

. What is Navratri?

Navratri, which literally translates to "nine nights" in Sanskrit, is a major Hindu festival celebrating the divine feminine power, or *Shakti*. It spans nine nights and ten days and is dedicated to the worship of Goddess Durga and her nine distinct forms, collectively known as the *Navadurga*.

2. The Central Legend: Victory of Good Over Evil

At the heart of the festival lies the legend of Goddess Durga's triumph over the powerful buffalo demon, Mahishasura. After he was granted a boon of near-invincibility, Mahishasura created havoc across the universe. The gods combined their energies to create Goddess Durga, who, after a fierce battle lasting nine nights, defeated him on the tenth day. This victory symbolizes the ultimate triumph of dharma (righteousness) over adharma (evil).

3. The Nine Forms of the Goddess (Navadurga)

Each night of Navratri is dedicated to worshipping one of the nine avatars of Goddess Durga. Devotees honor a different form each evening, celebrating her unique attributes:

- **Day 1:** Shailaputri
- **Day 2:** Brahmacharini
- **Day 3:** Chandraghanta
- **Day 4:** Kushmanda
- **Day 5:** Skandamata
- **Day 6:** Katyayani
- **Day 7:** Kalaratri
- **Day 8:** Mahagauri
- **Day 9:** Siddhidatri

4. Celebrations and Traditions

Navratri celebrations are marked by their vibrancy and vary by region.

- **Garba and Dandiya Raas:** In Gujarat and other western states, Navratri is synonymous with dance. As dusk falls, communities gather to perform the *Garba*, a traditional dance in concentric circles, and the *Dandiya Raas*, an energetic dance with sticks. These events are a spectacular display of colorful traditional attire, rhythmic music, and communal joy.
- **Fasting and Prayer:** For many, Navratri is a time for spiritual purification. Devotees observe fasts, consuming only specific foods like fruits, nuts, and non-grain flours. Homes are decorated, and special prayers (*pujas*) and hymns are offered daily.
- **Durga Puja:** In West Bengal and other eastern states, the last four days of Navratri are celebrated as Durga Puja. Grand, artistic temporary structures called *pandals* are built to

house magnificent idols of Goddess Durga, which are worshipped with great ceremony before being immersed in a river on the final day.

5. The Culmination: Vijayadashami (Dussehra)

The festival's tenth and final day is known as *Vijayadashami* or *Dussehra*. It celebrates the victory of Goddess Durga over Mahishasura. This day also coincides with the celebration of Lord Rama's victory over the demon king Ravana, often marked by the burning of large effigies of Ravana, further emphasizing the theme of good conquering evil.