

Introduction to **Yogic & Vedic Heritage** **FESTIVALS OF BHĀRATA**

Festivals and Holy Days are very familiar, very important interwoven part of our religious and social life. Leaving aside the holy days, undoubtedly, festivals are objects of natural love to the entire human race. Poet Laureate *Kalidasa*, has observed this truth and says ‘Human beings are fond of festivities’ (*"utsava priya khalu manuShyaaH" shaakuntala Act 6*). They are especially happy occasions of life. The most common method in which people all over the world celebrate festivals is by getting together with family and friends, enjoying the savory gourmet foods, drinking to the best of their ability (at times, even spending beyond their means), singing, dancing and chit chatting to their hearts content, forgetting their troubles, if any. Whenever an opportune occasion arises even animals, birds and vegetation observe the ‘eat, drink, make merry and rest and this verily is the feast’ principle, which brings limited happiness. In addition, since they do not have mental volitions and doubts, worries, and anxieties they immerse more deeply on those merry occasions, enjoy the sensual pleasures, relatively more than us. However, human beings brag of their superiority in statements like "Man is the roof and crown of all things" (Tennyson), and ‘there is nothing that compares

P.S:

- 1) *All Sanskrit and vernacular words are used in Roman script only.*
- 2) *Transliteration has not been used in this chapter to facilitate the readers to read easily the sanskrit and vernacular words.*

to human body' (*"naratan sama nahEEm kavaniwu dEhee" kaakabhushunDigaruDa samvaada, tulasi raamayaN*). If these statements were not to be vain proclamations, but true, the standards of our festival celebrations should rise above the level of animalistic merry making. Each and every one of festivals that we celebrate ought to be rooted in sound judgment, and the planning, decorations, the serenity and the bliss, and the wealth of experience we derive from celebrations should meet even higher standards. These higher standards hinge on the cultural refinement of the practicing communities and they apply to *'hoLi'* and *deepaavaLi* of Hindus, Bakreed and Ramzaan of Muslims, Easter or Christmas of Christians.

We have reviewed the generic meaning of the festivals. In addition to the festivals, we celebrate holy days known as *"haridina"*. Although this word has distinct conventional and philosophical meaning (these meanings will be explained subsequently), we may view these holy days as special occasions set apart for worship. Such holy days are found in every religious tradition that believes in God and in divine incarnations.

Although festivals and holy days, are celebrated by all people, sects, traditions, cultures and nations in a generic form, an in depth study reveals that the festivals and holy days shaped by the *sanaatana aarya bhaarateeya* culture have many distinctive features. The term *"sanaatana"* used here, does not convey the limited meaning 'that which belongs to ancient times or primeval'. We have to grasp its meaning as 'eternal' (*'sadaatanasanaatanaaH'*) as illustrated in the lexicon. In a similar vein, the term 'aarya', is not used to convey the idea of a sect of people with a distinguishing skin colour and language as has been interpreted by some of the modern historians. It is used in its true sense 'one who speaks of the supreme being', and 'learned (scholarly) preceptors' as stated in the following quotations: (*suShTu eerayanti prakRuSTaarthamiti aaryaaH*), (*"yamaaryaaH kriyaamaNam tu shaMsantvaagamavEdinaH | smRuti chandrikaa, kaa I"*). (*'yadaaryamasyaamabhilaaShi mE manaH'*

shaakuntala anka 1), and (*nacaavadadhbbharturavarNamaaryaa' raghuvaMsha sarga 14*). The term '*bharateeya*' is not used to refer to people belonging to a sovereign territory which is determined by politics and may change from time to time. We can understand that the intention of using this term is to convey "people engaged in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment" (*bhaaroopassatyakaamassatya sankalpaH*), in the spirit of the upanishads. (Since mother nature has granted this great land for people to lead such a cultured life, we call it the land of *bhaarata* people). We opine that the festivals and holy days endowed by people engaged in eternal splendor of truth, in this fashion, have special features. Subsequently, we will expound on this opinion, with praiseworthy reasoning (*yuktipuraHsara*). We can summarize our opinion here, in the following way: *sanaathana dharma* festivals and holy days are embodied in the knowledge [of the Supreme Being] and science [of creation]. Great seers, learnt the real form of these festivals by knowledge obtained by deep contemplation while they were in a meditative state, and preached them to us. With divine grace, they understood the intrinsic major and minor limbs of the time embodiment of the divine. They adapted that divine form to body and place. And, based on their findings, they preached very kind heartedly, the path of progression to attain the four fold aims of human existence (*prushaarthas*) [ethical precepts (*dharma*), righteous means (*artha*), desires (*kaama*) and emancipation (*moksha*)]. These festivals are celebrated with many types of sweets and puddings. But, these sweets are not limited to just pleasure of the palate and satiation. **Sree Rangamahaaguru** used to remind us, "Sweets and juices consumed that day should not end up in culinary satisfaction only. They should be a feast for pleasing the God *KrishNa* (*daamOdara*) ". Likewise, the various pleasurable activities (*vihaara*) on that day, should not end up in limited play of the five senses, they should result in relaxation, as a result of the amorous play of the soul.

What is said above, is the proclamation of the spiritual endeavor. But, if we ask ourselves: Are these festivals and holidays yielding the fruits

envisaged by the sages, even in the land that received their priceless gift of culture and tradition? What is their understanding of the festivals? How are they performing them? We cannot honestly answer these questions in the affirmative. We can observe that the gift of the sages is in a reprehensive state and lamentable form . We can analyze this state briefly as follows.

1. Although we observe many festivals we are not deriving full satisfaction by practicing them, because we do not perform them with wisdom. We recant the words of **Sree Ranganatha** here. "A half asleep child will not experience the nectary taste of the milk feeding. In the same way, unwisely practiced festivals are not oozing the savory essences. They may only help sustain the lingering life of festival culture". In spite of nourishing feast and merriment, attire and adornments, even the sparse worship we perform and the spiritual stories that we listen to, are yielding only a little bit of satisfaction, since they are being followed without the proper attitude, methods and procedures. The four fold aims of human existence (*chaturbhadras*, *purusharthas*) wished by the pioneers of the culture are not being realized.

2. Not only these celebrations are not yielding the promised excellent rewards, but they are also resulting in ominous consequences, since the knowledge of what the practice is, what the object of the practice is, and how it can be used, is lost. To cite an example, the great seers have taught us that all-night vigil on *Shivaraatri* festival is most auspicious. They have prescribed prayers and worship of *Shiva*, in each phase of the night, so that we can attain spiritual wealth, during these invaluable auspicious time periods with special properties. But, many people think that they have to stay awake somehow to accrue virtue, and so, they keep awake by gambling, watching sense teasing erotic movies and other despicable activities. These excursions will not produce peace of mind, rather they disturb the environment and disturb the minds of these observers. If these negative results cause troubles in their lives, some of these

misguided people hold *Shiva* and *Shivaraatri* festival responsible for their misfortune!

3. Festivals are, no doubt, occasions of great rejoicing and happiness. However, there is no rule that happiness is limited just to the delight of the sense faculties. Even when no food is consumed, such as during *mahaashivaraathri* and *prathamaidadashi*, these celebrations are known as fasting festivals in our tradition. If one asks, how can the days when no food is consumed be festivals, the answer is that on that day by performing worship of the Almighty, the soul has to experience inner bliss, which is the spiritual food of its true nature. So, in this sense they are also festivals. They are occasions of great rejoicing. (It is an accepted rule that those whose constitution will get upset without having some food may consume light food.) On festivals where special foods are prescribed, those who do not have the means to observe festivals according to the customs, can substitute them with leaves, flowers, fruits and water (*patram, puShpam, phalam toyam yo me bhaktya prayacchati - geeta*) and worship with love to gain the fruits of the festival observance. If people do not understand this essence and think that preparing and consuming different prescribed foods are the only main part of the festivals, they will borrow money and finally end up in untold sufferings due to burden of loans. Some people even complain, "These rotten festivals have ruined me." and earn the blemish of blaming sacred festivals, in addition to the sufferings mentioned earlier.

