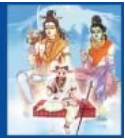




ॐ नमः शिवाय
Om Namah Shivaya



प्रदोषम
Pradosham



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MAHASHIVARATHRI - HOW IT IS BEING CELEBRATED WORLD WIDE
A look at the world-wide coverage of this Mega Event for Lord Shiva.

The worship of **Shiva Lingam** continues during the day and into the night. It is washed every three hours with milk, yoghurt, honey, rose water, etc., accompanied with Pooja, meditation and chanting of the Mantra --'Om Namah Shivaya'. Leaves of a forest tree Aegle marmelos (bilwa) are traditionally used for Pooja. Bilwa leaves, which have to be a stalk with three leaves, is kept on top of the Shivalinga after bathing the Shivalinga. Ber or jujube fruit is a special offering to the god on this day. Beetle leaves are also offered by some. Some also offer bilwa leaves on the belief that the Goddess Lakshami resides in them. Others believe it is offered for its cooling effects on the hot tempered deity. Let us now see how our beloved Lord's day is celebrated throughout globe.

DUBAI

People from all walks of life take bath early morning, visit the temple in large number. Individually devotees perform pujas at home, however, the Shiva temple in Dubai wear a festive look with special decoration of varieties of Shiva Lingams lined up for devotees darshan. The shrine located in Bur Dubai is visited by more than 1,00,000 people on the *Shivarathri* day. Various *abhishekams* and Arati is performed.

TAMIL NADU

In Tamil Nadu the festival of Shivaratri is celebrated with more enthusiasm and devotion. People throng Shiva temples early in the morning, take bath and observe fast. Various places such as Chidambaram, Madurai, Thiruvanaika, Thiruvannamalai, Tanjore, Thirunelveli celebrate the festival with reverence. In Kanyakumari District, the famous Shivalaya Ottam (Running between all 12 Shiva temples) takes place covering a distance of 50 miles in a day. They complete the run at the Suchindram temple. They fast for one week, they eat tender coconut, tender palmyra (nungu) in the day and tulsi and water in the night. Many of them chant Govinda Gopala while running as it is said, Bhima was chased by Purusha Mriga when he sought refuge in Shiva temples.

In Courtallam, the famous water falls in Thirunelveli district, Shivaratri is celebrated with a fine Deeparadana (It is one of the holiest shrine and Chit Sabha is located here among 5 sabhas of Shiva). The priests holding a huge column of fire and shows Deeparadana in a 'dancing manner'.

ANDHRA PRADESH

Festival of Shivaratri is observed with extreme enthusiasm in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The most visited temples in Andhra Pradesh on Shivarathri days are the Kalahasti temple and Bharamarambha Malikarjunaswamy temple at Srisailam. Devotees undertake fast and chant the names of Lord Shiva. Shiva worship in *Andhra Pradesh* is of utmost important and important centres are : Srisailam, Kalahasti, Kalesvaram, Keesara Kalesvaram, and many others. The Telugu strongly affiliated with Shiva worship for a long time.

KERALA

The most famous of the Maha Shiva Ratri celebrations are held in Aluva, on the banks of the Periyar River. An idol of the Lord is created on the sandy bank of the river for the thousands of pilgrims, who visit it to offer their prayers. People from all walks of life assemble for the great fair that is held. An exhibition and sale of goods is on during the celebrations. Cultural shows and dances are staged through the night to keep the pilgrims awake. In addition to the observance of Shivaratri rites, most of the pilgrims offer Bali (sacrifice) to their ancestors in the morning succeeding the holy night. The Shiva centres are : Thrissur, Vaikom, Ethumanur, Aluva, Kadunthuruthi, Thiruvanchikkulam etc.

KARNATAKA

Maha Shivaratri is observed with great interest in this state of Karnataka. Lingayts, people of Shiva's cult, worship Linga on Shivarathri. Lingayts woman, in keeping with their tradition, wear a Ling made of silver or gold on their body. A grand **Sri Shidlingappa's** fair is observed. Deity is taken to the river in a palanquin accompanied by drummers (Dollu and Majalu) from several neighboring villages. The famous shrines in Karnataka are, Dharmasthala, Gokarna, Sringeri among others where Shivarathri is celebrated in a grand manner.

MADHYA PRADESH

In Madhya Pradesh people take a holy dip in Sagar tank in Khujaraho. There is a beautiful Shiva temple there.

