

Navratri / Dhasera

Navratri, the festival of nights, lasts for 9 days with three days each devoted to worship of Ma Durga, the Goddess of Valor, Ma Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth and Ma Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge. During the nine days of Navratri, feasting and fasting take precedence over all normal daily activities amongst the Hindus. Evenings give rise to the religious dances in order to worship Goddess Durga Maa.

1st - 3rd day of Navratri

On the first day of the Navaratri, a small bed of mud is prepared in the puja room of the house and barley seeds are sown on it. On the tenth day, the shoots are about 3 - 5 inches in length. After the puja, these seedlings are pulled out and given to devotees as a blessing from god. These initial days are dedicated to Durga Maa, the Goddess of power and energy. Her various manifestations, Kumari, Parvati and Kali are all worshipped during these days. They represent the three different classes of womanhood that include the child, the young girl and the mature woman.

4th - 6th day of Navratri

During these days, Lakshmi Maa, the Goddess of peace and prosperity is worshipped. On the fifth day which is known as Lalita Panchami, it is traditional, to gather and display all literature available in the house, light a lamp or 'diya' to invoke Saraswati Maa, the Goddess of knowledge and art.

7th - 8th day of Navratri

These final days belong to Saraswati Maa who is worshipped to acquire the spiritual knowledge. This in turn will free us from all earthly bondage. But on the 8th day of this colourful festival, yagna (holy fire) is performed. Ghee (clarified butter), kheer (rice pudding) and sesame seeds form the holy offering to Goddess Durga Maa.

Mahanavami

The festival of Navratri culminates in Mahanavami. On this day Kanya Puja is performed. Nine young girls representing the nine forms of Goddess Durga are worshiped. Their feet are washed as a mark of respect for the Goddess and then they are offered new clothes as gifts by the worshiper. This ritual is performed in most parts of the country.

About Goddess Durga

Durga, in Sanskrit means "She who is incomprehensible or difficult to reach." Goddess Durga is a form of Sakti worshiped for her gracious as well as terrifying aspect. Mother of the Universe, she represents the infinite power of the universe and is a symbol of a female dynamism. The manifestation of Goddess Durga is said to emerge from Her formless essence and the two are inseparable.

She is also called by many other names, such as Parvati, Ambika, and Kali. In the form of Parvati, She is known as the divine spouse of Lord Shiva and is the mother of Her two sons, Ganesha and Karttikeya, and daughter Jyoti. Destroyer of demons, she is worshiped during an annual festival called Durga puja, especially popular among Bengalis.

Her Appearance

There are endless aspects of Durga described in the Puranas and Agamas and the iconography is consequently very varied. She is usually pictured as having ten arms holding Sword, Conch, Discus, Rosary, Bell, Winecup, Shield, Bow, Arrow, and Spear. She is most often shown riding a lion from which comes Her august name, Simhavahini, "She who stands astride the king of beasts". She is gorgeously dressed in royal red cloth and has several ornaments decorating Her personage. Her hair is dressed up in a crown (karandamukuta) which then flows out in long luxuriant tresses that are darkly luminous and soothing to the eye. The various tools reflect the eminent supremacy that helps in controlling the universe and obey Her will.

Weilding Energy

Goddess Durga exists eternally, always abiding in her own sweet nature and inhabits the hearts and minds of her ecstatic devotees. As Shakti power, she shapes, nurtures, and dissolves names and forms, while as subtle spiritual energy called Kundalini, She lights the lotuses for the seven centres of awareness in the sacred human body. Goddess Durga killed the powerful demon Mahish and all his great commanders. When demonic forces create imbalance all gods unite becoming one divine force called Shakti or Durga.

Origin of Durga - The Mythology

Devi is the great goddess of the Hindus, the consort of Shiva and she is worshiped in various forms corresponding to her two aspects: benevolence and fierceness. She is Uma, "light"; Gauri, "yellow or brilliant"; Parvati, "the mountaineer"; and Jagatmata, "the-mother-of-the-world" in her milder guise. The terrible emanations are Durga "the inaccessible"; Kali, "the black"; Chandi, "the fierce"; and Bhairavi, "the terrible."

