

## Baudhik Yojana for March, April 2008

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## Shivaratri

**Maha Shivratri** (*Night of Shiva*) is a Hindu festival celebrated every year on the 13th night/14th day in the Krishna Paksha of the month Maagha (as per *Shalivahana*) or Phalgun (as per *Vikrama*) in the Hindu Calendar.

- Skandha purANam describes about four shiva rAtris.
  - *nitya shivarAtri* (daily shivarAtri - every night)
  - *mAsa shivarAtri* which is observed on the kR<sup>^</sup>iShNa paxa chaturdasi (fourteenth moonday on the moons diminishing phase).
  - *mAga prathamAdi shivarAtri* which is observed for the thirteen days starting from prathama titi in the month mAga (mAsi) and on the chaturdasi night the Lord is worshiped throughout the night.
  - *mahA shivarAtri* : The fourth one is observed on the mAsi (mAga) month kRiShNa paxa chaturdasi. This is the one observed in a widespread manner. It is also called mahA shivarAtri.

### Common practices of Shivaratri

- Offerings of Bael (Bilva) leaves to the Lord Shiva
  - Once upon a time, a hunter worshipped Lord Shiva unknowingly on Shivaratri. He did this by dropping bael leaves on a shiva linga at the base of a bael tree from its branches where he was hiding and fasting all night. For this he was forgiven of all his sins. This forms the basis behind the offerings of bael to the Lord on Shivaratri.
- Fasting
- The Shiva Lingam is worshipped throughout the night by washing it every three hours with milk, curd, honey, rose water, etc., whilst the chanting of the panchakshara mantra 'Om Namah Shivaya' is performed. He who utters the names of Shiva during Shivratri, with perfect devotion and concentration, is freed from all sins. He reaches the abode of Shiva and lives there happily. He is liberated from the cycle of births and deaths.
- All night long vigil
- Consuming bhang lassi, which is believed to be Lord Shiva's favorite drink (from certain parts of northern India and Nepal)

### Stories associated with origin of Shivaratri

- **Samudra manthan**: According to one, during the samudra manthan, a pot of poison emerged from the ocean. This terrified the Gods and demons as the poison was capable of destroying the entire world, and they ran to Shiva for help. To protect the world from its evil effects, Shiva drank the deathly poison but held it in his throat instead of swallowing it. This made his throat turn blue, and he was given the name Neelakantha, the blue-throated one. Shivaratri is the celebration of this event by which Shiva saved the world.
- **Pralaya ratri** : It is said that the whole world was once facing destruction and the Goddess Parvati worshipped her husband Shiva to save it. She prayed for the Jivas (living souls) remaining in space like particles of gold dust in a lump of wax during that long period of pralaya (deluge) night, should, upon becoming active again and in the enjoyment of their short day and night, have his blessings, but

only if they worshipped him just as she did then. Her prayer was accordingly granted. Parvati named the night for the worship of Iswara by mortals Maha-Sivaratri, or the great night of Siva, since pralaya is brought about by him. This period is really his night from the great night or pralaya which was the cause for the origin of this Shivaratri.