4. For many people the festivals of our culture, has become a puzzle for various reasons and it has resulted in ridicule and incoherent opinions. The main issues of the puzzle are the number and variety of the festivals.

Scholars lecture, "We do not reject festivals of merriment. People of all countries have these festivals. But, in our land, every dawn ushers in a festival. There is not a day without a festival. They result in waste of time, money and productivity! The desire to eat and adorn new clothes results

in a lot of waste of money. Time is spent in idling. Demand for holidays increase. These festivals have become the reason for providing beds for the lazy people to sleep. Therefore there is an urgent need to restrict the number of festivals in the interest of the social and economic welfare of the society and the nation."

There are thousands of gods. There are hundreds of festivals for them. People fight claiming one festival is more important than the other. For every festival, the scripture declares that it is the most superior of all the festivals and the rest of them do not even compare to one sixteenth of this festival, in merit. (*vratanaamuttamaM vratam! anyaani tu vrataanyasya lalaam naarhanti ShoDasheeM*"). There is no answer to the question: Which festival's proclamation of the benefits are genuine?

"The fact that there is no unanimity about the specific dates for some of these festivals has resulted in division among people. The date for the New Year's Day (*ugaadi*) according to solar (*saura maana*) lunar (*chandra maana*) and Jupiter (*Brahaspatya maana*) calendars are different. Lack of a common date agreeable to all for festival days like *prathama ekaadashi*, *krishna aShTami*, *Sree jayanthi* and many other festivals cause arguments. In contrast, let us look at the systematic nature with which Christmas is celebrated. It is celebrated on the same day, every year in all the countries of the world". Orderliness of date of Christmas and the disorderliness of our festival dates are of equal weight. Some of these criticisms and comparisons are the direct result of lack of understanding of the essence of the festivals of *bhaarateeyas*. Some of these variations are the result of the mutilated form of our festivals. In any case, these facts have created confusion in the community.

5) Due to various notions described above, the mentality of mocking and deriding our festivals and holydays of our culture are on the rise, even among our own people. Proponents of opposing religious faiths are feeding fuel of their amity to this raging fire of disgust.

6) On top of this, meaningless customs, that are contrary to the

essence of rites of the righteous eternal order (*satya sanaatana dharma*), have raided our cultural life. Wearing various facial masks of modernism and fashion, these new customs have captured even the orthodox followers of our religion. We offer a specific example to illustrate this trend.

We address birthdays as addition of years, augmentation (*vardhanti*), that which brings victory (*jayanti*) and other words of progression. Our culture advises sighting and savoring auspicious things on such occasions. It is a special and propitious day, in praise of the new unfolding step in the evolution of the soul. But, birthdays are celebrated now-a-days by blessed folks, as an ordained rite of mounting as many candles as our age on a cake, lighting those candles and then blowing them off with our own breath, then cutting the cake in to pieces and distributing them to family and friends. How inauspicious is to follow this ritual, of turning off the lamp which is characteristically followed in the funeral rites, during the birthday celebration of a live person! (The practice, of ‘making the light big’ (literally shutting off) and then relighting it, is followed in our religious rites also. However, blowing the candle off is not in that group). In the households who have the ability to practice the rites of a culture which, desires to avoid using the phrase ‘tuning off’ when it comes to lamp which indicates the Eternal Divine light and instead uses the phrase "to make the light big" as a derivative, what an inauspicious practice has taken foothold!

The main reason, for the present dark day environment, is the cloud of ignorance that covers the bright Sun of our intellect, our lack of knowledge of the subject and our blind faith. In this situation, we feel a gale of scientific deliberation, as to what our festivals and holy days are, what are its special characteristics, what is prescribed in the scriptures, what are the procedures to follow, what are their usages, what is the arrangement of their timing, is essential to drive away the cloud of our ignorance and to shine light of the propitious day. In this exercise, we

should not give room to obstinate stances that we have to prove that everything in our culture is somehow correct, or everything in other cultures is to be censured. Without viewing the subject matter with such colored glasses, we substantiate and propound the festival and holy days of bharateeyas following the majestic thought waves of our heroic preceptor, who proclaimed "Information, experiment, experience, is my entire scripture". It is our desire that this deliberative mirror pertaining to an important aspect of our culture will aid in the reexamination and their apt performances.

We had avowed earlier that we will expound with praiseworthy proof that: the festivals and holidays graciously endowed by the great sages (*aarya-maharshis*) have many distinguishing features; they are replete with intellectual and scientific facts; they are based on the wisdom pertaining to the time embodiment of the divine; they grant the fourfold objectives of life (*purusharthas* : *dharma, artha, kama and moksha*) to those who practice with a good understanding (of the festivals). Traversing in the path of fulfilling that promise, firstly, we will examine the meaning of the terms used for festivals and holydays, the derivative words used to name the festivals and holidays, and the significance of their meanings, subsequently.

Our inquiry into the subject of various terms and names of the festivals and holy days, their meanings and their etymology, in order to illustrate credibility of our opinion about them as promised earlier, should not be viewed as semantic jugglery or infatuating doctrine based on the argument that they are not so important, even if they are relevant. If we study carefully the origin of the words, the literal and inferential (implied) meanings stemming from them, such a study becomes a systematic process of studying the culture and civilization. ***Sree Ranganamahaaguru*** used to teach us that 'Intimate knowledge of a word concludes in the intimate knowledge of the object of that word'. Modern scholar Dr, Earnest Klein says " To know the origin of words is to know the cultural

history of mankind" and further, he has observed its utility as " In tracing the words of their origin, we are tracing simultaneously civilization and culture to their roots"

In addition, a critical examination of these words and their meanings will help in understanding the science behind the time, the process and the object of the festivals and holy days promulgated (brought forth) by the seers.

While we are discussing the words used to enunciate the names of festivals and holy days of *bhaarateeya* culture along with their meanings, it is necessary to examine the notions of festivals expressed by other well known cultures of the world, in different languages. This examination enables us to weigh the cultures, as well. So, let us take that subject first.

Festival, feast, festivities are the words used in the English language for these celebrations. Webster Dictionary defines festival as a day or time of religious or other celebration marked by feasting, ceremonies or other observations; A period or program of festive activities, cultural events or entertainment and gaiety, revelry, merrymaking in remembrance of a great event or in respect of a great person.

In old French the derivative of the word festival is 'Feste', and it is 'Fete' in modern French. In Spanish it is 'Fiesta', in German it is 'Fest' and Russians use the word 'prazdnik'. All these words except prazdnik are derived from the Latin root 'Festivus'.

These words mean: an occasion to celebrate happiness, joyous congregation with feasting, dancing and singing and a sectarian celebration.

In Arabic language the word 'Id' is used. It gives the meaning, it is a holy day, a day of rest from work, a day of happiness and a special Muslim festival. They use the word 'Roza' to refer to religious fasting. In European languages they use Fast, Faste, Fasten, Fastan, and Foestan and so on. These words convey the idea of total fasting.

The words, used in Chinese language for these occasions, ‘Chieh’ and ‘Yen hui’ also mean happiness, celebration and a day of rest.

Let us analyze some of the words for festivals and holy days used in languages influenced by the *bhaaratheeya culture*. We will discuss the prominent words used in Sanskrit language, which is primal force and the mother of many linguistic offshoots.

1. **Utsavah:** The cited etymology of this word is: that which produces happiness (*utsoote harSham*), that which impels wellbeing and dearness (likeability) (*utsavati, prerayati shreyase preyase wa*), an uplifting ritual (*unnaayakaK yajnaH*). [note: the word uplifting has very special *yoga* significance. This implies upward path on the way to realization]. This brings the notion of a celebratory form of worship with the characteristics of satisfying, nourishing, rejuvenating and uplifting (involution). Figuratively, any subject that bring pleasure to the eyes, ears and other sensory organs are also called utsava for example that which brings pleasure to eyes is *netra-utsava* and that for ears is *shravaNa utsava*.

2. **Maha:** Etymologists describe this as an activity time for worshipping gods. (*mahyante devaH atra*), an activity time fit for the performer to acquire venerability and spiritual illumination (*mahyate poojyate tejo va praapnoti anena*). Their intention is to state that these festivals are for worship of preceptor and divinity and which will yield the fruits coveted venerability and spiritual illumination.

