

DASAIN OR DURGA-PUJA (दशैं वा दुर्गा-पूजा) (THE UNIVERSAL MOTHER GODDESS TRIUMPHS OVER EVIL)

- Compiled & summarized by Ganga P. Deo (October 11, 1997)

1. Reasons of Celebration :

- Celebration in the bright lunar fortnight (*Shukla-paksha* = शुक्ल-पक्ष) of *Ashwin* (Sept.-Oct.) mainly due to or for :

- * Puja of various manifestations of all-powerful goddess Durga (Devi or Shakti) for 10 days (First day of the moon to 10th day of the increasing moon). Durga is one who is incomprehensible or difficult to access. Durga is worshipped as Divine Mother Goddess in Her gracious as well as terrible aspect who liberated the suffering people from the miseries of Evil.
- * Triumph of Virtue over the forces of Evils and triumph of Good over Evil
- * Durga slaying notorious mighty demons especially Mahishasura, Chanda & Munda, Raktavija, Shumbha, Nishumbha, Madhu & Kaitabha,
- * Victory of the gods over the wicked demons and devils harassing the mankind.
- * Celebration of Ram (Lord Vishnu) over Ravana (demon king) possible when Ram evoked Shakti (Supreme Energy vested in Goddess Durga - the active power or manifest energy of Siva that pervades all of existence). Sita (Ram's Consort) being considered taking terrible Kali form to kill the demon. Taleju (Durga) as Ram's ancestral family deity.
- * Ritual holy bathing
- * Profuse offerings and sacrifices.
- * Family reunion.
- * Blessings, gifts and glad tidings exchange.
- * Public parades, processions and pageants being held

2. Preparations :

- Home ceremonially cleaning, painting, decorating and freshening for the visitation of Goddess Durga , family members and guests.
- First nine days of Dasain are known as *Nawa-Ratri* (नव-रात्री) and nine form of Devis (Durga/Shakti) are known as *Nawa Durga* (नव- दुर्गा) . First day is called *Ghatasthapana* (घट-स्थापना) or *Kalash-sthapan* (कलश-स्थापन) , the 7th day is called *Saptami* or *Fulpati* (सप्तमी वा फुलपाती) , the 8th day is called *Maha-Ashtami* or *Kal-Ratri* (महा-अष्टमी वा काल-रात्री) , the 9th day is called *Maha-Nawami* (महा-नवमी) , and the 10th day is called *Tika* or *Vijaya-Dashami* (टीका वा विजया-दशमी) .
- Devotees chant sacred hymns/verses, carry lamps and musical bands in the darkness to bathe and purify souls at tirtha (sacred bathing ghats) for 9 nights (usually early morning bath when stars are still visible in the sky) light oil-lamps and worship Durga with offerings.
- Exchange of Cards and Blessing words like "Shubha Vijaya Dasain or Shubha Vijaya Dashami".
- Bazaars and shops filled with buyers of clothes, gifts, luxuries, temple offerings and food-stuffs.
- Advances of leaves, salary and bonuses to employees.
- Holiday closing of Govt., educational and military institutions and some businesses.
- Herding of animals (goats, sheeps, chicken, ducks and buffaloes) according to the demand of the area for sacrifice and slaughtering. The trend is now shifting towards using sweets and fruits as offerings in place of animal sacrifice.
- Feasting.

3. Representations :

- Durga (consort of Siva) is depicted holding murderous weapons in all her hands who control the mystery of life and death - of birth, procreation and fertility.
- Durga is also depicted as Kali / Kalika / Bhairavi wearing necklace/garland of skulls, standing on the mangled bodies of her victims, and long tongue dripping blood.
- Durga depicted as Gujeshwari or Guhyaeshwari as hidden secret power beyond human understanding.
- Durga depicted as Kumari or Living Goddess.
- Durga depicted as Tara, Laxmi, Saraswati, Gauri, Uma, Sati & Parvati.
- Durga deity depicted as Kalash (water-pot) usually of fired red clay filled with sacred river or holy water.

4. Rituals or Procedures :

- (a) First day of Dasain called "*Ghatasthapana* (घटस्थापना) or *Kalash-sthapan* (कलश-स्थापन) " meaning establishing of the holy water vessel (*Kalash*) covered with blood red cloth representing Goddess Durga and is kept on soil sown with grain seeds in the shrine or purified area of the home. Sometimes fresh clay structured idols are especially made for Dasain occasion.
- Barley (and also rice) seeds are sown which sprout and grow more than 5-6 inches tall by 10th day under darkness and moist conditions and are called *Jamara* (जमरा) . An auspicious moment puja is initiated for the Spirit of Durga. *Chandi-Path* (चण्डी-पाठ) , chanting sacred hymns for Goddess Durga, is done for all the 10 days, either by the priest or the eldest male in the family.
- (b) The 7th day of Dasain is *Fulpati* (फुलपाती) meaning sacred flowers and leaves (usually tall flowers, banana stalks, holy leaves and sugarcane stalk tied with red cloth), which symbolize/represent the original family Goddess Taleju (Durga) are offered to established *Kalash*. On this day in Nepal, the king and queen worship the established *Kalash* at Hanuman Dhoka in Kathmandu and other royal family members, dignitaries, officials and army officers participate in the process. Normally a parade procession is carried in Kathmandu and other district headquarters of the country.
- (c) The *Maha-Ashtami* (महा-अष्टमी) on the 8th day is worshipped and sacrifice to Durga and Kali continues. This night is called Black-night or *Kal-Ratri* (काल-रात्री) as hundreds of buffaloes, goats, sheep, chickens and ducks, representing demon *Mahishasura* (महिषासुर) are sacrificed at the temples or shrines of Kali and later considered as *prasad* (प्रसाद) of Durga and consumed in family feasts. It is traditionally believed that Goddess Kali prefers black, uncastrated, male animals for sacrifice. However, many followers of Lord Vishnu (usually vegetarians) perform no animal sacrifice but hack to pieces a *Kubhindo* (कुभिण्डो = ash-gourd) or *Ghiraula* (घिरोला = smooth-gourd) in place of animals.
- (d) The 9th day is called *Maha-Nawami* (महा-नवमी) or *Nawa-Ratri* (नव-रात्री) when people rush to the temples with offerings (gifts) and prayers.
- (e) The peak of celebration and the official conclusion of Dasain is reached on *Vijaya-Dashami* (विजया-वशमी) - the Great 10th Day of Victory - from which Dasain takes its name. This is the day when Lord Ram slew the demon Ravana and Durga appeared in a great fury, riding on a lion to vanquish Mahishasura. This is traditionally an obligatory day to visit all elder relatives and superiors in order of seniority or rank starting with parents to receive **Tika Blessings/Benedictions** (a dot of red color mixed with rice grain and curd (yogurt) placed upon the visitor's forehead and *Jamara* on the head by elder's hand) - an emblem of victory and power worn by Devi Goddess and blessings of good fortune. The ceremony is continued until full-moon day to include everyone in a large family. **Tika Puja is a time completely devoted to good fellowship, when all disputes, quarrels, and feuds must be forgotten and goodwill and good cheer must prevail.** At the end of the Tika Puja Day (Vijaya-Dashami) of Dasain, the *Kalash* is disassembled and offerings are disposed off in ritual ceremony with the prayer to the Goddess chanting "Shantih, Shantih, Shantih (शान्तिः, शान्तिः, शान्तिः)" i.e. "Give us peace, preserve peace,