Descent of the Goddess

Durga, a beautiful warrior seated upon a tiger, was the first appearance of the great goddess. The circumstance of her miraculous arrival was the tyranny of the monster-demon Mahishasur, who through terrific austerities had acquired invincible strength. The gods were afraid of this water-buffalo bull because neither Vishnu nor Shiva could prevail against him. It seemed that the joint energy of Shakti was only capable of vanquishing Mahisha, and so it was the eighteen-armed Durga who went out to do battle.

Battlefield

She went to battle on her ferocious mount lion, armed with the weapons given to her by the other Gods. Durga is one of the angry and aggressive aspects of the goddess Shakti, whose role in Hindu mythology was to fight and conquer demons and also personify the Sakti or female aspect of any male deity. In the battle, she fought and killed the evil Mahishasura and restored heaven to the Gods. Since then the goddess is invoked for protection from the powers of evil. Durga Puja is observed in her honor, to celebrate her victory over evil.

Revered Mother

She has been worshiped from about 400 AD, but probably earlier, to the present. Her literary references are chiefly the Ramayana and Mahabharata, epic and Puranic texts, and she is mentioned by name in Vedic literature. In general, Durga is regarded in northern India as the gentle bride epitomizing family unity while in southern India she is revered more in her warrior aspect.

Different Forms of Durga

As the ten-armed Goddess, Goddess Durga presents a radiantly beautiful form that is bewitching to behold. That special form is somehow simultaneously wrathful and benign and transmits profound spiritual teachings in an exacting manner. The nine-day period from the new moon day to the ninth day of Ashvina is considered the most auspicious time of the Hindu Calendar and is hence the most celebrated time of the year as Durga Puja. The nine different forms of Devi are worshiped over the nine days. These are the most popular forms under which she is worshiped:

Durga Shailputri (Daughter of Mountain)

She is a daughter of Himalaya and first among nine Durgas. In previous birth she was the daughter of Daksha. Her name was Sati - Bhavani. i.e. the wife of Lord Shiva. Once Daksha had organized a big Yagna and did not invite Shiva. But Sati being obstinate, reached there. Thereupon Daksha insulted Shiva. Sati could not tolerate the insult of husband and burnt herself in the fire of Yagna. In other birth she became the daughter of Himalaya in the name of Parvati - Hemvati and got married with Shiva. As per Upnishad she had torn and the egotism of Indra, etc. Devas. Being ashamed they bowed and prayed that, "In fact, thou are Shakti, we all - Brahma, Vishnu and Shiv are capable by getting Shakti from you."

Brahmcharini

The second Durga Shakti is Brahmcharini. Brahma that is who observes penance (tapa) and good conduct. Here "Brahma" means "Tapa". The idol of this Goddess is very gorgeous. There is rosary in her right hand and Kamandal in left hand. She is full with merriment. One story is famous about her. In previous birth she was Parvati Hemavati the daughter of Himvan. Once when she was busy in games with her friends. Naradaji came to her and predicted seeing her Palm-lines that, "You will get married with a naked-terrible 'Bhole baba' who was with you in the form of Sati, the daughter of Daksh in previous birth. But now you have to perform penance for him." There upon Parvati told her mother Menaka that she would marry none except Shambhu, otherwise she would remain unmarried. Saying this she went to observe penance. That is why her name is famous as tapacharini - Brahmcharini. From that time her name Uma became familiar.

Chandraghanta

The name of third Shakti is Chandraghanta. There is a half-circular moon in her forehead. She is charming and bright. She is Golden color. She has three eyes and ten hands holding with ten types of swords - etc. weapons and arrows etc. She is seated on Lion and ready for going in war to fight. She is unprecedented image of bravery. The frightful sound of her bell terrifies all the villains, demons and danavas.

Kushmanda

Name of fourth Durga is Kushmanda. The Shakti creates egg, ie. Universe by mere laughing. She resides in solar systems. She shines brightly in all the ten directions like Sun. She has eight hands. Seven types of weapons are shining in her seven hands. Rosary is in her right hand. She seems brilliant riding on Lion. She likes the offerings of "Kumhde." Therefore her name "Kushmanda" has become famous.

