara to cross the frontier and fight against their neighbouring kingdoms. This border crossing is known as "simollanghan". Thus Dasha-Hara also marks the beginning of the war season.

Celebrations

In Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Western Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, it is traditional to plant barley seeds in earthen pots on the first day of Navrathri. On the day of Dussehra, the nine-day old sprouts (called noratras or nortas) are used as symbols of luck. Men place them in their caps or behind their ears. In most of northern India and some parts of Maharashtra, Dasha-Hara is celebrated more in honour of Rama. During these 10 days many plays and dramas based on Ramayana are performed. These are called Ramlila.

In the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand, the Dasshera festival starts with the performance of Ramlila which is itself unique as it is based on the musical rendering of the katha or story of Lord Ram.

Mysore





The legend associated with the Shami tree finds commemoration during the renowned Navaratri celebrations at Mysore. The Mysore celebrations also strongly emphasize the Durga legend described above, as may be expected in the city built at the very site of the events of the Durga legend. On Vijaydashami day, at the culmination of a colourful 10-day celebration, the goddess Chamundeshwari is worshipped and then borne in a grand procession on a Golden Ambari or elephant-mounted throne through the city of Mysore, from the historical Mysore Palace to the Banni Mantapa. Banni is the Kannada word for the Sanskrit Shami, and Mantapa means "Pavilion".

Orissa

Vijaya Dashami or Dussehra is celebrated as Durga Puja in two different ways in Odisha. In Shakti Peethas or temples of the goddesses, the Durga Puja is observed with rituals for a period of 10 to 16 days, known as Shodasa Upachara. The goddess Durga is also worshipped by devotees in different pendals throughout the state. The pendals are beautifully decorated. The last day of the Sharodiya Durga Puja is known as Vijaya Dashami. After the last ritual Aparajita Puja is offered to the goddess, a tearful farewell is offered to her. The women offer Dahi-Pakhal (cooked rice soaked in water, with curd), Pitha (baked cakes), Mitha (sweets) and fried fish to the Goddess. Most of the community pujas postpone the farewell as long as possible and arrange a grand send-off. The images are carried in processions known as Bhasani Jatra or Bisarjan Jatra around the locale and finally are immersed in a nearby river or lake. After the immersion of the deity, people across the state celebrate "Ravan Podi" in which they burn an effigy of the demon Ravan.

Andhra Pradesh

Vijaya Dashami has great importance in the Telugu household. For life events such as starting a business, or buying a new home or vehicle, rituals take place on this auspicious day. They perform Ayudha Puja where they sanctify vehicles and other new items. In the evenings, a procession is taken up in all major cities where people dress up as characters from the Ramayana and perform stage shows. Huge effigies of Ravana and Kumbhakarna are burned, signifying victory of Lord Rama.

People believe this to be an auspicious day for anyone starting a new venture, bringing victory. In the Telangana region, younger family members usually pay respects to their elders by giving them leaves of Jammi tree, and seeking their blessings.

This festival is celebrated in all temples of Durga. Shodasa Upacharam is offered to her. During Navratri ("nine nights"), Goddess Durga is decorated in her different aspects like Bala Tripura Sundari, Mahishasura-Mardini, Annapoorna, Kali, Raja Rajeshwari, Kanaka Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati and Gayatri Devi. On the river banks of Krishna at Vijayawada, at an age-old temple of "Sri Durga Malleswar Swami" on a hill called "Indra-Kila-Adri", Dushera Navaratri is celebrated every year with great pomp and tens of thousands of people visit this temple during this time. These celebrations are concluded on the tenth day of "Vijaya Dashami", which is usually a national holiday. In Vijayawada on Vijayadashami day, "Teppa Utsavam", in which Durga's image is placed on a big boat decorated with flowers and lights, is celebrated in the evening of Vijaya Dashami day. People of Andhra Pradesh wish to start new ventures on Vijaya Dashami day, with a belief that it will be successful.

Batukamma is a spring festival celebrated by the Hindu women of Telangana region in Andhra Pradesh, India. It is also called as Bodemma. This festival falls in the months of September/October and is named Aswiyuja; this concludes two days before Dussera or Durgashtami. Batukamma is very special in Telangana.

Maharashtra

In Maharashtra, the festival is celebrated on the tenth day of the month of Ashvin, which falls in October according to the Shaka Hindu Calendar. This is one of the 3 and a half days in the Hindu Lunar calendar every moment of which is considered auspicious. On this, Dasha-Hara day, the deities installed on the first day of the Navratri are immersed in water. This day also marks the victory of Lord Rama over Ravana. People visit each other and exchange sweets. On this day, people worship the Aapta tree (Bauhinia variegata) and exchange its leaves (known as golden leaves) as symbol of gold and wish each other a bright prosperous future. The tradition of exchanging aapta leaves refers to Raghuraja, an ancestor of Ramachandra and Kubera. Similar to Ayudh puja in Karnataka, many groups and communities, largely the artisan castes, celebrate the day before Dasha-Hara as Khande navmi when tools of all kinds are given rest and ritually worshipped. In Maharashtra, people also ritually cross the border of their community, in a ceremony known as Seemollanghan, which has its roots in the idea that this day is an auspicious one on which to start ventures.

Bengal

In Bengal, Dussehra is celebrated as Durga Puja. Deities of the goddess Durga are worshipped for five days, and on the fifth day (Bijaya Dashami) immersed in a river or pond. In Bengal, Assam and Orissa, the goddess Kali, an appellation of Durga, is also worshipped as a symbol of Shakti (Power).

