

Volume 10 | Winter 2025

ARPANAM

Cultural & Spiritual Studies

An Offering beyond the rituals:

The Soul of Devotion

Annadanam:

How Temple Kitchens
Feed Millions Every Day

About Hindu philosophy

behind offerings.

JAGANNATH

56 BHOG

A Divine
Confluence

*How Devotees participate in cleaning
the River Ganga?*





Express your care & devotion
for cows by offering

Gau Poshana Seva

"Whoever feeds the cow with grass and water every day derives the benefit equivalent to performing Ashwamedha Yajna. There is no doubt about this."

(Brhat Parasara Smriti 5.26-27)

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दानेन धान्यं,
दानेन वितं,
दानेन कीर्तिः च जीवति ।

"Through offering, one attains prosperity, wealth, and everlasting honor."



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Editor's message

From the flickering Deep Daan on the sacred waters of the Ganga to the humble Naivedyam placed before deities, each act of offering carries profound spiritual meaning. Hinduism teaches us that the true essence of an offering lies not in its material form but in the bhava (sentiment) with which it is given. Whether it is a handful of rice from a poor devotee, the selfless service of temple volunteers, or the soulful notes of a bhajan, every offering becomes divine when made with pure intent.

This magazine explores the philosophy, rituals, and symbolism behind Hindu offerings. Through insightful interviews with priests and devotees, we uncover personal stories of faith. We also examine how acts of giving—whether through food, prayers, or service—bridge the gap between the divine and the human.

As you turn these pages, may you find a deeper appreciation for the sacred traditions that continue to illuminate our spiritual journey.

Each gesture, steeped in devotion, transcends the physical to become a bridge between the soul and the divine. In this exploration, we celebrate the timeless wisdom that offerings are not mere rituals but heartfelt conversations with the sacred."

"Offerings, in their purest form, are more than just rituals ; they are expressions of devotion, gratitude, and surrender"



Shilpa

Shilpa Bhawsar
Editor-in-Chief

THE ESSENCE OF Offerings.

Offerings, known as **Upacharas**, are an integral part of Hindu rituals, symbolizing devotion (bhakti) towards the divine. From the simplest gesture of lighting a diya to elaborate temple rituals, the act of offering reflects a devotee's love, respect, and surrender to the divine. Hindu scriptures emphasize that offerings are not just about material objects but also about the purity of intention and selfless devotion behind them.

Hinduism, deeply rooted in the principle of Sanatana Dharma (eternal duty), teaches that the act of giving—whether to deities, fellow beings, or nature—creates a divine connection. It is believed that offerings bridge the gap between the devotee and the deity, creating an exchange of blessings and energy.

Why Are Offerings Made?

The tradition of making offerings is based on the philosophy that everything we have is given by nature and the divine, and thus, offering a portion of it back is a way of expressing gratitude. The Bhagavad Gita (9.26) beautifully summarizes this idea:

"A leaf, a flower, a fruit, or even water—offered with love and devotion—is accepted by me."

This verse emphasizes that it is not the grandeur of the offering that matters but the sincerity of the heart. Whether one offers flowers, incense, food, or prayers, each act symbolizes surrender and faith.



The Philosophy Behind Offerings: Seva and Bhakti

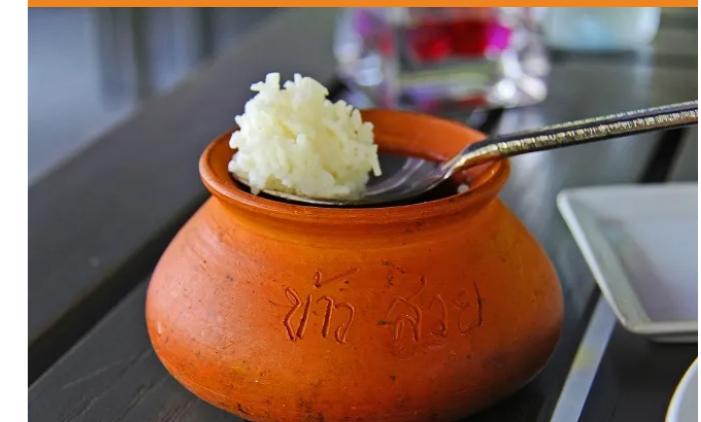
Bhakti (Devotion): The Heartfelt Connection with the Divine, the concept of bhakti is central to Hindu philosophy, emphasizing a personal and loving relationship with the divine. Devotees express their love through various acts of worship, including chanting hymns, performing aarti, and making offerings at temples or home altars. Hindu saints like Mirabai, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and Tulsidas have emphasized bhakti as the highest path to spiritual fulfillment. Their teachings suggest that an offering is not just a ritual but a way of surrendering oneself to the divine will.