Skanda Mata

Fifth name of Durga is "Skanda Mata". The daughter of Himalaya, after observing penance got married with Shiva. She had a son named "Skanda." Skanda is a leader of the army of Gods. Skanda Mata is a deity of fire. Skanda is seated in her lap. She has three eyes and four hands. She is white and seated on a lotus.

Katyayani

Sixth Durga is Katyayani. The son of "Kat" as "Katya". Rishi Katyayan born in this "Katya" lineage. Katyayan had observed penance with a desire to get paramba as his daughter. As a result she took birth as a daughter of Katyayan. Therefore her name is "Katyayani". She has three eyes and eight hands. These are eight types of weapons missiles in her seven hands. Her vehicle is Lion.

Kalratri

Seventh Durga is Kalratri. She is black like night. Durga hairs are unlocked. She has put on necklaces shining like lightening. She has three eyes which are round like universe. Her eyes are bright. Thousands of flames of fire come out while respiring from nose. She rides on Shava (dead body). There is sharp sword in her right hand. Her lower hand is in blessing mood. The burning torch (mashal) is in her left hand and her lower left hand is in fearless style, by which she makes her devotees fearless. Being auspicious she is called "Shubhamkari."

Maha Gauri

The Eighth Durga is "Maha Gauri." She is as white as a conch, moon and Jasmine. She is of eight years old. Her clothes and ornaments are white and clean. She has three eyes. She rides on bull She has four hands. The above left hand is in "Fearless - Mudra" and lower left hand holds "Trishul." The above right hand has tambourine and lower right hand is in blessing style. She is calm and peaceful and exists in peaceful style. It is said that when the body of Gauri became dirty due to dust and earth while observing penance, Shiva makes it clean with the waters of Gangas. Then her body became bright like lightening. There fore, she is known as "Maha Gauri" .

Siddhidatri

Ninth Durga us Siddhidatri. There are eight Siddhis , they are- Anima, Mahima, Garima, Laghima, Prapti, Prakamya, Ishitva & Vashitva. Maha Shakti gives all these Siddhies. It is said in "Devipuran" that the Supreme God Shiv got all these Siddhies by worshipping Maha Shakti. With her gratitude the half body of Shiv has became of Goddess and there fore his name "Ardhanarishvar" has became famous. The Goddess drives on Lion. She has four hands and looks pleased. This form of Durga is worshiped by all Gods, Rishis-Munis, Siddhas, Yogis, Sadhakas and devotees for attaining the best religious asset.

Navaratri - Kolu Festival



Navaratri is a joyous festival which is celebrated every year by Hindus, during early fall season (occurs during late September and early October). The Goddess in the form of the Universal Mother is worshiped for nine nights and hence the name *nava-ratri.' On the tenth day, the festival comes to an end with a special puja called Vijaya Dasami. During the ten days of the Dasara festival (ten days and nine nights), it is common for Hindus to read and recite slokas on the greatness of Mother Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati. Mother Durga symbolizes the power of purposeful action (Kriya Sakti). Lakshmi represents the will power (Itchaa Sakti) and Saraswati stands for the power of knowledge (Jnana Sakti).

We the human beings are prone to exhibit rajasic qualities like anger and hatred which are the menacing manifestations of Durga Devi to destroy the evil. Our interest in music, arts and knowledge are the pleasing vibrations produced by the power of Saraswathi Devi. The pure qualities which include compassion, love, forbearance and sympathy are derived from Laxmi Devi. When we worship Durga, Laxmi and Saraswathi externally in pictures or icons, they are giving physical forms to the subtle potencies that are within them. It is unfortunate that we fail to recognize the importance of the symbolism behind the festivals and celebrations. We are too quick to go after the material aspects of the celebrations instead of focusing on the spiritual message. We seem to look for remedies from outside instead of looking for the answers inside.