3. **Uddhava:** It is an activity time for expelling delusion and pain. (*uddhoonoti, duHKam moham ca*).

4. **KShaNa:** (*kShaNam kaala visheShe syaat parvaNya vasare mahe haima koSha*). It is an activity time to destroy attachment and delusion. (*kShiNoti shoKam moham ca*). An activity time to experience pleasure of the soul and experience joy which is not incompatible with righteous order (dharma), having dispelled attachment and delusion, is festival. Here, we can recant the sayings (*tarati shokamaatmavit*) a realized person overcomes the (bounds of) afflictions and infatuations and (*dharma*

viruddho bhooteshu kamosmi bharatarshabha), Oh, the best among the Baratha clan, desires which are not incompatible with the righteous order (*dharma*) is Myself, understand it as a pleasure that is agreeable to God, as quoted in upanishad and geeta respectively.

5. **Jayanti:** This word is used to refer to a birthday celebration of divine incarnations and great human beings. it is a day which propagates victory [over evil] and virtue (*jayam puNyam ca tanute jayanteem tena taam viduH*).

It is a celebratory occasion of the enlightening and majestic day which enables the practitioners, by providing incentives and the wealth of virtuosity, to be successful in their great pursuit of fulfilling the objectives of the human existence (*purShArtha*).

The explanation given above, clarifies the great benefits gained by proper practice of these festivals. We remember with reverence the following words of sree ranga mahaa guru, when he was giving a discourse on the celebration of the birth day (*jayanthi*) of great Spiritual guides (*aachaarya*). He taught us that "Whenever we experience the state of realization, the bliss, the immortality and the state of union with the divine, which was experienced by the spiritual guides, then all those occasions become the birthday celebration of the spiritual preceptors. During, certain auspicious lunar days (*tithi*) and auspicious asterisms (*nakShatra*) the nature possesses special qualities which can naturally carry a practitioner to such a state, those auspicious times can also be called the birthday of the spiritual guides."

Technically, Supreme Spirit sree *krishNa*'s birth day (especially) is also referred to as *jayanthi*. (For example:) The eighth day of the waning moon in the month of July or August together with *rOhiNi* constellation signifies sree *krishNa*'s birth day ("*rohiNee sahita shraavaNa maasasya krishNaasTami jayanthi*" from Appayaa Dikshita's *yaadavabhyudayaa vyaakhyaai, shlo 1*).

6. **janmamahaH:** 7. **janmOtsava** It is evident from their meaning

that these terms are associated with the festival celebrating birth (*janma*).

8. **parva:** '*parva*' means conjunction of times. Since it has the quality to protect and since it is complete, it derives the name '*parva*' (*piparti-iti parva, poo paalanapooraNayOH*).

The eighth day (*aSTami*), fourteen day (*caturdashi*), fifteenth day (full moon day, *poorNima*; new moon day, *amaavaasya*), the sun's passage from one sign of the zodiac to another (*saMkramaNa*) are known as the five parvas (*panca parva*). Apart from this, eclipse times are especially called *parva*. And, the conjunction times (dawn, noon, dusk etc) on full moon day, new moon day and the first day of the fortnight are also known as *parva*.

The primary meaning of the word *parva* is node, or a knot, or an important part of a plant, creeper and fingers and toes. Figuratively, it refers to conjoining point in time, a step or phase, a part of a treatise and so on. ('*ikShorograatya kramashaH yathaa parvaNi rasavishEshaH*' (*subhashita*) '*Bhaarate cEkShudanDE ca pratiparva rasOdayaH*' (*Bha. prashaMsaa*) '*sOpaana parvaani vimuMcadaMbhaH*' (*raghuvamsha 16-46*) '*parva kleebam mahE granthau prastaave lakShaNantare darshapratipadoH sandhau vishwavatprabhritiShTapi*). Just as a node is an important and very beneficial part in plants, trees and vines, a festival or conjunction of time periods (*parva*) is an important and very beneficial part in the time bound body. Indigenous, regional languages which are directly influenced by *maharShi* culture talk about festivals as follows.

A festival is '*habba*' in Kannada derivative of '*parva*' in *sanskRuta*. '*parva*' transformed to '*parba*' and from which transformed to '*habba*'. The meaning of this word has already been explained clearly.

In Telugu the word '*panDuga*' is used for festival. In Tamil it is '*panDikai*' and in Malayalam it is *panTika*. *Pandu* means to be fruitful. So, it is an opportune time for one's practice to bear fruit; '*pandam*' means an object, It is a time for consuming objects for a specific purpose;

paNNika means harnessing systematically; *panti* means a row, (*pankti*) or it is a day when friends and relatives sit in the same row and experience feast etc; all these are the derived meanings suggested for the words above. In any case it is a joyous day, a fruition day of our actions, a day of consuming enjoyable and emancipating materials. We recall the following message of sree *ranga mahaa guru*, on the occasion of a festival "on that day when we use and consume materials your mind should be filled with the object (*panDa*) of the Supreme Spirit (*panDaa aatma viShayaah buddhiH, geeta, shankara bhaShya* 5-18; *panDithaH atmayathaatmya vidaH, geeta raamaanuja bhaShya* - 11; *paanDithyamaagamajnanam (geeta madhwa bhaSyas* 5-18). If it is so, the festival (*panDikai*) is fruitful"

On festival days special foods like lentil soup, pudding, juices and many other special dishes and ingredients are prepared. These special foods should not have limited aim of satiation and culinary delight of the tongue, but, they should have the disposition of spiritual reverence, mentioned above, and a sense of bestowing the fruits the fourfold objectives of life (*puruShArhta*).

The word *ullsavam* in Malayalam is a corrupted form of *utsavam* in Sanskrit. The word *visheSham* is also borrowed from Sanskrit. These words convey that these are very auspicious times, and times that make substances distinct and times which bear superior fruits for practitioners.

The Tamil words *viLa*, *viLavu* indicate that it is a celebration which brings prosperity. The word *tirunaaL* proclaims that the time is auspicious and sacred.

'*varShada hecchu*', *varsha* '*vardhanti*' in Kannada also indicates prosperity. These words convey the meaning that it is a day to attain prosperity, a day for a new step in the evolution of the soul .

In classical Hindi, the word 'thyohaar' means a festival. This word is made up of two words '*tithi*' (lunar day) and '*vaara*' (day of the week). This

word conveys clearly the meaning that the festivals are to be celebrated on a specified time and day and not on a time and day of our convenience.

The word '*varShagaanT*' in Hindi means birthday. It is derived from the Sanskrit word *varSha-granthi*. '*granthi*' means a knot. It is in tune with the word '*parva*', referred to earlier.

Finally we will examine the meaning of the word '*haridina*'. It means the day of the Almighty, a very dear day of Lord naarayana. Its derived term is '*harivaasaraH*'. (*Sree harErdinam, haridina, haripriyam vaasaram - harivaasaram iti vivRitiH.*)

On the occasion of some of the festivals there are opportunities for the happiness and pleasure which do not conflict with righteous path . But *haridina* (*harivaasara*) is a day which is totally devoted to the worship of God. It is an auspicious and holy day, very dear to the Lord.

In a technical sense, the eleventh and twelfth day of the fortnight (*Ekaadashi* and *dvaadashi*) are also known as *haridina*. ("*ekaadashi dvaadashi ca proktaa sreechakrapaaNinaH*" - *ubhayordevataa hariH*). Lord *naarayana* is the presiding deity for both of these days. Therefore they are *haridina*.

It is also said that the term *haridina* refers only to the eleventh of the fortnight (*Ekaadashi*). "*tasminkasminschidaadye haridina tuLasee dwaadashibhiH prasaadye*" (*haridinatilakam I*). The first quarter of the twelfth day of the fortnight (*dvaadashi*) is also said to be the *hardiana*. ("*dwaadashyaH prathamaH padaH harivaasarasamjnakaH*")

Shivaratri also comes under this category of holy days, as it is totally devoted to the worship of God. On that occasion the almighty is worshipped specially in the form of shiva, the worship services during the night is auspicious, it is indicated as *Shivaraatri*. *Ekaadashi* and *Shivaraatri* are called fasting festivals. On these days the soul is served the feast of bliss, although the stomach is hungry.