Seva (Service): The Highest Form of Offering Seva, or selfless service, is regarded as one of the most meaningful forms of offering in Hinduism. Unlike physical offerings placed before a deity, seva is about giving to the world in the name of the divine. Acts such as feeding the hungry, helping the sick, and protecting the environment are all considered greater than temple rituals.

Many Hindu traditions emphasize seva as a path to liberation (moksha).

Do you know?

"Annadanam (feeding the hungry) is the highest form of Seva, often practiced in worldwide temples."



The World's Largest Spiritual Gathering



The Significance

According to Hindu mythology, the origin of the Kumbh Mela is linked to the Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean), where gods and demons fought over the nectar of immortality. During this celestial battle, drops of nectar fell at the four sacred sites, making them spiritually charged locations for purification and enlightenment. It is rooted in the belief that bathing in these holy rivers during the Kumbh period washes away sins and leads to spiritual liberation (moksha). Devotees, saints, and ascetics from across the world.

Rituals and Traditions

Shahi Snan (Royal Bath): The revered saints and sadhus, including the Naga Sadhus, take the first dip in the river, marking the beginning of the holy bathing period.

Spiritual Discourses & Satsangs: Renowned gurus and spiritual leaders share wisdom on meditation, self-realization, and dharma.

Akharas & Processions: Different sects of sadhus, such as Aghoris, Naga Sadhus, and Vaishnav Akharas, display their unique traditions. Mahakumbh represents the eternal struggle between good and evil, as depicted in the Samudra Manthan myth, where drops of Amrit fell at the four sacred sites.

A Symbol

The Mahakumbh is not just a religious gathering but a celebration of India's cultural, spiritual, and philosophical heritage. It unites people from diverse backgrounds in a shared pursuit of divine blessings and self-purification. The event also attracts international scholars, yogis, and researchers fascinated by its deep-rooted traditions. Mahakumbh represents the eternal struggle between good and evil, as depicted in the Samudra Manthan myth, where drops of Amrit fell at the four sacred sites.



The Mahakumbh Mela 2025 in prayagraj holds profound spiritual, cultural, and social significance, making it one of the most revered gatherings in the world. Rooted in ancient tradition, it is believed that taking a holy dip in the sacred rivers during this auspicious period washes away sins, purifies the soul, and grants moksha (liberation from the cycle of rebirth). The event symbolizes faith, devotion, and the eternal connection between humans and the divine, drawing millions of pilgrims, saints, yogis, and seekers from across the globe. It is not just a religious gathering but a melting pot of cultures, philosophies, and spiritual wisdom, where renowned gurus and scholars engage in discourses, meditation sessions, and yogic practices, imparting ancient knowledge to those in pursuit of enlightenment.

During Mahakumbh, the Shahi Snan (Royal Bath) is the most significant ritual, where revered saints, Naga Sadhus (naked ascetics covered in ash), and spiritual leaders from various Akhadas (Hindu monastic orders) take the first ceremonial dip, marking the beginning of the holy baths. The festival is not only a religious event but also a grand cultural and social gathering, featuring Vedic discussions, devotional singing, religious discourses, and spiritual debates. It is believed that the waters of the rivers become divinely charged during

this period, bestowing blessings upon those who immerse themselves. The Mahakumbh also serves as a meeting ground for spiritual seekers, where saints and mystics impart wisdom, share ancient traditions, and guide devotees on their spiritual journeys.

The scale of Mahakumbh is beyond imagination, with temporary cities being erected to accommodate millions of pilgrims. These massive settlements include tented accommodations, free food stalls, healthcare services, sanitation facilities, and security arrangements to manage the influx of devotees. The 2013 Mahakumbh Mela at Prayagraj witnessed a staggering 100 million visitors, setting the record for the largest human gathering in history. In recognition of its cultural and religious significance, UNESCO has designated the Kumbh Mela as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Each Mahakumbh is a spectacle of faith, devotion, and discipline, uniting people from all walks of life under the sacred banner of spirituality. The next Mahakumbh Mela is scheduled for 2025 in Prayagraj, where millions of pilgrims from across the globe will gather once again to partake in this extraordinary spiritual phenomenon.

Talk with Sri Sri Ravisankar Ji

Is concept of offering is deeply rooted in spiritual traditions. How do you define the true essence of offering?

Offering is an expression of love, gratitude, and surrender. It is not about giving something away, but rather about sharing what we have with devotion and purity. The essence of offering is selflessness—when we offer something, whether to the Divine, nature, or another being, we acknowledge that nothing truly belongs to us. Everything is part of the universe, and we are merely channels of that abundance.

Many religious traditions have specific rituals for offering. How do these rituals help in spiritual growth?

Rituals provide a structured way to express devotion and bring our minds into a meditative state. When we offer flowers, food, or light a lamp, it is not just an outward act—it is about offering our ego, desires, and attachments. These rituals help cultivate discipline, humility, and devotion, making us more mindful and present. Over time, they deepen our connection with the Divine and bring inner peace.