The kolu is the essence of Navaratri celebrations. Earlier, preparations for the kolu would begin months in advance. The dolls, wrapped in cotton rags and neatly stacked in huge wooden trunks, are carefully taken out, dusted, mended and sometimes, given a fresh coat of paint. Some artistically inclined women would craft a couple of new dolls for the occasion each year.

The tradition has been in existence for at least 500 years, from the reign of the Vijayanagar kings. Some of the inscriptions mention the Navaratri kolu. An old Marathi record at the Saraswathi Mahal library (Thanjavur) mentions the supply of dolls representing people belonging to 18 different castes for the Navaratri kolu. The kolu tradition, it is believed, was popular among the royal families of Thanjavur and Pudukkottai.

The kolu is not confined to India alone. It is followed in many Asian countries, especially Sri Lanka and Japan. In fact, the Japanese version of our Navaratri kolu is known as Hina Masturi.

The Navratri Kollu Festival commences on the Amavasya day of the month of Bhadrapada, the last day of Pitripaksha. Kollu means displaying.

On the Amavasya day after finishing the rituals, like offering `tarpana etc. the custom is, to keep the Kalash filled with rice, toor dal haldi sticks, betel leaves and nuts or mango leaves with a coconut on it.

The right muhurtam is chosen before placing the Kalash and the dolls for worship, with which the Kollu festival begins. The dolls are given to the girl from her parents during her marriage and are called "Marapachi Bommai". From this day she starts the ceremony of Kollu going on adding Bommais from South.

The Navratri Kollu is done by constructing wide tiers or steps in any number, maximum being seven. The number of tiers or steps should be in even numbers, like, one, three, five and so on. One can erect nine steps too if space and time permits. Variety of dolls are displayed artistically and arranged beautifully on the steps.

The dolls are given to the girl from her parents during her marriage and are called "Marapachi Bommai". Marapachi is made from a special kind of wood which has medicinal value.

From the day the married girl gets the Marapachi Bommai she starts collecting dolls and observes the ceremony annually. The clay dolls displayed are mostly from mythological characters.

All Gods and Goddesses of our Epics and Puranas are displayed on the tiers which are beautifully decorated and look spectacular and colourful. For example, 'Garuda Vahana' i.e. God Narayan taken in Garuda Vahan or vehicle is kept. One of the items exhibited is the Marriage Set called 'Malam Talam' i.e. the marriage procession of relations and friends led by musical players of clarinet (malam) and mridangam (talam).

Those days, houses were spacious, joint families were common and people had lots of leisure. Hence, the arrangements were grand and elaborate. Usually, a whole room was devoted for the kolu. The dolls were displayed on the kolupadis or steps made of wood and covered with a thick cloth. The number of steps was always an odd number — three, five, seven or nine. The more the steps, the merrier!

The dolls were mostly mud icons of various gods and goddesses painted in bright colours. Some families displayed dolls made of rosewood, sandalwood and ivory.

A Ramayana set, a Dasavatara set, a set of musicians and the ubiquitous pot-bellied smiling Chettiar and his equally plump wife... these were most common in most arrangements! Many kolus also had a miniature kitchen — various utensils made of soapstone or brass, which were filled with grains and pulses. Then, there were fruits and vegetables made of mud or wood and painted... they would look almost.

The floor space on the sides and the front of the steps was landscaped to feature a village, gardens, parks and temples.

The most popular was the temple scenes. Sand, painstakingly gathered from the Marina, would be used to lay the narrow streets surrounding the temple. The mini-temple was either built of mud or bought. The temple invariably had an imposing gopuram. If it was a Murugan temple, it was placed on a small hillock. The temple had a mud tank in the front. A brass trough normally served as the tank.

Today, quite a few things have changed. Innovation and substitution appear to be the watchwords for the present-day kolus. The traditional wooden steps have vanished from most homes and some families now use iron kolupadis which can be converted into bookshelves after the event. Many families build the steps out of big boxes and outsized dictionaries.