ASSAM

In the North-Eastern state of Assam, the hub of Shivaratri celebrations is at the **Umananda Temple**, situated on the Peacock Island in the middle of Brahmaputra river in Guwahati, the capital of Assam. Thousands of Shiva devotees from all over the country pay a visit to the temple on the occasion of Shivaratri. **Sibsagar**, the capital of the erstwhile Ahom kings, is the other major centre of Mahashivaratri celebrations in Assam.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

The Temple of **Bhutnath** at Mandi in Himachal Pradesh is said to host the biggest *Shivaratri Pooja* in the country. Every year on Shivaratri Festival, the

Governor of the state leads a Shobha Yatra at a function inaugurated by the Chief Minister. It is recalled that royal family of Mandi started this tradition about 500 years ago. An eight-day-long fair is also organized which witness the participation of artists from India and even beyond.

JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Hindus in Kashmir observe Shivarathri by attaching great significance. It is celebrated for 21 days beginning from Amavasya and end on the 8th day of the bright half of Phalguni. Kashmiri Brahmins perform Shivarathri Pooja on the 13th day of the dark half of Phalguni to mark Lord Shiva's wedding with Uma

In Kashmir, Shivarathri is also called **Hayrath**, which is the corrupt form of '*hairat*', a Persian word meaning 'utter surprise'. The term was coined during the Pathan occupation of the valley.

MADHYA PRADESH

Shivarathri is favorite celebrations in Madhya Pradesh. People in Madhya Pradesh take a holy dip in *Sagar* tank in Khajuraho. The place houses a beautiful Shiva temple.

Bundelkhand Region, which has a stronghold of Shaivites hosts the biggest Shivarathri celebrations in the state. A large number of Lord Shiva devotees flock the **Matangeshwar Temple** and worship throughout the night. Highpoint of the Shivarathri celebrations at the Matangeshwar Temple is the 10-day-long fair that witness the participation of traders, peddlers and gypsies from other parts of the state. Display of traditional fare and a variety of handicrafts besides the rural circus show, magic shows, folk theatre, and merry-go-rounds add to the excitement.

ORISSA

The Maha Shivarathri is celebrated in the state of Orissa with much fanfare. Major centres of Shivarathri celebrations in the state are Lingaraj Temple and Hakateswar Temple Atri. Shiva temples located at Mahendragiri, Gupteswar, Kapilas, Bhubaneswar and Khiching also draw a large of pilgrims from across the state.

Shivarathri celebration at **Lokanath Temple**, Puri is also quite popular. According to a legend popular in Orissa, long ago, Puri was a center of Shiva worship. The story goes, Lord Ramachandra himself installed the Lingam in the Lokanath Temple. This lingam is kept submerged, in a vat of water. It can only be seen on Pankodhar Ekadasi, before Shivarathri, when the water is removed from the vat, large number of devotees gather to have a darshan.

WEST BENGAL

In the state of West Bengal, on a *Shivarathri* day, devotees in West Bengal fast through out the day. Following the tradition, they also make four Shivlings made of clay of the holy river Ganga. These Shivlings are later offered in Pooja in four "prahars" (a measure of time equal to 3 hours) of the night. In the first prahar one of the Shivalings is bathed in milk. In the second period it is bathed with curd, in the third with ghee and in the fourth with honey. The devotees stay awake throughout night. The following they break the fast by feeding Brahmins.

At the temple of **Tarakeshwar**, 57 km from Kolkata, bare-footed pilgrims carry containers filled with the sacred water of river Ganga to pour over the stone image of the Lord and decorate the granite Lingam with garlands and flowers, as a mark of their devotion.

MAURITIUS

Maha Shivarathri is celebrated in Mauritius, in a grand way spread over three days. The majority of Hindu population makes a pilgrimate to the holy volcanic lake, Grand Bassin and make food sacrifices and stockpile vessels of the holy water.

NEPAL

Lord Shiva is one of the most favorite and popular Gods of NEPAL. On the Maha Shivarathri day - the day of reverence, devotees crowd the famous Pasupatinath temple to worship him. On this occasion "there is no space for a sesame seed", colorful Sadhus, the wandering sages who emulate Shiva, rub ashes over their bodies, give lectures to disciples, meditate, practice yoga. Devotees pray to Shiva inside the temple at midnight and may queue for up to six hours to look at the image. Bonfires are lit, neighbours and friends share food, two days of festivities really make the temple complex divine.

[top](#)