

CPGRAMS enhances transparency

The Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) is an online platform developed by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) in collaboration with the National Informatics Centre (NIC). It serves as a unified mechanism for Indian citizens to lodge complaints and seek redressal regarding issues related to Central Government Ministries, Departments, and Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs). By digitizing grievance redressal, CPGRAMS enhances transparency, accountability, and efficiency in government services.

CPGRAMS was established with the primary objective of creating a citizen-friendly governance system where grievances are addressed promptly. It ensures that government departments are responsive and accountable by providing a structured mechanism for complaint resolution. Additionally, it minimizes bureaucratic delays by streamlining the process and allowing real-time monitoring of complaints. The platform facilitates direct interaction between citizens and government bodies, reducing reliance on intermediaries.

The system allows citizens to file grievances through the official website (<https://pgportal.gov.in/>). To submit a complaint, users must provide details about their grievance and select the relevant government department. A unique registration number is generated, enabling users to track the status of their complaint. The grievance is then forwarded to the appropriate ministry or department, which is required to respond within 30 to 45 days, depending on the complexity of the issue. If the complaint remains unresolved or if the resolution is unsatisfactory, the complainant can escalate the matter for higher-level intervention.

One of the key features of CPGRAMS is its multi-channel accessibility. Citizens can file grievances not only through the online portal but also via mobile applications, emails, postal services, and call centers. This inclusivity ensures that people from various backgrounds, including those without internet access, can voice their concerns. Additionally, the system is available in multiple Indian languages, making it more user-friendly for people across the country.

CPGRAMS is also integrated with state grievance redressal mechanisms, ensuring better coordination between the Central and State Governments. This integration allows for seamless transfer of complaints when they pertain to state-level issues. Furthermore, the system includes an automated escalation mechanism, which ensures that unresolved complaints are sent to higher authorities for review. Government officials can track grievance redressal trends through real-time dashboard analytics and reports, enabling them to identify common issues and make data-driven policy improvements.



■ PROF NUTAN K RESUTRA

When I used to read folk talks, I found that they almost all started with the sentence "Once upon a time there was!" And this tale also starts with the same sentence:

Once upon a time, there was a big jungle near the area what is today called Tehsil or City of Ramnagar, in District Udhampur. Just outside this jungle was a small village where the family of a Brahmin lived. As was the tradition in those days, this Brahmin family also had some domestic cattle. Each morning, the house owner would send the cattle to the jungle for grazing and the latter would return in the evening.

One day the Brahmin noticed that his best cow had stopped giving milk. He noticed that when the cattle went for grazing, that particular cow had full udders with milk; but when they returned, there was no milk. He suspected that some- one in the jungle would mulch his cow. He decided to check stealing of his cow's milk by who so ever it was.

The following day he sent all the other cattle but tied that particular cow in the house itself. But the cow became violent, broke her rope and ran towards the jungle. When she returned, again; there was no milk with her. The Brahmin became very confused and could not think of any possible reason for it.

Throughout that night he could not sleep

properly. The next morning, he let all cattle out for grazing. Keeping a safe distance, he started following them with the intent to catch the milk- thief red handed. On entering the jungle, that cow went to a particular spot and stood there. Suddenly, she automatically started pouring her milk without any one mulching her! That milk was absorbed by soil at that very point. After giving milk, she started grazing and returned home with other cattle.

The Brahmin was very perplexed. He could not understand the logic behind all this phenomenon. The same thing got repeated the following day and the day after also; baffling the Brahmin completely. And then he decided to do something.

When following day, the cow again went to that particular spot, the Brahmin also went there and started digging the place where milk would flow from the cow. After digging for a while, his spade suddenly struck some hard object with force. When he removed the earth with his hands, he found an antique Shivling buried there. It was on this Shivling on which the cow used to give her milk!