The dolls are not restricted to those of gods and goddesses. Now there are dolls dressed in traditional costumes of different Indian States and the countries. The air-hostess dolls are often seen on display in the homes of foreign-returned families. Then there are postman dolls in his khaki uniform and with a mailbag, the doctor with his stethoscope, the shopkeeper with his wares. Designer kolus exhibit, besides dolls, colourful books, stamps, coins, medals, paintings, charts, toys and board games. Fancy lighting and installations and computer graphics too are used as part of the decorations.

The floor is no longer limited to village scenes and temples as children are discouraged from bringing sand and clay in to the flat. Instead, events such as the general elections, the Kargil war and the Olympic games are featured.

A new development is the thematic kolu where the entire kolu, both on the steps and on the floor, revolves round a particular theme. India's freedom struggle was a popular theme in 1997, when the nation celebrated the golden jubilee of its Independence.

Another novel trend is the concept of 'community kolus'. Many women, unable to keep kolu in their homes, join hands and put up a kolu in a common place.

Community kolus besides promoting team spirit and neighbourhood amity, also reflect the collective talent and imagination.

For children, the kolu provides a nine-day crash course on hard work, discipline and courtesy. The children do their bit... by keeping the room clean, inviting and serving guests.

Despite the Internet and various other forms of infotainment, the colourful kolu is adapting itself to the changing needs of the society.

Kolu festival lasts for nine days with arti, prayers Prasad daily mornings and evenings. During these nine days ladies are invited and offered haldi kumku with betel leaves with huts and fruits. In the morning sweets and evening 'chundals' i.e. different chanas are offered to the ladies. Kollu festival days are for rejoicing when ladies dress up in their finery and ornaments and find an opt occasion to dress up specially their daughters.

On the ninth day, the day before the Vijay Dasami day, the tenth day of the Dussera, falls the Saraswati Puja. Goddess Saraswati is the Goddess of Learning and as such books musical instruments etc., are decorated with flowers and worshipped. Vijay Dasami or the Dussera Day, the last tenth day is the auspicious day when all fine arts like, dance, music, or any new venture in learning is begun. It is the `Learners' Day.

A child beginning his first lessons of alphabets begins it today ceremoniously. Prayers are offered to Goddess Saraswati and her blessings sought. Token of Guru Dakshinas are also given to the respective Gurus.

On the tenth night after the ceremonial arti and prayers the, `Marapachi' and the exhibits are packed carefully in cloth or paper and preserved for use the next year.

Vijay Dasami and Navratri are also the auspicious time for buying new clothes and feasting. Unlike other Vrats, there is no custom of fasting during Navratri Kollu.

What is that we should do during these days of the Navarathri festival?

We direct our Itchaa Sakti to direct our mind toward Divinity within. We apply our Kriya Sakti to conduct Dharmic Actions - unselfish service to the humanity. Finally, we turn our Jnaana Sakti to attain the Divine Self. Hindu Festivals and Celebrations constantly remind us our True Human Nature through symbolic messages. The purpose of the celebrations is not for external pleasures but for inward peace and tranquility.

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Kolus celebrated in two different houses

Each day of the function starts with reciting the shothrams (prayer songs) on Goddesses such as Lalitha Sahasranamam, Devi Bhagawatham etc. In the evening, we light the Kuthuvilakku and offer flowers, fruits etc. to the kolu. They invite the neighbours, friends and relatives to receive thamboolam. Every day, a different kolam is drawn in front of the kolu.

In the end, they do the "mangala aarathi" (In a plate they mix some turmeric powder, and kumkum with water, and show to the Gods and finally pour it outside the house.)



First day

This is the first day of the navarathri and is celebrated in a grand way. They take head bath and do worship.

Recipes:

Payasam

Steamed toor dal

Dal vadai

Curd Pachidi

Morkuzhambu

Chips

Sundal in the evening

Other days

Payasam

Sundal in the evening

The types of sundal to be prepared on each of the navarathri days is given below:

- Day1: Moong dal (Green gram)
- Day2: Sweet Puttu
- Day3: Peanut
- Day4:
- Day5: Gram dal (kadalai paruppu)
- Day6: Cow gram (sweet or hot)
- Day7: White peas (pattaani)
- Day8: Field beans(mochai)
- Day9: Konda kadalai(channa dal)
- Day10: Payasam.