Offerings are often material—flowers, food, money. But is there a deeper form of offering?

Yes, the highest form of offering is offering oneself—our time, skills, and service. Material offerings have value, but they are symbolic. The greatest offering is love, kindness, and compassion. When we dedicate our actions for the well-being of others, when we serve selflessly, that becomes the truest offering. Even a simple prayer with a pure heart is more valuable than the most expensive gift.

The Bhagavad Gita mentions offering even thesmallest things with devotion. How does intention shape the power of an offering?

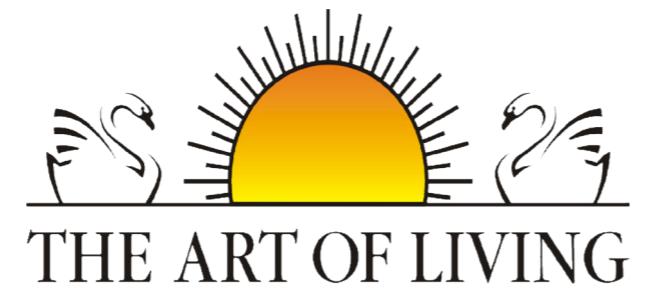
Intention is everything. The Bhagavad Gita says, “Param, pushpam, phalam, toyam”—even a leaf, flower, fruit, or water, when offered with devotion, is accepted by the Divine. It is not about what you give, but how you give. When an offering is made with love and sincerity, it carries a powerful energy. That is why even prayers, mantras, and good intentions are considered powerful offerings.

ART OF LIVING

It is a global movement dedicated to promoting inner peace, well-being, and self-transformation. Through techniques like Sudarshan Kriya, meditation, and yoga, it helps individuals manage stress, enhance mental clarity, and cultivate emotional resilience. Rooted in ancient wisdom, it emphasizes seva (service), sadhana (spiritual practice), and satsang (collective wisdom) to foster a balanced and fulfilling life. With a presence in over 180 countries, it integrates spirituality with social responsibility, inspiring millions to lead a life of compassion, mindfulness, and purpose.

Message Guruji would you like to give to all readers about the art of offering...

Offering is a path to inner fulfillment. When we give with an open heart, without expectation, we receive much more in return peace, love, and divine blessings. Make every moment, every action, and every thought an offering of love and gratitude. That is the real essence of spiritual living. "Faith and devotion are not just rituals; they are the essence of a peaceful and fulfilled life. The art of offering—whether through prayer, service, or kindness—connects us with the divine and nurtures harmony within and around us. True spirituality lies in love, humility, and a heart that gives selflessly. May this magazine inspire you to embrace these timeless traditions, deepen your inner journey, and spread light and compassion in the world.



Ritual of Prasadam

Prasadam holds profound spiritual, cultural, and social significance in Hinduism, symbolizing the ultimate act of surrender, devotion, and gratitude toward the divine. The word "prasadam" in Sanskrit means "mercy" or "grace," signifying that it is not just food but a sacred blessing from the deity. In Hindu rituals and worship, food offerings are made to God before consumption, reinforcing the principle that all sustenance comes from the divine and should first be offered back as an act of humility and devotion. This act of offering is a reminder of selflessness, surrender, and the importance of gratitude in one's spiritual journey.

The Bhagavad Gita (9.26) beautifully encapsulates this concept: "**If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit, or water, I will accept it.**" This verse highlights that God does not seek material wealth but the sincerity and love behind the offering. It teaches that even the simplest act of devotion, done with pure intent, is received and reciprocated by the divine. Beyond temples, prasadam plays a crucial role in Hindu households, where food is often offered before meals as a daily spiritual practice.

ISKCON

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness

The offering of food (prasadam) is a daily ritual, deeply rooted in the Vaishnav tradition. Devotees prepare pure, vegetarian meals with love and devotion, which are first offered to Lord Krishna before being distributed among devotees and visitors. This act symbolizes selfless service, gratitude, and the principle of sharing divine blessings with all.

The daily food offering follows strict spiritual guidelines, ensuring that it is sattvic (pure, without onion, garlic, or tamasic elements) and prepared in a meditative, prayerful state. Once the food is offered on the altar, it is transformed into prasadam (sanctified food), which is then distributed among devotees, guests, and the needy.

Additionally, ISKCON runs large-scale food distribution programs, such as Akshaya Patra, serving millions of free meals daily to underprivileged children and communities. This initiative highlights the movement's belief that feeding others is an act of devotion and service to God. Through this offering, ISKCON fosters unity, gratitude, and spiritual well-being, ensuring that the sacred act of sharing food remains an integral part of its global mission.



PHOOL

Revolutionizing Sustainability and Innovation

Phool.co, founded by Ankit Agarwal, is transforming temple waste into ecofriendly products, redefining sustainability in the wellness industry. The company's journey began with repurposing discarded flowers from the Ganges River into premium incense sticks and cones.

