

durga

Durga is known to be the Goddess of 'beyond reach' or 'inaccessible'. One of the names she is known by is 'Devi Mahishasuramardini'. This means 'the Goddess Killer of the Buffalo Demon'. Devotees see her to be gentle & mild and also, frightful & terrible.

There was once a demon, called Mahishasura, and he couldn't be killed by any of the gods, because he had a protective spell on him that stops any males from killing him. As Parvati was a female, only she was able to kill him. Mahishasura was in the form of a buffalo, and his name also meant, the buffalo demon – Mahisha meaning buffalo.

ā story

Hundreds & Hundreds of years ago, there were some differences between the Gods and the Demons. A terrible battle had started and it continued for ages. Unfortunately, the Gods got defeated, and they lost the battle. They all went to the superior, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, informing them about their defeat. The Gods were furious, they could not have this happening in their land. In their anger, parts from all the Gods came together, and another life was created, all in one single female form. The Devi kept laughing and laughing, and the skies were filled with a sort of cackling noise. The earth trembled, and the mountains moved as this life was created. The Gods were pleased, and cried 'Victory' to the one who rides the lion.

The great goddess was born, and she battled with Mahishasura. Mahisha tried many techniques, including changing his form every time she made an attempt to kill him. Even still she defeated him, and the gods praised her. She promised that if in need of aid, all they have to do is call, and she just disappeared.

navratri

The mood of Navratri is very colourful & unique and it is a festival of pure happiness. It is celebrated with great enthusiasm and is one of the most auspicious occasions of the year. 'nav' means nine and 'ratri' means nights, hence the name of the nine-night festival. Navratri comes twice a year, in mid March and the beginning of October. However, it is the one in October that is largely celebrated. Navratri is purely dedicated to the mother, or 'mataji' (goddess).

'On each of the nine days, Durga takes a new form, and with the help of weapons, she rides the lion to fight the demon Mahishasura. He was so powerful that no god could individually defeat him. We pray to Shakti (Durga) to fight him with the collective weapons. On the tenth day, Durga killed the demon.'

the basic concept of navratri

Navratri is divided into sets of three days, each section is devoted to one of the goddesses, which symbolise an aspect of womanhood. On the first three days, we worship Kali, the goddess of honour, who destroys all of our impurities and sins. During the next three days, we worship Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. It is believed that she blesses her devotees with luck and prosperity. On the fifth day, all books are gathered and a lamp is lit to call upon Saraswati, who is the goddess we worship for the final three days. Also known as the goddess of knowledge & wisdom, and the wife of Brahma. On the eighth or the ninth day, many people take part in a 'yagna puja', at their own home or attend the one at their local temple. It is a sacrifice offered to the fire, and where we bid our farewell to the goddesses. For us to be successful in our lives, we need blessings from all corners of femininity.

Navratri

Devotees of Durga may choose to fast during this festive period, to devote their time to god, and protect their health, family, values and property. Navratri is also another festival ensuring a new start, where your sins have been cleared through these nine days.

This is a festival celebrated by men and women from all areas of society. The women dress up in colourful 'ghagra cholis', decorated with sequins and mirrors. Men dress up in 'khafni pyjamas' or 'chauni jabo's'

the traditional dances

Garba is the name of one of the traditional dances. The full name is 'Garbha Deep'. 'Garbha' meaning the inside or the womb of the pot which was used to store drinking water. 'Deep' means diva or lamp. Traditionally, the diva used to be placed in this earthen pot, holes used to be made and it was decorated using flowers, mirrors and covered with a coconut. The 'Garbha Deep' was a sign of 'Shakti' and it was placed in the middle, where women would dance around it in a rhythm, clapping their hands as they go along. These days a showpiece with the photos of the 'navdurga' is placed in the middle rather than the 'Garbha Deep'.

Dandiya was a traditional dance for men. This was because it was a branch of sword fighting, and anyone of the female gender would not be seen doing this. It involves bamboo or wooden sticks of a 2 feet length, and the men in pairs hitting their sticks with the other person, going around in a circle. It was a traditional dance that incorporated goddess with the art of swords and entertainment. The dance begins slow, gradually going faster and faster, until the music stops. There is often a pause, before the next dance begins.

'To be in Gujarat during Navratri, is to witness Gujarat at her best.'

दुसहरा

Dussera is celebrated on the tenth day, it is a day of victory. There are many meanings behind this festival. Even then, it is where good conquered evil.

- *Navrati* – It was the day that Durga defeated Mahishasura.
- *Ramayan* – It was the day that Rama won the war with Ravan.
- *Mahabharat* – It was the end of the Pandav princes exile, where he returned with his weapons to claim his kingdom.

Every year, this day is relived and celebrated. Hundreds of people gather in the park or an outside field, where a large statue of 'Rakshas' or the demon, made from grass & fireworks is lit like a bonfire. Traditional songs are sung and it is followed by a procession of fireworks that leads late into the night.