Other languages of *bhaaritha*, such as maraati, bengali, gujarathi

and sindhi use either the above mentioned samskrita words or their derivatives of their own, to refer to these festivals.

In military circles when a high ranking official visits, there is the practice of arranging a grand feast in their honor. In such feasts excessive eating, drinking, singing and shouting, some speech and some gymnastics are the main feats carried out. In English such a grand occasion is called a feast. But in Hindi it is not called a feast (tyohaar), but it is called as a big meal (*baDaakhana*), conveying the activity literally. Our big salute to them for this distinguishing term!

A close analysis of the terms used indicate festivals and holy days in the languages influenced by the bharateeya culture and the languages of other cultures, their derived forms and etymology, a few facts stand out.

1. The fact that festivals are celebrations of happiness is accepted by both the bharateeya culture and other cultures.

2. Both cultures agree that there are some festivals for showing respect and reverence for God or remembrance of saintly personalities.

3. Both cultures accept that fasting is a part of the rites.

4. There are a numerous derived terms to refer to the festivals in the languages of bharateeya culture. That wealth is comparatively less in the languages of other cultures.

5. There are no separate words to distinguish the festivals and holy days in the languages of other cultures.

6. Both the spiritual and material enjoyment aspects are integrated in *bharateeya* festivals. Even the fasting days are termed festivals (fasting festival) in this culture. The delight of the soul derived in *yoga* 'samaadhi' state (in the state of absorption with the divine) is regarded with utmost respect and is termed as the coveted supreme or divine bliss, serves as the proof [of the fact both spiritual enjoyment with or without material enjoyment is termed festivals]. In English and the languages of

other cultures, fasting and feasting are contradictory terms and can not be used in singular sense.

7. The terms which refer to various aspects of festivals in *bharateeya* culture signify their utility in absolving sin, accruing religious merit (*punya*) and attainment of the four fold objectives of life (*purusharthas*). Such aspects are not found in any terms or words used for festivals and holy days in the languages of other cultures.

8. Terms such as '*parva*' (festival time) *tyohaar* which indicate that festivals should be celebrated on specific time and specific days decorate the *bharateeya* languages. The science of the time, *karma*, substances that come to light with these terms are magnificent. Such terms and the scientific significance of time etc are not found in other languages.

It is appropriate here to describe the term '*parva*'. It is most fitting that the term 'knot' (*granthi*), which connotes the nodal joints of plants, trees and vines, is used to indicate special confluence of time.

In bamboo plants and sugar canes, the knots governed by a [biological] rule, appear at regular intervals and in a determined quantity. In a similar fashion, in the time embodiment of the divine, the festival occurs at regular intervals, in determined numbers governed by a law. Protection of the plant's life force, nourishment, evolution and the leaves, branches, flowers necessary for bearing fruits originate from their nodes. In the same way, the protection, nourishment, enfoldment, and the avenues necessary to attain the four fold objectives of human life, which is dependent on time, specifically originate from the confluences of time. Nodes in plants are the storehouses of nature's gifts. In the same way, the knots in times, called festivals are the store houses of strength for renewed evolution of human beings.

This is the significance of these festivals. The great sages preached that the rituals performed during these festivals bring the wealth of their fruits in quick order. If so, many questions arise: Can these festivals be celebrated at different times? Do such [untimely] performances become

less virile? Do we have to wait for such special festival time (parva) for God reminiscence? What do we do, if the person waiting do so passes away? What is time? Does it have form? Does it have limbs? Let us examine these questions and ponder over the classical investigation and analysis of time and actions (*kaala-karma-meemaamsa*), which provides the answers.

The rituals should be performed at the earliest possible time. There is no guarantee that the present good state of man's mind lasts in the next minute. It is said that good deeds face many obstacles (*shrEyaamsi bahu vighnani*). As the time is postponed obstacles may increase in number. Furthermore a person who plans to perform a rite, on a certain auspicious time and awaits such a time, might pass away. Our scriptural cannons (*neeti shaastra, dharma shaastra*) teach us to perform the religious rites at the earliest, as if the messenger of death has grabbed us by the hair (*gRiheeta iva kesheshu mruthyunaa dharmamaacarEt*).

Furthermore, there is no prescribed time for offering prayer to God. There is no defilement or impurity for offering prayers to God "*naashoucam keertanE tasya*". There is no fixed time, place or direction for worshipping "*yatraikaagrata tatraavisheShaata*" (*brahmasootra* 4.4.11). In whatever land or whichever time facilitates concentration, that is where and when is the right time to worship, according to the realized. So, it is natural to object and ask 'is it not silly to wait for an opportune auspicious or festival time (parva) to perform religious rites'? However, this is not a deep rooted objection. In prior discussions, it is only avowed that the rites performed at the prescribed time for the festival or holidays bear special fruits, but it does not prohibit performance of the rites at different times or suggest the auspicious time has to be awaited. It is better to perform the rites without delay.

But, those who are confident that they can perform the ritual now, as well as perform it in eight days, which is the stipulated time for the eighth day of fortnight (*aShTami*) celebration and further they are confident that

their mind will not change during that time interval, may wait until the prescribed time. Those who lack such determination or lack facilities to celebrate at the prescribed time, have the freedom to celebrate it today. Those who do not lack the facilities, but, if they ask what guarantee is there that death will not consume them, no such guarantee can be given. But, the question, ‘what if death embraces them while they are making the determination to perform the rites instead of waiting eight days for the propitious time’, has to be asked.

If we were to say, ‘when one dies with a desire to do these sacred rites will get a chance to do it at least in his next birth’, then the same rule applies to one who dies while waiting for the auspicious time to perform the rites.

Now let us think about meditation on God and prayer (*nimeShaardham na tiShtanti vRittim brahmamayeem vina | brahmaadyaa naaradadyasca sanakaadyaashyukaadayaH*). Brahma and sages like *naarada* and *sanaka* never detach themselves from the meditative path (*braahmeevRutti*), even for half a minute. People who belong to this category need no special festival time for prayers and singing carols (*sankeerthana*). Why shouldn’t those who do not have the ability for such uninterrupted contemplation, and those who are in the process of acquiring such contemplative ability, make use of the facility of auspicious festival times? By God’s grace, if they acquire such power of concentration of the mind at other times, let them perform intense meditation at those times. From their vantage points those times are also auspicious times. The natural facility, that is available to all, at special times in the time embodiment of the divine, is called festival times (*parva kaala*). If, on these special and auspicious times meditation, carols, worship bear especial fruits in a short order, why shouldn’t they be used for the benefit of the soul?

When one has all the facilities to perform a propitious rite today, as

well as on the specified future day, it is always advisable to perform it on the specified day.

We recall the following advice given to us by *Sree Ranga mahaa guru*. "The divine, in the time embodiment form, has provided facilities at known auspicious time phases, known as festival times (*parva*, for the deliverance of the souls. We shouldn't forego the use of these special times"

Bharateeya sages possessed amazing knowledge of the source and the science (*jnaana-vijnaana*) of the subject of time, such as, it's nature, form, quality, consequence and the benefits we can derive from it. This knowledge is also incorporated in the festivals which they have brought into practice. This fact becomes clearer, if we undertake a comparative view of the perception of time in different cultures.

What is Time? Does it exist or is it only a concept ? Normally, people do not ponder over these issues. But, all have the experience of time. All understand at least a little bit of the effect of time. People understand the daily morning, afternoon, evening, night time changes from a shorter duration to longer periods, at certain longitude and latitudes. (At the north and south poles the days and nights stretch for months). These durations are calculated by observation of the period of daylight, darkness, the distance at which the sun, the moon, the stars, appear in the skies. Depending on the changes caused by time in weather conditions such as cold, rain, heat, winter, the rainy, summer seasons are observed; by observing the changes in the body and the mind due to time, childhood, youth, old age are categorized; so also, with the aid of instruments, and knowledge obtained by perception. Second, minute, day, month and year of time period is measured.