A Game-Changing Innovation: Fleather

Beyond incense, Phool's latest rough, Fleather, is a plant-based alternative to leather, aiming to eliminate the need for animal leather. This innovation marks a significant step towards sustainable and cruelty-free fashion.

Commitment to Ethics and Growth

Phool.co prioritizes honest ingredients, ethical sourcing, and superior quality. With ongoing global expansion and investment in research, the company is committed to sustainability and conscious consumerism.

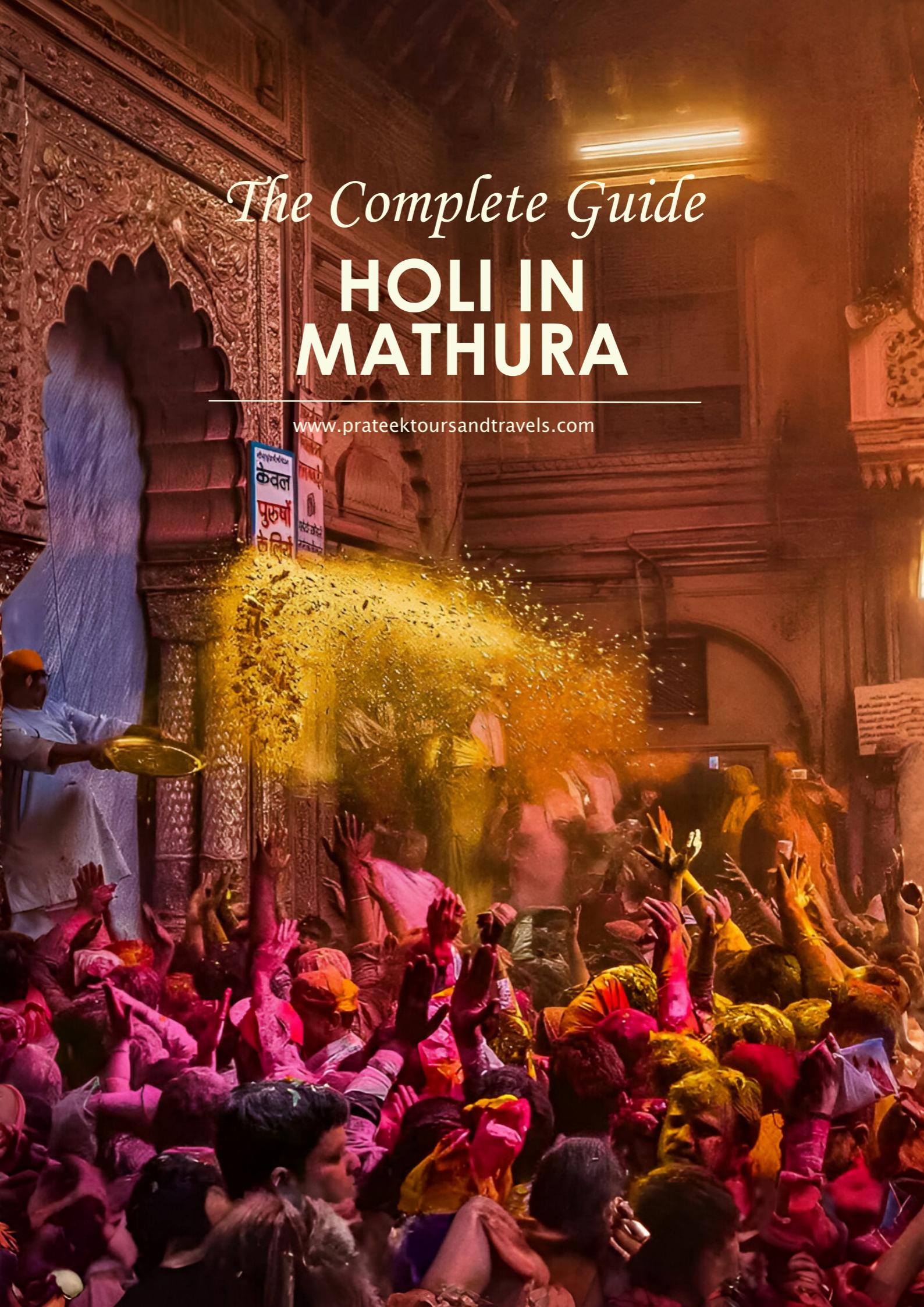
Impact and Future Vision

By creating employment for marginalized women and reducing environmental pollution, Phool is making a tangible social impact. As Agarwal states, "We are building a brand that blends sustainability with purpose."

With its vision for luxury, ethics, and sustainability, Phool.co is pioneering a greener, more responsible future.

Expanding Global Influence

Phool.co is rapidly expanding its presence, gaining recognition for its unique approach to sustainability. The brand is exploring new markets and collaborations, ensuring that its eco-friendly innovations reach a wider audience. By continuously evolving, Phool is setting new industry standards for ethical production and environmental responsibility. By ensuring that every aspect of its operations aligns with sustainability, the company continues to inspire ethical consumerism while minimizing environmental impact.