The Brahmin removed the Shivling and erected it on a small pedestal, giving it the shape of a make shift temple. This temple was situated on the bank of a large water body or lake which is now known as the Dalsar Lake. Even today, this Shivling has a mark of spade on it, clearly visible in the above photograph,

giving credence to the story that the Brahmin had hit that Shivling with his spade!

When the news of discovery of that Shivling spread, the Raja of Ramnagar also came to pay his obeisance there. In those days, Ramnagar was ruled by the Kings belonging to the Bandralta Clan. The Raja vowed to build a temple there. And it is said that the first temple of miraculous Shivling of Dalsar was made by the then Raja of Ramnagar. That first temple got built by the Bandralta Raja of Ramnagar was destroyed because of a powerful earthquake that rocked the area after the rule of BandraltaKings had come to an end. The Shiv Temple at Dalsar was made three times; and it is this third construction that we find today. The second temple at Dalsar was built by the locals and devotees. But that temple was very small where hardly three to four persons could sit and perform pooja at one given time. In the year 1996, it was for the third time that the temple was rebuilt. This time, it was an old lady of Dalsar named Sita Devi Khajuria who, out of her own resources, got the present structure erected in memory of her son Om Parkash and daughter -in -law Sushma Devi. Her son was posted in Indian Army and the duo had died in a tragic accident at Srinagar.

There is another legend associated with this temple. The locals believe that this miraculous Shivling changes its colours three times in a

day. The afternoon or evening colour of Shivling would be altogether different from what it was in the morning! The Shivling has the signs of mouth, ear, nose and jataor long hair of Bhagwan Shiv Shankar.

The story of Dalsar Shiv Temple would not be complete if we do not make mention of Dalsar Lake. It is said that this lake was developed by the Bandralta kings of Ramnagar kingdom. They got steps constructed around it; the remains of those steps can be seen even today. It is said that many palatial houses were also built around this lake. Even the Dogra Raja Ram Singh took keen interest in its development and beautification. He also got different ghats built around it where people used to bathe with ease.

In those days Dalsar Lake was spread over a vast area, but now due to various man-made -causes, this lake has shrunk to less than half of its original size. Yet, the sanctity of the lake is still maintained because of the existence of the miraculous Shiv Temple.

Even after passing of so many centuries, no one has been able to give a satisfactory explanation of the daily changing colours or the signs of nose, mouth, ears and jata on the miraculous Shivling of Dalsar!

(The author is former Principal GGM Science College and former Chairman, J&K BOSE)

Maha Shivratri which coincides with last day of Maha Kumbh at Paryagraj

■ DR SONIA VERMA

Maha Shivratri, known as the "Great Night of Shiva," is one of the most significant festivals in Hinduism, celebrated in honor of Lord Shiva. This festival holds deep spiritual and cultural resonance, symbolizing the union of divine energies and the cyclical nature of existence. It is a time for reflection, devotion, and the pursuit of enlightenment among devotees.

The festival is steeped in mythology, featuring prominent legends that highlight its importance within Hindu teachings. Among these tales is the divine marriage of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, which represents harmony between masculine and feminine energies. Moreover, the cosmic dance of Tandava performed by Shiva signifies the eternal rhythm of creation, preservation, and destruction, echoing the cyclical nature of life.

This year, Maha Shivratri holds a particularly auspicious significance as it coincides with the last day of the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj. The Kumbh Mela, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world, draws millions of pilgrims seeking spiritual purification. The convergence of these two monumental events amplifies the devotion and energy surrounding Maha Shivratri, enhancing its spiritual import.

Rituals Associated with the Festival
Ritual practices during Mahashivratri vary widely but share common themes aimed at spiritual elevation. Key rituals include: fasting, night vigils (Jaagran), abhishekam. These rituals exemplify the cultural importance of Maha Shivratri, marking it as a time for community gathering, spiritual introspection, and rejuvenation of faith. Through various practices, devotees reaffirm their connection to the divine and seek personal and collective enlightenment.

