

NAVARATHRI CELEBRATIONS

Navarathri means nine nights. In Indian culture these are followed with great fervor both religiously and socially. It is very rare in India to have a village without a temple let it be for Rama, Siva or Krishna (Vishnu). Always these temples have their concert Goddesses also and Navrathris are special occasions for puja celebrations. In North India which is subjected to frequent wars and invasions these are merged into social celebrations – like in Bengal where it is common to get the married daughters to their parents and treat them specially. The Navarathris are celebrated from Sukla Padyami to Navami tithis of Hindu panchanga.

Infact there are two Navarathris – Vasant and Sarat. Vasant coming in Caitra masa and Sarat coming in the month of Asvya. The ninth day of Caitra is doubly auspicious and is celebrated as birth day and marriage day of Lord Rama.

For those following Devi or Sakthi worship there is no other time more suitable or auspicious than these Navrathris. In today's global village if one wants to follow the Hindu Scriptures to the best of ones ability the question comes when to celebrate and what to celebrate. Socially in many places of India these are days of home coming for married daughters, inviting newly married couple to brides place and enjoying with festivities and displaying all artistic talents by having “ BOMMMALA KOLUVU” – of arrangement of different gods, toys and animals as a demonstration of universal peaceful coexistence.

The timing of these is defined by the Soni-Lunar Calendar of Sukla Padyami as the first day of that masa at the time of sunrise. As for Hindu Panchanga day is defined from sun rise to next day's sunrise. So they start with Padyami with sunrise (say Asvayuja – meaning the full moon day of that month has Asvani as the star) and close with Dasami when dasami should have Sravanam star which is considered to be that of Devi herself. It is this sunrise definition which gives variations in the duration of these Navarathris. They vary from 8 days in one year to 10 days in another year. The place also affects a lot – for e.g. in 2002 in USA CA it was for 9 days as Padyami started at sunrise locally – where as it was evening in India and so Navarathris were only for 8 days only in India.

Regarding what is to be done – our scriptures always suggest doing as for ones capacity – infact this is part of “ SAMKALPA” of any puja - meaning one has to do as for his best ability and capacity. The Purana of Devi Bhagavatam suggests the following. With the help of persons with Vedic knowledge one should perform “Devi Yagam” to an idol of one of her forms or on Yantram or atleast to a copper plate on which her (Navavarna) Mantra is written. One should have a principle of observing total fast, or eating only prasada etc. One should do Trikala Puja (three times a day) – with either shodasa (16) or catus shashthi (64) upacaras. The extensive pujas may include puja of Sri Lalitha Sahasranama , Trisati and Navavarna archana followed by Suvasini and Kumari puja. Candi homam on every day is also desirable. Infact Candi puja is very common in North East part of India. Recitation of Candi saptasati and Devibhagavatam is also highly recommended. This Devi Yaagam can be as for ones ability of Citta (Devotion) Sudhdhi(=Purity), Dravya (Materials used) Sudhdhi and Mantra sudhdhi. As said in Lalita sahsranama Antar mukha samaradhya Bahirmukha Sudurlabha (Easily attainable by internal Prayers only) Antar or manasik yaaga is most desirable. In this nothing except devotion is

needed. The Yaaga is to be for her Nirguna form. In this Pancha Pranaas become the agni the sacred fire , Mind as the sacred place, and Yaga becomes the rise of kundalini in which all karmas or results of actions or offered as the sacrifice. The culmination is the Mahayaga Krama radhya of Lalitha sahasranama – where the yoga of the union of Jivaatma and Paramatma occurs.

The Only aim of all these rituals is to realize and experience the Identity that the Doer , The receipient of Devi in Nirguna or Sadguna form and the Action of Yaga is one and same as meant in “ Aham Iti Eva Bhavaye Bhavaniim” (= O Mother Bhavani I am no other than you)

Those who cannot do all the 9 days choose to follow Trirathri Vratam of doing these on last three days of Saptami Ashtami and Navami – these three days are specially designated for the trinities of Sarasathi , Lakshmi and Maha Kali – representing the Triguna nature of Sadguna Brahman. The sapta sati or 700 slokas of Markandeya purana describe the victory of good over bad as a story of Devi in these three forms.

Thus the Puja Holidays as they are popularly called in India are specially meant for rigorous sadhana for the fulfillment of the objectives of life – Dharma (Righteous living) , Ardha (The means like money to do so) Kama (The fulfillment of all associated desires) and Moksha..

At least an attitude to follow some sadhana in the above lines as per ones capacity will surely uplift us from our Basal qualities – to lead a more happy and contended life.