The Complete Guide
HOLI IN MATHURA

[www.pratektoursandtravels.com](http://www.prateektoursandtravels.com)



Jagannath Temple, Odisha

The Mahaprasada is not just a meal but a sacred offering infused with divine blessings. It holds immense spiritual and cultural significance, deeply rooted in centuries-old traditions. This revered prasad is first offered to Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra, after which it is distributed among thousands of devotees daily. The temple's Ananda Bazaar, the world's largest open-air food market, serves Mahaprasada to pilgrims, fostering a sense of community and shared devotion.

The preparation of Mahaprasada follows a unique and strictly ritualistic process in the temple's kitchen, which is considered one of the largest and most ancient kitchens in the world. The cooking is done by Suanas (traditional temple cooks) who follow prescribed customs and purity standards. The food is cooked in earthen pots stacked atop one another over a wood fire, with an astonishing belief that the pot at the top cooks first, defying conventional heat dynamics. This phenomenon is considered an act of divine intervention.



The Jagannath Rath Yatra is an annual grand festival held in Puri, Odisha, dedicated to Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra. The deities are placed on chariots and pulled by thousands of devotees from the Jagannath Temple to the Gundicha Temple, symbolizing their visit to their aunt's home.

Mahaprasada is prepared without the use of onion or garlic, adhering to Satvik. It is one of the largest community offerings in the world, feeding thousands of devotees daily. The food is first offered to Lord Jagannath, then to Maa Bimala, a form of Goddess Lakshmi, which makes it Mahaprasad (otherwise, it is called "Anna Prasad").

The temple's kitchen, known as the 'Rosha Ghar', is one of the largest kitchens in the world. Around 500-600 cooks (Suanas) and helpers (Mahasuanas) prepare the Mahaprasad daily.

It is considered one of the holiest prasadams in Hinduism and is prepared in a unique, traditional manner inside the temple's kitchen. The food is first offered to Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra inside the temple. Seven earthen pots are stacked on top of each other, placed over a single wood fire.



Interesting Mysteries

The Flag Mystery: The flag on top of the temple always flutters in the opposite direction of the wind.

No Shadow: The temple's main structure casts no shadow at any time of the day.

No Birds Flying Over the Temple: Unlike other temples, no birds or planes fly above the Jagannath temple.

The Mahaprasad: The temple serves a special offering called Mahaprasad, prepared in clay pots using a unique cooking method where seven pots are stacked on top of each other, yet the topmost one cooks first.

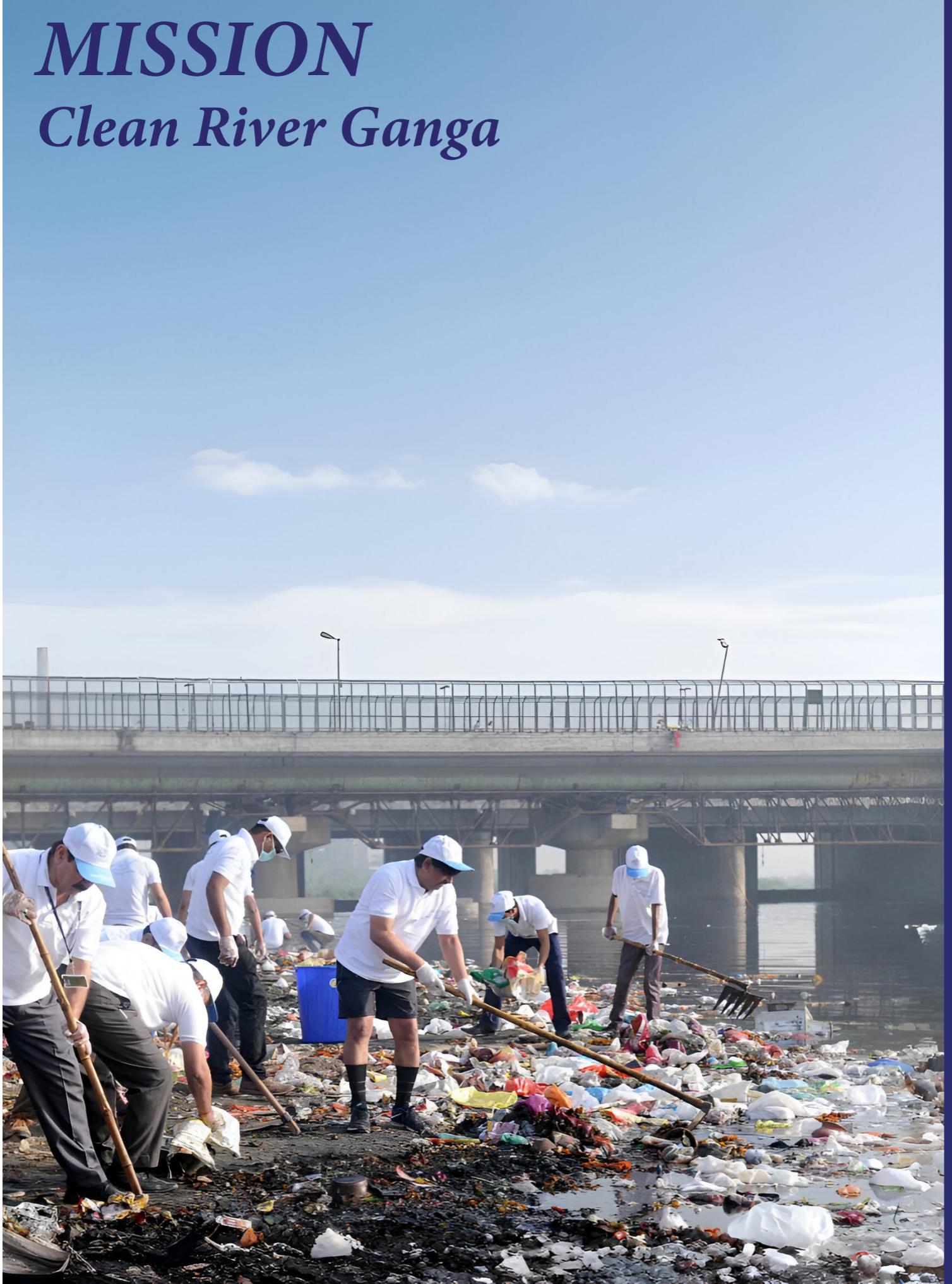
The Sound of the Ocean Disappears: Inside the temple, the sound of ocean waves is not heard, but as soon as one steps outside, the sound.