The Divine Marriage of Shiva and Parvati

One of the most celebrated legends is the divine union of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. This narrative portrays Parvati, the reincarnation of Sati, who performed stringent penance to win Shiva's love. Their marriage is not merely a romantic partnership but a representation of the cosmic balance between Shakti (feminine energy) and Shiva (masculine energy). Devotees view this union as an embodiment of harmony, a crucial principle for spiritual fulfillment. The celebration of this marriage on Maha Shivratri encourages devotees to embrace and harmonize these dual energies within themselves, fostering unity and balance in their lives.

The Cosmic Dance of Tandava

On Maha Shivratri, Lord Shiva is believed to perform the Tandava, a cosmic dance symbolizing the cycles of creation, preservation, and destruction. This majestic dance signifies the eternal rhythm of life and embodies the dynamism inherent in the universe. For devotees, the Tandava not only reflects Shiva's role as the ultimate creator but



also invites them to engage in their spiritual practices with fervor. Participants often chant alongside the rhythm of the dance, symbolizing their collective movement within the fabric of the cosmos. Through this engagement, devotees seek to connect deeper with the divine, invoking a sense of peace and introspection.

The confrontation between Brahma and Vishnu

Another significant tale associated with Maha Shivratri centers on the confrontation between Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu regarding superiority among deities. To resolve their dispute, Lord Shiva manifested as an infinite column of fire, embodying the essence of creation. Neither Brahma nor Vishnu could find the ends of this column. In a moment of deceit, Brahma falsely claimed to have discovered the top with the aid of a Ketaki flower, which led to Shiva's wrath and his subsequent curse of reduced worship for Brahma. This narrative stresses the importance of humility and truth, illustrating that divine authority stems from righteousness rather than ego. In spiritual practice, this teaches devotees to embrace humility, seek truth, and acknowledge the divine presence in all deities.

These myths and the richness embedded within them serve as guiding principles for Maha Shivratri's celebrations. They inspire devotees to engage in rituals that align with these cosmic themes, fostering a deeper understanding of their spiritual path. By connecting with these stories, individuals deepen their devotion to Lord Shiva, reinforcing their spiritual journey and communal bonds during this revered festival. Through the lens of mythology, Maha Shivratri transcends mere celebration, transforming into a profound spiritual experience that resonates globally.

Purification and Spiritual Growth

The rituals practiced during Maha Shivratri collectively serve to purify both the mind and body. Fasting helps shed unwanted distractions, while night vigils cultivate unwavering focus on spiritual pursuits. Mantra chanting enhances mental clarity and encourages devotional fervor. These practices not only reinforce individual spiritual journeys but also foster a sense of community among devotees. As they gather in temples or homes, sharing their devotion, they reinforce their collective spirit and commitment to enlightenment. Through this shared experience, Maha Shivratri transcends mere observance, transforming into a powerful ritual of introspection, growth, and communal unity.

Celebration Across Regions

Maha Shivratri is celebrated with great fervor across various regions, particularly in countries like Pakistan and Nepal, where unique customs, pilgrimages, and significant events showcase the festival's deep cultural relevance.

Maha Shivratri Celebrations in Pakistan

In Pakistan, one of the most notable celebrations occurs at the Katas Raj Temples located in Chakwal. This historic complex draws Hindu devotees from all over the country, as well as from India. Key aspects of the celebrations include:

Pilgrimages to Katas Raj:

Every year, thousands of devotees journey to this sacred site to participate in religious ceremonies organized by the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB), making it a vibrant hub during Maha Shivratri.

Local Observances:

Cities like Karachi, Hyderabad, and Mirpurkhas also see enthusiastic celebrations. Rituals include fasting, night vigils (jaagran), and making offerings of Bilva leaves to Shiva Lingas in homes and local temples.

