

9 Nights Of Feminine Divinity! Navarathiri



Goddesses Durga, Lakshmi and
Saraswathi

Acclaimed to be one of the most colourful religions, Hinduism has a calendar of events celebrated by its followers all over the world. In the lunar month of 'aashvina' which falls in either September or October, millions of Hindus celebrate a nine or ten day festival called 'navarathiri'. This festival of worship means nine nights, where 'nava' means nine and 'rathiri' means nights in Sanskrit - the holy language of Hinduism.

Words Jananey Jayaratnarajah

Navarathiri is celebrated devoting three days each for three different goddesses known for their prowesses in the hierarchy of Hinduism - Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathi- whose blessings are respectively Courage, Wealth and Knowledge.

In preparation for this festival, a ritual is practiced commonly by the devotees. It's the placing of the traditional deity 'Kumbham'. A metallic pitcher is filled with water. Mango leaves usually five or seven are placed on the neck of the pot with a coconut that has been neatly shaped to resemble a tomb and polished with saffron which holds these leaves like a frill surrounding it. It is arranged on a plate of uncooked rice or paddy and then placed on the head of a banana leaf.

Another preparation is the 'navathaniyam' - meaning nine grains. Which are 'khodhumai' - wheat, 'Nellu' - Paddy, 'Thuvarai' - Pigeon Pea, 'Payaru' - Green gram, 'Kadalai' - Chick pea, Mochchai - Fava/Broad bean, 'Ellu'- Sesame, 'Uzhunthu' - Black gram and 'Kollu' - Horse gram. These nine grains are mixed with soil and placed in a mud pot or on the banana leaf around the 'Kumbham'.

[The story behind Navarathri is the battle between the combined strengths of the three goddesses called Shakthi and the devilish Mahidasuran.](#)

The 'Kumbham' is established invoking the blessings of all three goddesses and the 'Navathaaniyam' (Nine Seeds) for prosperity. With these preparations, the celebration of Navarathri is begun with a pooja to Lord Ganesh.

During the first three days, goddess Durga is worshipped. She is known as the goddess who destroys all impurities and protects her worshippers bestowing them with courage and strength to face the world.

The second three days are dedicated to the mother of wealth - Lakshmi, who is believed to replenish the household she visits with wealth in abundance.

During the last three days, the goddess of wisdom Saraswathi, the one who imparts the knowledge of words, music and all art forms is worshipped by her devotees singing 'Bhajans' (hymns) yearning for her blessing.

On the ninth day, 'Ayudha Pooja' - blessings of the tools of one's trade is performed. May it be the utensils of a chef, tools of a barber, instruments of a musician or even the needle and thread of a cobbler, the tools are placed in the shrine and devotees worship the goddess for her blessing on their profession and the tools that help them earn their living. It is also considered as a rest day for them as one wouldn't resume back to their work until the following day.

The tenth day is auspicious specifically for children who start their formal education. On this day called 'Vijaya Dhasami', the 'vidhyaarambham' - meaning 'beginning of knowledge' is performed as a ritual where a parent, an elder or a priest takes the child's index finger and writes "Om Sri Ganapathaye Namaha" in either paddy, uncooked rice or sand. They also write the first letter of the Tamil alphabet M(Aah) and then using a gold ring dipped in honey, the child's tongue is gently touched with a movement in the shape of the letter. In Hinduism, a teacher is considered to be the third god - "Maatha, Pithaa, Guru, Dheivam" - Mother, Father, Teacher and God. So on 'Vijaya Dhasami', students also pay homage to their teachers with betel leaves, fruits, flowers, sweets and 'Dhatchanai' - a monetary offering all placed beautifully on a tray asking for their 'Gurus' blessings to shine in their studies and art.

Another tradition is the 'Kolu' - a display of dolls on an improvised staircase. Traditionally statues of gods and goddesses, dolls and crafts depicting village scenes and weddings are placed on steps and decorated with flowers and coloured lights. It is also a tradition to have wooden dolls, particularly a figurine

of a boy and a girl together called 'Marapacchi Bommai'. The word 'Kolu' originates from the Indian language Tamil, meaning a sovereign sitting in his royal 'Durbar' (a historical Mughal court in India). And as believed, the concept depicts Goddess 'Mahidasura Mardhini' seated in her durbar prior to the killing of the demon 'Mahidasuran'.

[This rich and unique philosophy of Hinduism makes Navarathiri a festival of festivals dedicated to the goddesses.](#)

The kolu steps are usually arranged in nine tiers

STEPS 1-3:

These are specifically devoted to idols of Gods and some also place the 'Kumbham' on the first step.

STEPS 4-6:

These steps are dedicated to Hindu saints like Sri Ramakrishnar, great men like Swami Vivekananda and poets like Valluvar.

STEP 7:

Various scenes are depicted like a farmer ploughing his field, including weddings and any human activities.

STEP 8:

Various businesses are portrayed with the use of dolls depicting a business man or woman and are placed along with their commodities like, clothes, rice, pulses, vegetables, furniture etc.,

STEP 9:

The final step will always have the traditional wooden dolls called 'Marapachi' and dolls of birds and animals are also kept.

The arranging of the 'Kolu' itself being an event, neighbours and friends are invited where they are offered small gifts and food.

The story behind Navarathri is the battle between the combined strengths of the

three goddesses called Shakthi and the devilish, greedy demon Mahidasuran. On the tenth day, Shakthi conquered Mahidasuran with the holy 'Trishulam' (a weapon). Hence, it is believed that 'Vijaya Dhasami' is concluded in the triumph of the goddesses over the demon Mahidasuran. And goddess Shakthi was henceforth called 'Mahidasura Mardhini'. In the city of Mysore in Karnataka, India where the victory is said to have occurred, there is a gigantic statue of the demon that has been built in the temple hills called Chaamundi Hills which was named after the goddess Durga. The city celebrates this day with colourful processions of dancers, singers and beautifully decorated elephants in a procession.

In Hinduism the goddess Shakthi is the origin of power. She is the essence and the creative manifestation of the Supreme Being. This rich and unique philosophy of Hinduism makes Navarathiri a festival of festivals dedicated to the goddesses. It is also a festival that deeply and emotionally connects women to their feminine divinity.

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