The Changing Idols: Every 12 to 19 years, the wooden idols of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, and Subhadra are replaced with new ones.

The Legend Behind Mahaprasad

The legend behind Mahaprasad at the Jagannath Temple in Puri is deeply rooted in faith and devotion. According to mythology, Lord Jagannath, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, instructed that food offered to him should be prepared in a special way and distributed among devotees as Mahaprasad, signifying divine blessings. It is believed that Maa Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth, oversees the temple kitchen, ensuring that the food never falls short, no matter how many devotees arrive. A popular legend states that once, the King of Puri doubted whether the food prepared daily would be sufficient for everyone. To test this, he instructed the temple priests to prepare a smaller quantity. That day, when the food was served, it miraculously satisfied all devotees, reaffirming the divine presence in the temple's kitchen. Another mystical aspect of Mahaprasad is that it is cooked in earthen pots placed in a stacked formation over wood-fired stoves, and it is said that the food in the topmost pot cooks first, defying natural laws. This sacred offering, cooked without tasting and prepared following age-old traditions, is considered to carry the blessings of Lord Jagannath.

MISSION *Clean River Ganga*



A Sacred Initiative for a Pure River

The Clean Ganga Mission, also known as **Namami Gange**, is a flagship initiative **launched by the Government of India in 2014** to restore and preserve the sacred Ganges River.