In order to understand the nature of people's reaction to the time, we can observe they adapt themselves to extremes in weather, such as cold and heat, by wearing warm clothes or stay comfortable with artificially cooled air.

In order to understand what benefits people derive from divisions of time, we can observe they eat hot and spicy food in winter, they drink cooled juices in summer; work longer and harder in milder climate, and get salaries and bonuses paid at specified times etc. All these activities are related to pleasure of the physical and sensual body. As a result of time, if someone near and dear to us passes away, we express sympathy and say "poor thing, he got caught by sharp teeth of time" and forgetting the fact that we are also going to face the same fate sooner or later, we engage ourselves in the routine life. (*ahanyahani bhootaani pravishanti yamaalayam | sheShaH sthavaramicchanti kimaascharyamataH param."* *mahaabharatha yakShaprashna*)

Western philosophers and scholars of even advancing physical sciences also do not say anything conclusively about the nature of time. They say, "Although very familiar to us, yet it is a subject full of mystery and riddle". "Time, more than any other subject of philosophical concern, has been a perennial source of puzzlement and perplexity. It is ironic that something with which we are so intimately acquainted with, should give rise to paradoxes as soon as we attempt to scrutinize it analytically" (The philosophy of Time, edited by Richard M. Gale, preface) "It has no independent entity. It is the virtue of a quality of an object" is what Aristotle, Jeno, Augustine and many other philosophers say about time. "It has being only as an attribute of an attribute of substance." "Time proves itself unreal, under the weight of analysis."

Among the physicists, Isaac Newton opined that time has independent existence and it is not (relative) dependant on perception (*bhavanaasapekSha*). According to Einstein's theory, time is a relative object, not an independent and real object. Can one escape the power of time? Although not practicable, it is theoretically possible if one travels at the speed of light. To give an example, if out of the just born twins one stays on the earth, and the other is taken into space in a plane which flies at the speed of light, for seventy years and returned back to the earth, it is

not aged at all. The child that remained on the earth will be 70 years old. This has to be explained by the scholars of physics.

What do scientists say about the use of time? They talk about the previously described material benefits, comfort and enjoyment for the senses. Other than these, they talk about the intellectual delight (satisfaction) due to the enquiry into the subject of time. They also talk about the application of the knowledge of time in scientific investigations. All these are also confined to the material plane.

With a review of this background, we will examine, the doctrine of time of *bharateeya* sages on the subject, and the nature of their experience of time. When we view it in this respect, we will observe that they have not refuted the subject matter discussed above. But, we can observe that their thought flow encompasses incredibly deep and broader areas.

The flood of time keeps us captivated and pushes us ever forward. We get a glimpse of the power of time, when we are rushing downstream, outwards facing. But, it is impossible in this state to know its nature and its origin. If we want to know these, we have to have the courage and the contemplative ability to go in the opposite direction, swimming upstream. The people, who achieved this great feat by rigorous meditative practice are *brahma JnAni RiSh-s* (Seers who have the knowledge of the Creator). When they entered into deep contemplation, restraining (*samyama*) their mind, the senses and their intellect, they had the audience (*dharShana*) of the effulgence of supreme spirit, the origin of all that is. They discovered that It was the origin of time as well. Not only did they personally experience the One without the limitation of time, action (karma), directions, sans forms, sans impurities (pure - *niranjana*), the great sea without motion, ocean of peace, blissful (*amRuta*), but they also realized that it is the absolute universal truth which can be experienced by all human beings. While nearing that contemplative state they saw a force, the embodied form of God, in deep contemplation and they perceived it to

be a still, not orbiting (*bhramaNa*). They named that divine form "*su-darShana puruSha*" (auspicious - audience person), *su naabha* (auspicious navel), the origin of the wheel of time and they praised it as "To whom the Cosmic wheel as well as the everlasting wheel of time are subservient, to that divine person, *su-darShana*) "*yadaayattam jagacakram, kaalacakram ca shaswatham*" (*Shodashayudhastuti*). While returning from that contemplative state to the world of nature, they witnessed that wheel's super natural motion, and they witnessed the majesty of that wheel controlling the whole universe, they discovered each and every stage of its formation and they preached their acquired knowledge to the whole world.

In their experience, time is the radiance or force (*tejas*) of the Supreme. "*kaalaatmEti samaakhyataam tejo maheshwaram param.*" "*tasyaaMshaMshamayee shaktiH kaalatmani mahaatmani.*" (*Shivapurana*. Chapter 6.6). Although, as a force it is formless, it has a supernatural divine form visible to yogis. Its elemental form, can be described metaphorically as: He wears many nooses; He is majestic with armor and rings; He has pleasing disposition with six seasons. ("*bahupaashadhaarah, Sreemaan kuNDaleekavacaanvitaH RutuShatkamayOdaaravaktraShatkasamanvitaH*").

The meaning of the term itself conveys its glory "*kalayati iti kaalah*" *kaalaH kaalayataamaham*" (geeta Chapter 10). Because it counts or measures, it is time. (*kalaanaatsarvabhootanaam sa kaalaH parikeertitaH, viShNudharmottara*). Every thing is created and so also everything is swallowed, by time ("*kaalEnaiva ca srujyante sa eva grasatE punaH*"). It is the glutton that swallows even the great godheads. It cooks everything ("*kaalaH pacati bhootaani*". But its tricks does not work with the Almighty, because he as *mahaakaala* (Supreme Time) has measured even the one which measures everything ("*aahaakalo mahaanaTah*"). He is beyond the blemish of time. ("*kaalam kaaala kaalaateetam kalitaasheSham kalodoShaGnam*" *govindaaShtaka*.) He is

the lord of the '*sudarShana chakra*' which is regulator of the wheel of time. "*kaalah kaalakaraH prabhuH*" (*koormapurana*. Ch. 15),

(*swaatma yonijJnaH kaalakRudguNi* (*shiva puraaNa* Chap.6) "*naivEshitum prabhurbhoomnaH*" (*bhAgavata* Part 3-11) "*shivasya tu vashe kaalaH, na kaalasya vashe shivaH*." (*shiva puraaNa* Chap -6). Time is his body. It is his power. Since he is embodied and possesses the power, time works as subservient to him. But, as is his ever-present power it is the regulator of everything except him, it is called as the "*paramEshvara*". "*aanadirESha bhagawaan kaalOnantO ajarO amaraH || sarvagatwaat swatantratwaat sarvaatmatwanmahEshwaraH*" (*koorma* c25"). No one can act against its order. "*yadalamghyamashEShasya sthaavarasya carasya ca | niyOga roopameeshasya balam vishwaniyaamakam*". In its holistic form, it is everlasting. "*anaadi nidhanaH kaalah rudraH samkarShaNa smRutaH*" There is no conception without time. "*na sO asti pratyayO lOke yatra kaalo na bhaasatE*". In its component view, the realized sages, described by categorizing it starting from a 'supreme atom' form to the 'supreme substance' form. That which has no smaller division than it is the 'supreme atom' (*paramaaNu*). That which has no greater form than it is the 'supreme form' (*mahattatva*). This is comprehended only by yogis. (More details about this can be found in *bhaagavata* III - 11).

Time is a fierce force that cooks and swallows everything ("*kaalOsmi OkakShayakRut pravRuddhaH*"). It is also referred to as decease (*mRutyu*) or god of death (Thanatos, *yama*). It is a wheel with thousands of blades that chops off everything. It is a black asp with venom of ignorance, that bites and kills everyone. It is a flood of time which carries away everything. It is an unconquerable tiger of time, with sharp canines. We find these above mentioned frightening portrayal of time in our scriptures.

However, within the terrifying body of time, the seers discovered that the Supreme Being has placed propitious centers for human being's

welfare. When human beings make use of these centers in an appropriate manner, they become focused inward. During these times they are pulled toward their origin, with little or no effort. When they are so travelling inward, they get the audience of godheads from whose blessings the four fold objectives (*dharma, artha, kaama, mOkSha*) are especially attained. In addition to this, the seers found there are nodes in time itself, that can help one to get release from the hold of time and enjoy the supreme bliss of timeless state. People who make use of this facility are most fortunate, indeed. The seers called these nodes as *parva* (festival).