- **Fight between Vishnu and Brahma:** According to another legend in the Shiva Purana, once the other two of the triads of Hindu Gods, Brahma and Vishnu, were fighting over who was the superior of the two. Horrified at the intensity of the battle, the other gods asked Shiva to intervene. To make them realize the futility of their fight, Shiva assumed the form of a huge column of fire in between Brahma and Vishnu. Awestruck by its magnitude, they decided to find one end each to establish supremacy over the other. Brahma assumed the form of a swan and went upwards and Vishnu as Varaha went into the earth. Then Brahma and Mahavishnu repented for their mistake and prayed to Lord Shiva for forgiveness and worshipped the shiva lingam which manifested as the form of the flame. In the night of Shiva rathri Lord Shiva appeared before them and blessed them. This flaming linga, which is supposed to manifest every Shivaratri -- is also called Jyotirlinga.
- **Favorite day:** After creation was complete, Parvati asked Shiva which day pleases him the most. The Lord replied that the 14th night of the new moon, during the month of Maagha, is my most favourite day. It is known as Shivaratri. Parvati repeated these words to her friends, from whom the word spread over all creation.
- **The story of Chitrabhanu**(This was related by Bhishma whilst lying on the bed of arrows in the Shanti parva of Mahabharata): Once upon a time King Chitrabhanu of the Ikshvaku dynasty, who ruled over the whole of Jambudvipa, was observing a fast with his wife, it being the day of Maha Shivaratri. The sage Ashtavakra came on a visit to the court of the king.
- The sage asked the king the purpose of his observing the fast. King Chitrabhanu explained that he had a gift of remembering the incidents of his previous birth. The king said to the sage that in his previous he was a hunter in Varanasi and his name was Suswara. His only livelihood was to kill and sell birds and animals. One day while roaming through forests in search of animals he was overtaken by the darkness of night. Unable to return home, he climbed a tree for shelter. It happened to be a Bael tree. He had seen a deer that day but let it live, after seeing the deer's sad family. As hunger and thirst tormented him, he was kept awake throughout the night. His canteen leaked water as he thought of his poor wife and children who were starving and anxiously waiting for his return. To pass away the time that night he engaged himself in plucking the Bael leaves and dropping them down onto the ground.
- The next day he returned home and bought some food for himself and his family. The moment he was about to break his fast a stranger came to him, begging for food. He served the food first to stranger and then had his own. At the time of his death, he saw two messengers of Lord Shiva. They were sent down to conduct his soul to the abode of Lord Shiva. He learnt then for the first time of the great merit he had earned by the unconscious worship of Lord Shiva during the night of Shivaratri. The messengers told him that there was a Lingam at the bottom of the tree. The leaves he dropped fell on the Lingam. His canteen, which leaked water, washed the Lingam and he had fasted all day and all night. Thus, he unconsciously worshiped the Lord. As the conclusion of the tale the King said

that he lived in the abode of the Lord and enjoyed divine bliss for long ages and now he has reborn as Chitrabhanu.

- Mahabali: In a Shiva temple on a Maha Shiva rathri day the lamp kept in the altar was very dim. That time a mouse which came take its prey touched the flame. Due to the heat it moved its head immediately. In the process it kindled the lamp and the altar was illuminated well. Lord Shiva, pleased by this deed made the mouse Mahabali, the renowned asura king.

### Celebration and observance in different parts of India

Shivaratri is considered to be the auspicious time for the pilgrims to visit the twelve Jyotirlinga situated in different parts of the country to earn blessings from Lord Shiva.

- Kashmir : On the first day of the dark fortnight, called *Hurya Okdoh* the wholesale cleaning of the house, painting and decorating begins with gusto. The *pooja* room called *Thokur Kuth* and the front door called *Dar* are specially cleaned, one for the pooja and the other to welcome Shiva and Parvati, whose communion is the real essence of Shivaratri. The actual pooja begins in the night when all the family members assemble in the pooja room for the purpose. The *Vatuk*, representing various *Devatas* and *Bhairavas*, is worshipped under the directions of the *Kula-Purohita* (the family priest). This is an elaborate pooja for a good three hours and is followed by a sumptuous feast. All the items cooked are first offered to the *Vatak Nath*. On the *Amavasya* day the culminating pooja of the festival is held and the entire paraphernalia of *Vatuk* is taken off from its place. The only thing that remains is the disposal of the residual material i.e.; grass seats of the *Vatuk*, the flowers and *Naervan* tied round these pots and other such things. These are dropped into the river on the *Tila Ashtami*, and this marks the grand finale to this great festival. It is believed that every Kashmiri girl is a *Parvati* and is wedded to *Shiva*. The *Shivaratri* symbolises the wedding of the two, and on this occasion the *Bhairavas* and other *Ganas* accompanying *Lord Shiva* are fed with choicest dishes up to the fill and to their satisfaction. That is what is known as *Vatuk poojan*.
- Rajasthan: In Rajasthan, a special puja marks the auspicious occasion. A fair is held at *Dabeshwarji* in *Jaipur*. There are various rituals and traditions associated with *Shivaratri* celebration. The devotees of *Lord Shiva* take a dip in the nearby river at dawn and go to the temples of *Lord Shiva* to offer their prayers along with *Bilva* leaves. They observe fast throughout the day.
- Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh: The *Shivalingam* of *Matangeshwar* in *Khajuraho* is considered to be the biggest in India and is the only temple in the thousand-year-old *Khajuraho* temple complex where worship still continues.
- Andhra Pradesh: In *Andhra Pradesh*, pilgrims throng the *Sri Kalahasteshwara Temple* at *Kalahasti* and the *Bharamarambha Malikarjunaswamy Temple* at *Srisailam*
- Karnataka: In *Karnataka* majority of *Lingayats*, who are followers of the *Lingayat* cult of *Lord Shiva*, belong to *Karnataka*. They celebrate the festival with great fervour. In southern *Karnataka*, children are allowed to get into all kinds of