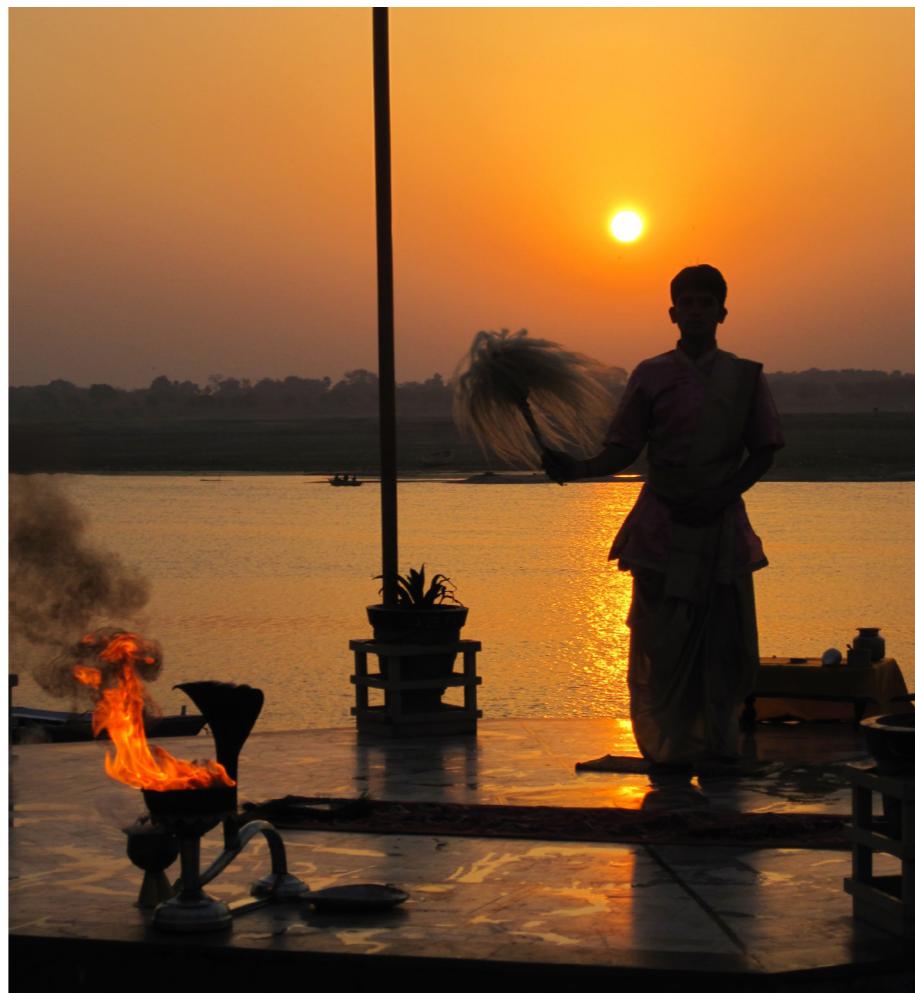
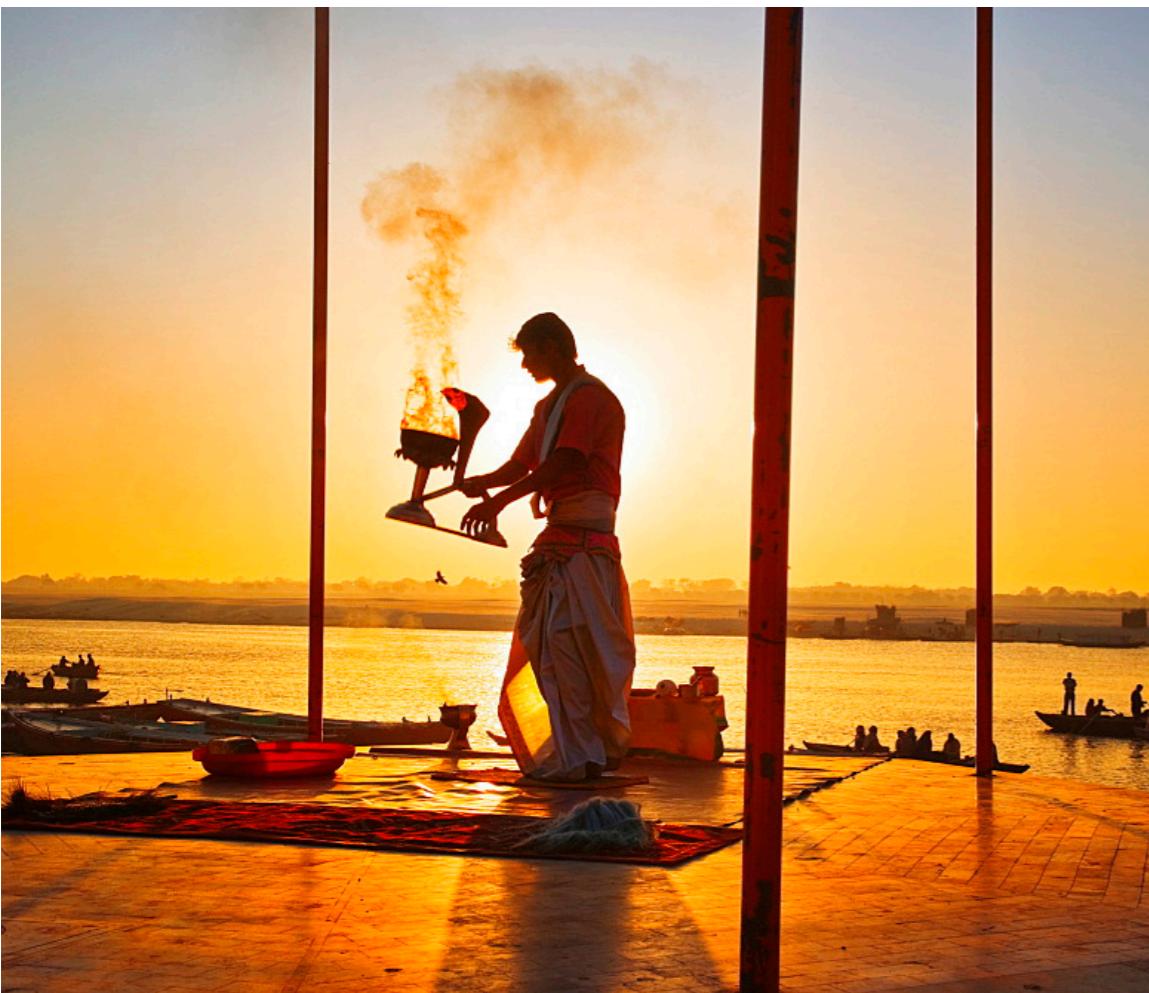
The mission aims to reduce pollution, rejuvenate the river ecosystem, and ensure sustainable water management. To achieve this, large-scale sewage treatment plants (STPs) have been established to prevent industrial and domestic waste from contaminating the river. Strict regulations have been enforced on industries to curb effluent discharge, while community-driven efforts promote eco-friendly rituals to prevent plastic and chemical offerings from polluting the water.