During these special junctures of time (*parvas*), the body also experiences transformation externally (these changes cannot be perceived by gross minded people) and internally. Due to these transformations, the rate of flow in the naadi [pulses that indicate the three humours, *pitta vaata kapha*] undergo changes . The seven constituent elements of the body (*sapta-dhaatu*) undergo changes, in their quality. It will be clearly visible to the sensitive minds that the innate nature [of a person], comprising mind, intellect and senses etc, is also transformed. As proclaimed earlier, for the conscious ones who understand and utilize these transformations, it brings bountifully auspicious results, in a very short time. "So, mark those festival times (*parva*), don't neglect them, don't waste them. If they are lost they don't come back when we desire them. We have to wait for their next occurrence. "Sail with the wind", "don't close your eyes when the [medicinal oil is offered" with these forewarnings, the kind hearted seers showed us the excellent utility of the festival times. They praised this means, for deliverance of the soul and the betterment of the world, as the charming and propitious portals and named them as festivals (*parva*) and showed us the precept and method of practice of these rituals. Offering our gratitude to the seers, we have performed the worship, with this brief exposition, of our preceptor, who is the embodiment of time, beyond the bounds of time and who mastered the science of time.

Time (*kaala*) is the wonderful and invisible force of the Supreme Spirit. Its play does not touch the Supreme Being and the emancipated souls in His shelter. Time chases everyone else wherever they go and plays with them. Without a tiny bit of compassion, it devours them in its fangs, and swallows them like a black cobra that devours frogs. However, even in this formidable embodiment of time, merciful God has placed centers which help human beings to prosper. They are the festivals and holy days handed down to us, in our culture and custom, by the great sages of *bhaarata*. Those who understand the significance of these occasions, and use them are indeed blessed.

"martyo mRityuvyaalabheetaH palaayan lokaansarvan nirbhayaM naadhyagacchat | twatpaadabdhaM praapya yadRicchayaadya swasthaH shEtE mRityurasmaadapReiti" (bhaagavatha X - 3 - 27)

Next, we will take up the main objections about the festivals and holy days, that have preoccupied our minds, for discussion. If we reconcile these doubts, it will help us clearly grasp the topics in the future sections of this work.

The first objection is that Hindus have too many festivals. Whenever a person is faced with a series of troubles, this fact is published highlighting the grandeur of simile as ‘problems and poverty besieged them as the Hindu festivals do.’ They express the opinion that the abundance in the number of festivals results in excessive waste of money, waste of substances, waste of time and waste of energy.

In order to solve this problem, they prescribe the solution ‘let them reduce the number of festivals; just like other religions, let them celebrate four or five festivals during a year; let them celebrate them on a grandeur scale; so, without much effort, merit and the fourfold objectives of life are attained.

Apart from the above objections, they continue, ‘why follow the dogma of observing the festivals in their order, one after the other, we have to have the independence to select their order to suit our convenience. For

example, let us follow, *Shivaraatri* right after *Ugaadi*. This way the effect of the sumptuous meal of the first day is remedied by fasting of the next day, and it is good for health. It is not good to declare public holiday separately for each festival. It comes in the way of other important worldly affairs'. There are some folks, who race their intelligence, and suggest, 'we can celebrate the festivals on days which are declared holidays for other reasons'.

We can say, the very meaning of the term '*parva*' (festival), proclaimed by *bharateeya* sages are not understood by those who argue these points.

If these festivals were occasions meant only for eating, drinking, dancing, playing, and chatting, we could have increased or reduced the number of festivals to suit our monetary, leisure, and health conveniences. We could have celebrated them on days of our liking. But, as we have already observed, the festivals as taught by the realized, are the nodes and centers of power in the time embodied form of the Divine. Their numbers and their order, also, follow the rule as conceived by the omnipotent God, the regulator of time. It is not possible or desirable to reduce their number or their order. For example, the rule of how many nodes are to be, which node follows which node, in a sugarcane plant, is determined by its variety and its growth, by mother nature. Such a change is as undesirable as the degree of impossibility of effecting its change. The reason being, according to botanists, each knot in a sugar cane is the seed substance for the birth of a new plant. If there are more nodes they will be helpful in increasing sugar cane plant population, by planting and nurturing all of the nodes, at a proper stage of the plant's growth. Whether we observe them or not, or use them or not, a certain number of nodes, in a given order will be there in them according to a law of nature. The same law applies to the festival time nodes, in the tree of time. In a gross manner, everyone can observe that morning, noon, afternoon, evening and night occur, in order. We do not wish to change

their order, although we observe them. We make use of them for our physical benefits. We have to understand the festivals nodes, which can be observed in a subtle view, in the same way and make use of them. The wise way is to utilize them for plane related to deities (*aadhidaivika*) and spiritual plane (*aadhyaatmika*) and not limiting them only to the material plane (*aadhibhoutika*). There is an adage which says "New moon (*amaavaasya*) does not wait till the big brother arrives". Likewise, festivals do not occur, when we wish. We have to make use of them as and when they happen. On such occasions, our senses and mind will be naturally focused inward. If we practice the rites during those times sincerely and enthusiastically, the journey in the inward kingdom progresses at a fast pace. This is the gracious gift of Mother Nature or Supreme Spirit, for our wellbeing. Therefore, the desire for reduction in their number is not a propitious wish.

On account of certain special reasons, it is said that on some festivals, special foods and dishes are dearer to the deities. Those who can afford may prepare such dishes, offer it to the deities and partake the foods as their gifts (*prasaada*). For example, for *gaNapati* festival special sweet dish 'modaka, for *hayagreeva* festival, special lentil (split chickpeas) dish are said to be propitious in the scriptures. But, these dishes are not the main aspects of these festivals. Those who cannot afford it, need not stop the worship services on that account. They should offer whatever food is available and consume it, as if it is gift of the Gods. "*yadannaH puruShO bhavati tadannastasya dEvataaH*" (*vaalmiki raamayana, ayodhya khaanda*).

As the Lord said in bhagavad geeta, without any obligation to anyone, using whatever is readily available in nature, like leaves, flowers, fruits and water the festival performance can be accomplished. Those who cannot get even these substances can perform the worship services with the five elements (*pancha-bhoota*) of their body as five offering to the Super Spirit. As ordained in *Shivananda Lahari* mental worship can be performed

("shraddhaanadeevimalacittajalabhiShEkaiH nityam samaadhi-kusumaira punarbhavaaya", "samarpairkyaM cEtassarasiJamumaanatha bhavatE"-shivananda lahari). For whatever reason, we need not stop the performance of the festival due to lack of money and substances and so also, we need not engage in blaming [of festivals].

Since great benefits are derived during the festival times from the meditation and other worship of even a short duration, spending money, substance, time and energy for them become a means of earning high (supreme) profits "sakala prushaarthasaadhanaM sukha sampaadhyam alpaprayaasam analpaphalaM." (viShnusaharanaama bhaaShya of shankaraachaarya, shLOka 1). It is unintelligent to think of these as unnecessary waste.

The argument which states there is no time available for other important tasks, because plenty of time is spent in the performance of various festivals, is also not correct. Because, there is no rule that states every one has to observe everyone of the festivals. As described above, affairs of the state have to be organized wisely so that there is time allocated to celebrate festivals. Until the wisdom to facilitate such times for festival observance sets in people, the festivals should be observed at available times, without hindering the affairs of the state.

There is no end to the number of divinities worshipped during these festivals. Among the devotees the fire of hatred is on the rise due to arguments that the deity they worship is superior, all other divinities are inferior. Every rite states, when recalling its benefits, that it is superior and derides all other rites as inferior to it. Let us take up the discussion of the suggestion, 'let Hindus worship one God and let the worship method be the same', based on the facts observed above and predicting these divisive factors cause fights and friction among people.

There should be peace of mind for performing any rites and worshipping any divinity. There should not be any passion or enmity. The fruits of worshipping are, also, peace and contentment. So, there is no

doubt that it is highly foolish for worshippers to fight among themselves. However, It is similarly foolish to argue that the divine form and the worship methods be the same, only then there is unanimity and equality; because these rites that are practiced conform to practitioner's preference, desire, level of spiritual progress.

