

## **NAVRATRA & RAM NAVAMI**

Navratri is observed twice in a year. It occurs during first nine days of Shukla Paksh in the months of Ashwin and Chaitra separately. While the first one is called Sharadiya Navratra which precedes Vijayadashami, the other one is called Vasantiya Navaratra which continues up to Ram Navami when Lord Rama is said to have taken birth in the month of Chaitra.

During this Chaitra Navratra which normally falls in the month of April, worship of goddess Durga and that of unmarried young girls take place in Hindu families. On the first day of this Navratri, sowing of barley seeds and infusing of hymnised life into goddess Durga's idol take place. Devotees themselves or through Brahmins, perform Durga's worship for nine days.

Chaitra Navarata being associated with the birth of Lord Rama adds more auspiciousness to the occasion as devotees make a beeline to river Sarju to take holy dip in it for earning Punya. In Ayodhya, the festival is observed by holding grand fair in which people from far off places throng temples to pay obeisance to Lord Rama. In South India, the festival is observed in a big way with much fan fair.

What is more significant during this Navratra is that the devotees apart from worshipping female deities and young girls, also read and listen to divine discourses on Lord Rama's ideal life, character and conducts which leave some impact in the minds of devotees to mend their ways and relationships in life.

Ramnavami Navratra reminds us of our country's rich ancient culture, heritage, ethos and ideals which need to be synthesized with bests of modern scientific and technological manifestations for attaining holistic and sustainable growth of our people and country.

Whether it is Ramnavami Navratra of Vasant Ritu or Devi Navaratra of Sharad Ritu, both are associated with Lord Rama's birth and his triumph over Ravana respectively. Devi Navaratra is also associated with divine creation of goddess Durga through the powers of incorporeal God shiva and other celestial deities to annihilate devil Mahishasur.

Navaratra festival which is associated with worship of Durga, Kali, Laxmi, Saraswati etc is widely observed in India especially in West Bengal where for nine days people worship the idols of these deities to finally immerse them in water at the end.

If we seek to know more about these goddesses and about Navratra, worshippers of Shaktis refer to "Durga Sapta Sati" and Markandaya Puran in which these divinely invoked female forces (goddesses) are described to have destroyed innumerable demons including "Madhu Kaitav", "Mahishasur", "Raktavij", Sumbh & Nishumbh" etc in order to restore back divine Kingdom to deities.

In "Sapta Sati" we find narration of deities being conquered and oppressed by devils like Mahishasur, Chaand, Sumbh, Nisumbh etc. To end their sorrow and sufferings, deities together pray Adi Shakti Mahamaya who blessed and advised them to observe Vraat from first day of Ashwin Shukla Paksh till Vijaya Dashami which till date is being commemorated as Devi-Navratra Mahostav. During this period, young unmarried girls ideally from one to ten years of age are worshipped normally till Vijaya Dashami. This symbolic worship of pure female powers commemorates the worship of Durga to eliminate evil forces like lust and ego as symbolized by Mahishasur.

The specialty of Devi Navaratra is that it allows and provides right of worship to all irrespective of high caste Brahmins or low caste sudras who need to be strictly vegetarian in their offerings and food intakes during Navratri and they need to read Sapta Sati verses, listen to Devi Bhagavat, and to keep garland of earthen lamps continuously burning in front of the goddess.

The rituals, legends and stories, associated with Navratras provide rich spiritual meanings and messages which can be imbibed to enrich our personal, familial, social and cultural life.

The dialogues and discusses mentioned in 'Sapta Sati', have referred to the period of kalpant or at the end of a kalpa. This refers to end time of kaliyug characterized by climax of irreligiousness, unrighteousness and devilishness in human beings and society. The time also characterizes near end or absence of righteousness and virtues in people. This necessities divine intention of Supreme Power Shiva in association with Brahma to create Shiva Shaktis or female powers of purity, truth, tolerance, love, courage, compassion, cooperation., confrontation to destroy people's inner impurities and demonic traits like lust & ego (symbolized by Mahishasur), pride attachment & greed (symbolized by Madhu Kataiva) anger (symbolized by Chaand), violence (symbolized by demon Nisumbh) etc.

Such inner purification and empowerment can be done through practice and promotion of spiritual wisdom, values and meditation on Supreme Soul Shiva, the ocean of all divine powers and virtues. With this ceaseless fire of divine knowledge and communion with the Supreme Being, we can sublimate our inner vices and evil tendencies so as to experience true peace, purity, order, harmony & happiness in self and society which is the real message of Navaratra.

Vraat on this day is not merely to abstain from physical food or water for a day or two but to abstain from mental and intellectual intake of unholy, negative, vicious & violent thoughts. Rather the festival encourages us for undertaking holy, healthy, positive & virtuous thoughts and actions.

Darshan (philosophy) of Lord Rama or Devi Durga means to how true spiritual knowledge about these divine deities so as to inculcate their novel qualities, character, ideals & powers in us. Like deity Durga or Lord Rama, by establishing spiritual connection with incorporeal God Shiva we can draw divine powers from Him to conquer over or inner Mahisasur of lust & ego or over inner Ravana of five vices in each man & woman today.

This spiritual practice in our daily life will lead to restoration of deity qualities and culture in our mind-body-motor-sensory kingdom as well as in the world outside. This is the true message of Navratri for us.

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