Devotees participate in cleaning the Ganga because of its spiritual, cultural, and ecological importance. Many devotees see cleaning the river as an act of devotion and service (seva) to Mother Ganga, ensuring that it remains pure for future generations. Many believe that a clean Ganga reflects a clean soul and a responsible society, motivating them to participate in awareness drives, clean-up campaigns, and eco-friendly rituals that reduce pollution. The mission has made notable progress, with improved water quality in several areas, visible reductions in foam and floating waste, and enhanced sewage treatment capacity.

However, Namami Gange is a significant step toward restoring the Ganga's purity, ensuring future generations continue to benefit from its sacred and life-sustaining waters. To prevent industrial pollutants, strict regulations have been placed on factories along the riverbanks, requiring them to install treatment systems. Additionally, solid waste management projects and river surface cleaning drives have been initiated to remove floating waste, including plastic and floral offerings. Beyond pollution control, Namami Gange also focuses on biodiversity conservation by protecting aquatic life, such as the Gangetic dolphin, and promoting afforestation along the river banks to prevent soil erosion. The initiative also integrates public awareness programs, involving local communities, NGOs, and volunteers in clean-up drives and educational campaigns.

**“Flowing Pure, Flowing Free –
Ganga is Our Legacy!”**

Ganga Ghat, Varanasi



Ganga Aarti is a breathtaking spiritual ritual performed every evening on the sacred banks of the Ganges River, symbolizing devotion, gratitude, and the deep connection between humanity and nature. As the sun sets, priests dressed in spiritual tradition attire perform the Aarti with large brass lamps (deepams), moving them in synchronized circular motions while chanting sacred mantras. The air fills with the sound of conch shells, bells, and bhajans, creating a mesmerizing atmosphere of spiritual transcendence.

Devotees gather in large numbers, sitting by the ghats or floating in boats, as they offer prayers, flowers, and floating diyas to the river, believing it to be . The sight of countless flick lights drifting on the river enhances the divine ambience, making the ritual experience.

Ganga Aarti is most famously performed at Dashashwamedh Ghat in Varanasi, Har Ki Pauri in Haridwar, and Triveni Ghat in Rishikesh, each offering a unique yet deeply spiritual experience. The ceremony holds profound symbolism—fire divine energy, water signifies purity, sound creates positive vibrations, and incense smoke carries prayers to the heavens. More than just a religious event, Ganga Aarti is a celebration of faith, unity, and cultural heritage, a profound sense of peace and spiritual awakening. The ghats are not only spiritual centers but also cultural hubs, having inspired poets, philosophers, and artists for centuries. They are depicted in films and literature as symbols of India's deep-rooted traditions. Additionally, the river plays a vital role in the local economy, supporting tourism.

Flower Venders outside the Temples

This vibrant image beautifully encapsulates the soul of India's traditional flower markets, where the air is thick with the fragrance of freshly plucked blooms, and the vivid colors create a feast for the eyes. Marigold garlands, strung with meticulous care, dominate the scene, symbolize purity, prosperity, and spiritual devotion. These flowers hold deep cultural and religious significance, adorning temples, homes, and wedding venues, and playing a key role in festivals such as Diwali and Durga Puja. At the heart of the image, a woman in a striking red sari stands as a symbol of perseverance and tradition. She represents the countless small scale vendors who dedicate their lives to sustaining this age-old trade. Her expression, a mix of contemplation and determination, mirrors the daily struggles faced.

The market itself, with its bustling ambiance, colorful stalls, and neatly arranged flowers, tells a deeper story of India's interconnectedness with nature. It is a place where faith meets commerce, where the devotion of the buyer aligns with the hard work of the seller, and where every petal carries whispers of prayers, blessings, and tradition.

Beyond just a place of trade, the flower market is a cultural hub, preserving customs passed down through generations and reinforcing the their found role of nature in spirituality and daily life. Despite their work being physically demanding and subject to weather conditions, flower vendors form an integral part of the temple ecosystem, sustaining both their livelihoods.





Closing of the month

Faith and devotion have always been the pillars of spiritual life, shaping the way we connect with the divine and with one another. The art of offering—whether through prasadam, rituals, or acts of selfless service—transcends mere tradition. May we continue to uphold these sacred traditions with reverence, spreading love, compassion, and the joy of giving, ensuring that the spirit of devotion remains alive for generations to come.

SOMETHING

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