We recall the teachings of **Sree RangamahaaGuru** : "It is foolish to argue that all patients irrespective of their different diseases should take the same medicine and in the same quantity, only then there is equality. Let there be equality in the desire that all patients regain their health, with medicine."

Our scriptures describe vividly that even if various divine forms are worshipped in the field of actions (*karma khaanDa*), their root is the same in the spiritual view. "*Ekam sadvipraa bahudhaa vadanti*", "*yO devaanaam naamadhaa Eka Eva*", "*Ekassanbahudhaa vicaaraH*" (Rigveda). For examples, we can recall from *manusmRuti* "*EthamEkE vadantagnim manumanyE prajaapatim*" and the commnetary by etymologists (*niruktakaaras*) "*Ekaiva devatha mahaabhaagyaat bahudhaa stooyatE*". If we view from a philosophical angle that there is one and only one indwelling Supreme Spirit, there is no subject for infights.

If that is so, why do the compendium of rituals (*pooja-kalpa*) praise "Only this form is the Supreme God". This is because their objective is to help the performer to have a teady and undivided devotion to that particular deity.

"*saamanyamEShaam prathamaavaratvam*" As the poet laureate kaaLidaasa says, due to the distinction of the place, the distinction of day, the distinction of the form of worship, this glory of being the Supreme God, may be afforded to all forms of divinity. The intention is in the importance of ISTadEvata and not in derision of other deities. "The God in question, alone, is present in the mind of the singer. With Him; for the time being, is associated everything that can be said of a divine being. He

is the highest, the only god; before whom all others disappear, there being in this however, no offence or depreciation of any other god." (Koegi, P. 33)

"Which is the main and most important part of a coconut tree.? Is it root? Is it the trunk? Is it leaves? Is it the bunch of flowers? Is it the husk? Is it the shell? or Is it the kernel inside? According to the time period, circumstances, and utility any of these parts can become the main part. The common part is 'coconut'. It is the innate essence for all of these parts. So, also are the Creator (*parabrahma*) and the rest of the divinities". We recall the occasion *Sree Ranga Mahaa Guru* taught us this essence, using the simple example above.

In *bhaaritha* land, Hindus celebrate the same festival on different dates in different parts of the country. Also, different sects celebrate the festivals on different days. This scattered practice is very unscientific. Apart from that, it leads to divisiveness and mutual distrust among people. (We can provide contrary example that in the festivals of other religions we do not see this kind of diversity and the resultant difference of opinion or hatred). For example, Lord *Krishna*'s day of incarnation is called *janmaaShTami* by some and they celebrate it on a particular day. They consider that the eighth day of lunar fortnight (*aShTami*) is important. Some others call that day as '*Sree Krishna Jayanti*', and celebrate it on a different day. They consider lunar asterism *rOhini* (*nakshatra*) as the important factor. Why has this difference cropped up? Did the Lord incarnate on two days? In the same way, the new year day (*ugaadi*) is celebrated on the first day of caitra month (Spring Equinox), in certain parts. Some others observe it on winter solstice (*mESha sankramaNa*). *Ekadashi* (eleventh day of the lunar fortnight) is observed on different days. These differences create disunity in the society. In order to avoid such rifts, some suggest that all Hindus, wherever they are in the world, should celebrate each festival on the same day.

Some others argue that it is better to celebrate the same festival on different days in different households; so that the families can visit each

other's house and partake in the celebration; Both can enjoy the dishes prepared in each of the houses; Mutual friendship and harmony grows as a result of this; "The best way to heart is through stomach".

Without viewing these objections from an emotional angle, we should take them up in a logical sense and render our opinion. In that opinion, there should not be any attachment or prejudice
"abhinivEshavasheekRitacEtasaam bahuvidhaamapi sambhavati bhramaH" (Agama praamaaNya. Shloka. 3)"

If these differences are caused by prejudice or attachment or out of rivalry, they must necessarily be rejected. It is a well known truth that the sunrise, sunset does not occur at the same time in all places on the globe (Let alone the globe, even in different parts within a country). Planets and stars do not cast their influence on all places at the same time. There is no rule that says they affect all the practitioners in a similar fashion. Among the practitioners, some may only have emancipation as their goal. Some others may perform rituals to fulfill desires (dharma, artha). 'A measure of time from one winter solstice to the next winter solstice, is called a solar year. A measure of time from one new moon to the next new moon is called lunar month (*chandramaana*). These two measurements of time may suit different people in different parts of the country for different purposes. Observance of a rite in a lunar day (tithi) with or without '*Edha*' [The term means protrusion of one '*tithi*' into another] may be different in accordance with the difference of the desired results. If this is the credible reason, it is logical for people to celebrate a particular festival on different days, in different places.

But they should not quarrel with each other on account of this. Patients may consume different medicines depending on the nature of their ailments. But for this reason there should be no ill feelings among them. Let people observe festivals on the scientifically determined day, to fit their intended purpose. There should be reverence and appropriate cooperation, if some others practice it on a different day for the same

reason. In our view, there is both the wisdom and amity in this type of action.

Similarly, at times while accenting the glory of a particular rite and the inferiority of other rites are stressed. The aim of this [comparison] is to induce a firm resolve in the performer for the particular rite. There is no desire to deride other rites. This method is formally named '*artha vaada*' ['Explanatory Remark or a sentence which conveys the praise or glorification of a thing enjoined or the censure of others] ("*nahi nindaa nindyam ninditum pravartatE, apitu nindyaaditarat prashaMsitum*" (Agama pramaaNya pp 4 - 45). However, this should not give room to incoherent arguments.

We have reconciled some of the main objections that are caused by misconception about bharateeya festivals and holy days. Distinct and special topics of these festivals are to be learnt by approaching those great souls, who have gained the knowledge and science of the Supreme being to their satisfaction, with reverence and offering them service and asking questions. We are pleased if these discussions have helped calming some notion which have raided our intellect, resulting from information that are contrary to our culture's festivals and holy days.

Festivals are one of the life's most savory occasions. Life's journey, lacking their knowledge and not practicing them, is like a voyage in the desert without oasis. "It is common experience that 'Human life without festivals is oppressively monotonous and tortuous. It is a journey in a desert-land devoid of any oasis'. This subject is the common experience of all people. Therefore, forgetting all bitter situations of life, mingling with near and dear friends to enjoy the delightful and not so delightful moments to the extent possible, the custom of celebrating at least a few festivals are found among all peoples of the world. We have observed that among these festivals there are many special praise worthy aspects in the festivals and holy days of the culture of the great sages (*maharShi*). Now,

we have to take a few important festivals and holy days as examples, and distinguish these aspects.

While we study the various festivals we have to bear in mind some of the related significant facts. When we do so, it becomes easy to categorize them and study individual festivals and holy days. For performing any religious festival or holy day (*parva*), our mind should be in good humor.

The three instruments (mind, speech and the body) should be pure (*trikarana shuddhi*). All the senses should be restrained. The virtues of the soul should be abundant. In accordance with the rites either fasting or subsisting on wholesome bland diet (*saatvika*) should be observed. The lunar day (*tithi*), day of the week (*vaara*), and the asterism (*nakshatra*) should be pronounced and with the requisite resolve (*sankalpa*) the rite should be performed.

The performance should consist of meditation (*dhyaana*), rosary (*japa*), fire offerings (*homa*) and worship (*pooja*). If one does not have the facilities to all these external worship, at least mental worship (*maanasa pooja*) should be performed. Devoid of stinginess, false pride and arrogance, charity should be practiced. When giving charity, things that are good and useful should be gifted. It is good practice to gift the items prescribed for a particular festival. They should be only given to the needy and deserving such as mendicants, families, the poor and invalids.

