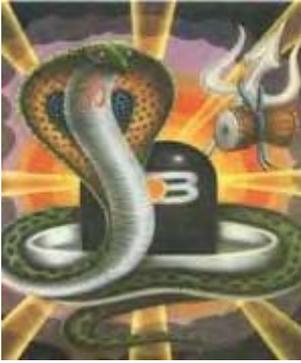


naagpanchami



Snakes are believed to have power over secret treasures and sexual virility.

Naag means 'serpent or cobra' and Panchami means 'fifth day', hence the celebration on the 5th day of the bright half of the month of Shravan. Sandalwood paste is used to draw snakes on wooden boards and sometimes, a small pot of milk decorated with flowers is placed near the snake holes, so that the snakes come out to drink from it. If a snake actually drinks from it, the devotee is said to be extremely lucky. It ensures freedom from danger in their families. Especially the women celebrate this festival with lots of enthusiasm.

the story behind it

Kadru was the mother of the Naags, and she once bet with her sister, Vinata, about the colour of Indra's horsetail. Vinata said that the horse's tail was white, just like the rest of its body, but Kadru made her sister sure that it was black. As Indra's horse trotted past, Kadru asked her sons, the Naags to coil around its tail so it would appear to be black. The Naags refused, as it would be a form of cheating, so Kadru cursed them. She said that a fire, as a punishment for disobeying her, would consume them. A Brahman softened the curse, and sent them to live in the netherworld. This happened on the 5th day of Shravan, and because the Naags were saved on this day, it is a great day for snake worship.

In Maharashtra, snake charmers go from house to house playing harmonic music with a wind instrument called 'pungi'. They entertain neighbours who stand around to watch the cobras sway to the music as they appear from their cane baskets. Women offer cooked rice & milk to the snakes and money & clothes are usually given to the people as a form of charity.

Clay snakes are usually brought home to worship in the day and immersed in the sea in the evening. Around a week before Naagpanchami, young men from the village go into the forest, and persuade the snakes to come out from their snake hills. They are then collected and taken home for the family to worship and are then released back into the forest on the day after Naagpanchami. As the sun sets, bullock carts take the clay snakes in a mammoth procession as they travel together to the nearest Shiva temple (as naag is associated with Lord Shiva) and they are let into the sea. There are stalls, fun and games to be enjoyed till late at night as a feast of sweets is also eaten by everyone.