mischievous and asking for punishment is the rule of the day, probably originating from the mythological incident of Shiva punishing Brahma for lying.

- **Assam:** In Assam also it is celebrated with great devotion and faith the great Shiva temple, Umananda Temple, situated on the peacock island in the middle of Brahmaputra near Guwahati, attracts devotees from all over the country during the Shivaratri celebrations.
- **Mauritius:** Hindus in Mauritius make a pilgrimage to the holy volcanic lake, Grand Bassin, in honour of Lord Shiva.
- **Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh:** The Vishwanatha Temple at Kashi in Varanasi celebrates the Linga (symbolic of the pillar of light) and the manifestation of Shiva as the light of supreme wisdom.

Mahashivaratri is thus not only a ritual but also a cosmic definition of the Hindu universe. It dispels ignorance, emanates the light of knowledge, makes one aware of the universe, ushers in the spring after the cold and dry winter, and invokes the supreme power to take cognizance of the beings that were created by him

## **What sustains Sangh?**

(Collective Reading: Excerpts from Dattopant Thengadi ji's book, "What Sustains Sangh")

As members of the august organization the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh we are ever in the process of learning more and more about this body. The sangh is no longer only a Rashtriya phenomenon. It has grown into a gigantic world organization spreading its branches in all the continents. A key to the understanding of this sky scraping banyan tree is to delve deeply into the myriad incidents of the hallowed life and the various aspects of the luminous personality of Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. After doing that we shall be able to clearly grasp the vision the revered Doctorji entertained of the future of the Sangh. Without clearly grasping these we shall never be able to understand the soul of the Sangh. The diversified shape of the Sangh is actually the blossoming and flowering of the great Doctor's vision. All the various branches in the form of Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad and the Bharatiya Janata Party are but the progressive informant of that vision. In its rudimentary form Dr. Hedgewar had conceived of specialized bodies for specialized functions like Seva Bharati. Today's multifarious growth of the Sangh in its several avatars is the vindication of the truth that Doctorji was a great seer.

### **Loving service**

Once Swami Amitabh Maharaj and Swami Apurvananda were at the Ramakrishna Mission at Nagpur. Most swayamsevaks must have seen the former with the revered Shri Guruji. They heard a group of swayamsevaks passing the mission boisterously. When the swami duo came out, they found to their surprise Doctorji too was with them. Doctorji had walked four miles from his house. On inquiring, Dr. Hedgewar said that he was visiting a sick swayamsevak. So far and on foot, exclaimed the Swami. Doctorji's reply was most profound. Swamiji, distance is only in the mind. When a dear one is ill, the distance vanishes. In that close fellow-feeling of Hedgewarji lay today's well-knit family feeling that is the distinctive characteristic of the Sangh. For loving service is the swayamsevak's nature.

### **Bag of food on Doctorji's back**

Whenever and wherever natural calamities occur the swayamsevaks are always in the vanguard to rush to the rescue of the affected people, be it floods, earthquakes, draught or other disasters. The swayamsevaks are only following in the footsteps of Doctorji who carried bags of baked food to the affected people during the Damodar deluge, often carrying a bag on his own back across the raging river.

The venerable Doctor used to take turns with the swayamsevaks to attend to the sick, several wakeful nights on end. Many distinguished personalities availed of these services of the Sangh including services related to the funeral rites.

Krishnarao Moharil once came to know that a railway porter's wife was in labor. He left the work in hand and rushed her to the hospital. Earlier, the swayamsevaks had the