"kShama satyam dayaa daanam shoucamindriya nigrahaH l

dEvapoojaagnihavanam santOShostEyamEva ca l

sarvavRatEShwayam dharmaH saamaanyO dashadha smRuthaH ||

(agnipuraaNa 175-10-11)

"japO hOmascha saamaanavRitaantE daanamEva ca l

brahmacaryam tathaa shoucam satyamaamiShavarjanam" ||

(agnipuraaNa 174-10)

"vRatEShvEtaani catvaari variShTaaneeti niscayah l

bhOjanE tu haviShyaannam saamaanyata udaahrRutam
(naaradeeya" (110-48.)

These great sayings of sages above support this view. Festivals practiced without these attributes become the festivals of demons or animals.

When there is impurity (*ashouca*) [10 days after the birth or death of a family member, monthly periods] no festivals should be celebrated. If such event occurs while a rite is being observed, that rite should be continued with the purity of mind or get it completed by a competent person. A religious rite should not be discontinued in the middle, after taking a firm resolve to carry it out. Even if the person passes away in the middle of the rite he accrues the full benefits of its conclusion.

"yO yadartham carEddharmaM asamaapya mRuto yadi l
sa tatpuNyaphalaM prEtya praapnOti manurabraveet" ll

Commonly, religious stories are associated with rites. Without criticizing them from historical or literary perspective, the principles contained therein have to be valued. Excessive hyperbolic accounts (*atishayOkti*) of the benefits are seen at times. The intention here is only to create deep interest in the celebration of the rite. We have to take it with wisdom as sensational benefits ("*rocaanaartha phalashrutihH*")

In this work, the term '*vrata*' (rite) is used along with festivals and holydays as their derivative. Some people think *vrata* is different from festival. For example they say 'we celebrate *shivarathri* festival not *vrata*'. '*vrata*' means fasting, and puritanical cleanliness and other rules. Festival means eating satiating meals, according to them. But even in festivals there should be discipline, following certain procedures prescribed by religious canons. There are requirements of fasting or consumption of lighter food untill the completion of the ritual. These are also *vratas*.

For this very reason there is the custom of referring to sree *Siddhivinaayaka vrata* as *vinaayaka* festival, *ananthapadmanaabha*

vrata is as *anantha padmanaabha* festival. *Sree Krishna Jayanthi* is both a festival and a *vrata*.

The attribute of the term '*vrata*', as described in the scriptures, (that which conforms to the Divine law, which is scientific and which protects those who practice them) is canonical law. It is in the form of penance (*tapas*) and it purifies us spiritually. It makes the attainment of the fourfold objectives of life (*puruShaartha*) possible. We may experience difficulties while performing, but it becomes bearable with practice. ("*abhyaasa vairaagyaabhyaam tannirOdah*" *patanjala yOgasootra*, "*abhayaasEna tu kauntEya, vairaagyENa ca gRuhyatE*" *geeta*). All the difficulties are resolved upon fruition, and a newer variety of enthusiasm ensues and pleasure of the highest order (bliss) is obtained. "*klEshaH phalEna hi punarnavataam vidhattE*"-*kumarasambhava* - 5, "*shastrOdito hi niyamaH vratam taccha tapO matam*." Every festival has its rules and regulations to enable these. For examples, the rules of commission such as worship God, give gifts to the deserving, and also, the rule of omission such as, do not resort to bad thoughts, do not speak foul language, there should be no stinginess, are common to all festivals.

But customarily, if fasting, chanting, technical methods, sacrificial offerings and ceremonies are prominent, the rite is called *vrata* and when such religious injunctions are not very many, and after the worship if the consumption of foods, sweets and juices as divine grace are permitted, such a rite is called a festival.

On the same day, in the same house on such an occasion, it can be a *vrata* to some and a festival to some others. For example the occasion of *upaakarma* ceremony, to those who are initiated to the *vEdas*, or those who perform *Rishi pooja* and those who perform offerings to elders who have passed away (*tarpana*), it is a day *vrata*. Such people should fast at least until noon or during the night. But to the others, it is a festival.

Classification:

Festivals can be classified from different angles.

1) Those festivals which are observed based on a specific lunar day (*tithi*), day of the week, (*vaara*) and asterism (*nakShatra*), can be divided as *tithi-vrata*, *vara-vrata*, *nakshatra-vrata*, *divasa-vrata* and so on. For example *kaarthika prathame*, *chaitra prathame* or *maargashira prathame* are classified as *prathama-tithi vratas*. *shravaNa dvaadashi*, *shayana dvaadashi*, *utthaana dvaadashi* these are *dvaadashi vratas*. *shravaNa shanivaara*, *kaarthika sOmavaara*, are *vara-vratas*. *punarvasu vrata*, *dhenu vrata*, are *nakshatra vratas*. The term *chaitravishu* indicate that it falls on the auspicious equinox day (*vishuvat*) in the month of *chaitra*. *aavaNee aviTTam* (*yajur vEda upaakarma*) indicates that the *vrata* takes place on *shraviShTe* of the month of *shraavaNa*. *samkranti*, *amaavasya poorNima* and other parvas are ever present in the flow of time and cast their influence on all.

2) Festivals and vratas are classified based on the main deity of worship on the festival day. For example, *utthaanadvadashi*, *shravaNa-shanivara*, *Ekaadashi* are *vaishNava vratas*. *mahaashivarathri*, *kAarthika sOmavaara* are *shaiva vratas*. *Mangala Gauri*, *Svarna gauri*, *varamahaalaxmi* and many others are *dEvi vratas*. Although these vratas pertain to the worship of specified gods or goddesses, they are propitious occasions for mediation and worship to all spiritual seekers.

3) *kaamya*, *nithya* and *nithya-kamobhaya-vratas* such as *santaana saptami*, *avidhavaanavami* come under *kaamya*. (based on specific desire). *Ekaadashi*, *amaavasya* are *nithya vratas*. *Mahaashivarathri* and *nRusimhajayanthi* are both *nithya* and *kamya*. If one performs *nithya vratas* with specific desire, they become *kaamya vratas*.

4 a) Festivals that can be celebrated by all, are *satyanarayaNa vrata*, *shivaraathri* and *krishNajayanthi*.

4b) Similar to the rule that certain medicines are taken only by certain people, there are vratas which only some select people should perform. *Upaakarma* and *Vedavrata* rites come under this class.

5a) *Ekadainika vrata*. (One day festivals) *Ugadi* and *sAnkraanthi* fall under this class.

5 b) *anEkadainika vrata* (Festivals celebrated for a specified number of days) *navarathra paarayaNa*, *saptaaha vrata* belong to this class.

6) *Vratas* can also be categorized as *Maanasika*, *Vaacika*, *Kaayika* and so on.

7) Festivals in the form of birthday celebrations:

a) God's incarnation days: *Raama Navami*, *Krushna Ashtami*. These festivals influence all those who worship *brahman* and *dharma*. If the preceptor (*aachaarya*) happens to be an incarnation of God, this rule applies to their *jayanti* also.

b) Birth anniversary of great men: Such celebrations inspire those who have special regard for them.

Such great people's birthday is called *vardhanti* when they are alive and *jayanthi* when they are no more.

The birthdays of all others - It is a sacred day for the particular individuals. These are termed as *vardhanti*.

With this necessary background we can start studying, in detail, some special festivals. We will elaborate in a chronological order beginning with the first month of the year, incorporating any special features in the description of festivals (*parvas*).



Transliteration followed in this book

अ	आ	इ	ई	उ	ऊ	ऋ	ॠ	ऌ	ए	ऐ	ओ	औ	अं	अः
a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	ṛ	ṝ	ḷ	e	ai	o	au	am	ah
क	ख	ख	ग	ङ										
ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa										
च	छ	ज	झ	ञ										
ca	cha	ja	jha	ña										
ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण										
ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa										
त	थ	द	ध	न										
ta	tha	da	dha	na										
प	फ	ब	भ	म										
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma										
य	र	ल	व	श	ष	स	ह							
ya	ra	la	va	śa	sha	sa	ha							

Example:

क	का	कि	की	कु	कू	कृ	कृ	क्लृ	के	कै	को	कौ	कं	कः
ka	kā	ki	kī	ku	kū	kṛ	kṝ	klṛ	ke	kai	ko	kau	kam	kah

Note: ḷa stands for ಳ in kannada.

ḷa stands for ழ in Tamil.