# What is Navratri

Symbolizing victory of positivity over negativity, Navratri literally means 'nine nights' in Sanskrit; Nav - Nine and Ratri - nights. During these nine nights and ten days, the three forms of the goddess -Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathi - are invoked.

The various navratris celebrated are Vasanta Navaratri, Ashadha Navaratri, the Sharad Navaratri, the Paush/Magha Navaratri and the Magha Navaratri.

**Sharad Navaratri:** This is the most important of the Navaratris. It is simply called *Maha Navaratri* (the Great Navaratri) and is celebrated in the 'pratipada' (first day) of the bright fortnight of the lunar month of [Ashvin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashvin" \o "Ashvin). Also known as Sharad Navaratri, as it is celebrated during [Sharad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharad) (beginning of winter, September–October).

During the period of 9 days of navratri, 9 forms of Durga, called *nav-durga*, are worshiped in the following order:

1. **Shailaputri**: She is the primal energy of the trident Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, and was born as daughter (putri) to Himalayas (shaila - mountains)
2. **Bhrahmacharini**: This form represents penance and austerity leading to blissfulness and moksha
3. **Chandraghanta**: Represented as 10-armed mother riding a lion, she adores a bell-shaped (ghanta) moon (chandra), and is slayer of evil forces.
4. **Kushmanda**: Literally meaning "little warmth cosmic egg", she is the creator of the universe
5. **Skandamata**: She is the mother of Skanda, or Karthikeya, the chief warrior of Gods.
6. **Katyayani**: As daughter of sage Katyayan, she is a fierce form of Durga.
7. **Kaalratri**: As death of Kaal (time), she showcases the other side of life - death. She is the most terrible and ruthless form of Durga.
8. **Maha Gauri**: She represents calmness and grants wisdom to her devotees.
9. **Siddhidatri**: The fulfiller of all the wishes and giver of boons.

# Why

There are various reasons why Navratri is celebrated, and each has its own significance in different parts of India. Let's discuss two of these.

* **Killing of Mahishasura**

One of the fiercest daemons, Mahishasura undertook severe penance to obtain a boon that he cannot be killed by a male, underestimating at his own cost the power of the female form, and started creating havoc everywhere. To stop him, Shakti took a very beautiful form of Durga and told him that she would marry him if he defeats her in a battle. It is believed that they battled for 9 days, and on the 10th day, Durga killed Mahishasura. Therefore the 10th day is called Vijayadashmi, day of the victory. One of the most famous idols that you see in temples depicts this scene where Mahishasura, in the form of a half bull, is being slayed by Mother Durga.

* **Lord Rama praying to Goddess Durga**

Another legend has it that Lord Rama fasted and prayed for 9 days to seek Goddess' blessings to kill Ravana. He kills him on the 10th day, and this day is called Dusshera, the day when the 10-headed Ravana was killed.

# How

In India, the primary theme is the celebration of truth over evil. It is celebrated as *Garbha-Dandiya, Ramlila, Golu and Durga Pooja*in various parts of the country (explained in detail below).It is probably the most important Indian festival you have never heard of. Essentially, it is an art festival and the celebration of good over the evil.

**North India**  
The north celebrates it as a victory of King Rama over the demon Ravana in the festival**Ramlila**. King Rama is celebrated in the great Indian epic of Ramayana and is one of the most revered/respected gods in India. Rama is known for truth & honesty, and is life is believed to be worthy of emulation of commoners. At the end of the 10 day battle, huge effigies of demon Ravana are burned in each neighborhood.

**South India**

**In Telangana,** Bathukamma is celebrated for nine days during Durga [Navratri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navratri). It starts on the day of Mahalaya Amavasya(11 days before Dasara) and the 9-day festivities will culminate on "Saddula Bathukamma" or "Pedda Bathukamma" festival on Ashwayuja Ashtami, popularly known as Durgashtami which is two days before [Dussehra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dussehra" \t "_blank). Bathukamma is followed by *Boddemma*, which is a 7-day festival. Boddemma festival that marks the ending of Varsha Ruthu whereas Bathukamma festival indicates the beginning of Fall. The origins of this custom goes back to Goddess Sati who sacrificed herself to save the honor of Lord Shiva. There are also many other anecdotes explaining the origins of the festival. Apart from that, this festival in recent days has become very crucial in glorifying rich culture and heritage of Telangana people. The beauty of these festivals lie in the fact that they unite communities. All the people from different families and background congregate at a public place and offer their prayers to their beloved goddess. Its real treat to eyes to see all the women competing amongst themselves to come up with the best combination of colors and flowers.

In Tamilnadu, it is called **Golu.**We buy 100s of idols and try to create various settings that portray our culture and heritage. These idols & dolls are arranged in wood/steel stair specially built for this purpose. It is like a mini-museum at home. Some of these settings will talk about mythology and others about the lives during ancient times. Few others get more creative and set more modern scenes (such as a Cricket field or contemporary Indian life). On the 9th day, we stop all work and decorate the stuff that is essential for our professions. These are then put to use on the 10th and final day. Little kids begin their kindergarten at the end of this festival and in most south Indian homes you would find the kids from neighbors' homes singing and getting a gift (a sort of an elaborate "Trick or treat" during American Halloween)

**East India**  
In the east, this festival is celebrated as "**Durga Pooja**" where the goddess Durga wins over a demon. It celebrates both the victory of truth and the greatness of feminism. If you end up in the eastern city of Kolkata at this time, you will see swarms of Durga idols dotting all over the city and people of all walks celebrating in the street. It is a happy time.

**West India**  
In Western India, the festival is celebrated as the dance festival - **Garba**. This is absolutely fun and you will find people dancing in the streets with two decorated sticks. Many universities in the US organize this event in October and if you are around a major university, do take your time to attend this event.