Temple Activities:

Temples, such as the Shree Ratneswar Mahadev Temple in Karachi, host special programs that include prayers, chanting, and community feasts, allowing the local Hindu community to reinforce their faith and cultural heritage.

The Pakistani celebrations highlight the festival's role in fostering community ties and preserving spiritual traditions, despite cultural shifts.

Maha Shivratri Celebrations in Nepal

In Nepal, the Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu serves as the epicenter for Maha Shivratri festivities. Significant elements of the celebrations include:

Pilgrimage to Pashupatinath

Thousands flock to this revered site to worship Lord Shiva amid vibrant rituals. The atmosphere pulsates with devotion, heightened by the rhythmic chanting of mantras and devotional songs.

Cultural Festivities

Activities at Pashupatinath encompass a range of cultural performances and processions that reflect the richness of Nepalese traditions. Devotees often stay awake throughout the night, engaging in prayers and celebrating with family and friends.

Ritual Offerings

Devotees bring flowers, fruits, and Bilva leaves as sacred offerings to Shiva Lingas, symbolizing their devotion. Special arrangements ensure that pilgrims from various regions can partake in the festivities. The events in Nepal not only honor Lord Shiva but also illuminate the vibrant cultural tapestry that underscores Maha Shivratri's importance within the religious life of the community. Both Pakistan and Nepal exemplify the festival's ability to transcend geographical boundaries, uniting devotees through shared customs and practices. The cel-

ebrations serve as expressions of faith while reinforcing the cultural identity of Hindu communities in these regions.

Global Observance of Maha Shivratri

Maha Shivratri, beyond its potent cultural roots in Asia, is embraced by communities around the world. The celebrations outside of Asia reveal a remarkable tapestry of shared devotion, highlighting the widespread impact of Hindu traditions.

North America

In North America, cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago become vibrant hubs for Maha Shivratri celebrations.

Europe

European celebrations take place in various countries, with notable observances in the United Kingdom, Germany, and France:

Cultural Gatherings: Cities like Birmingham and London witness significant events, where devotees come together to celebrate Maha Shivratri. These gatherings often include cultural performances, storytelling, and workshops, bringing the community together while honoring their heritage.

Faith-Based Activities: Rituals such as Abhishekam and nighttime vigils (jaagran) are regularly observed, with devotees engaging in communal prayers and blessings that reinforce their spiritual connections.

South America

In Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and Chile, Maha Shivratri has gained traction among the local Hindu diaspora:

Community Festivals: Celebrations typically consist of temple gatherings where rituals are performed, complemented by community feasting and sharing of cultural traditions. These events serve as vital links to their heritage and promote unity among practitioners.

Spiritual Discourses: Educational talks on the significance of Maha Shivratri and Lord Shiva are often organized to deepen understanding and appreciation among attendees, whether they are long-time devotees or newcomers.

Africa

African countries, particularly Mauritius and South Africa, also partake in Maha Shivratri:

Processions and Pilgrimages: In Mauritius, processions to Ganga Talao (Grand Bassin) are a highlight, where devotees immerse in spiritual practices, prayers, and offerings.

Cultural Events: South African Hindu communities celebrate with rituals, traditional music, and dance that celebrate their cultural identity while honoring Lord Shiva.

Australia and Oceania

In Australia, as well as in New Zealand and Fiji, Maha Shivratri is observed with great enthusiasm:

Temple Celebrations: Temples fill with prayers, meditation sessions, and intricate rituals. Events often include family-friendly activities, engaging younger generations in their cultural and spiritual heritage.

Community Bonding: The celebrations foster a sense of community spirit, allowing devotees to unite over

shared beliefs and traditions, reinforcing their identity within a multicultural landscape.

These global observances highlight the transcendent nature of Maha Shivratri, showcasing how diverse communities come together to celebrate devotion, spirituality, and cultural heritage, fostering unity and strength amongst practitioners across the world.

Lesser-Known Legends

Maha Shivratri is enriched by numerous legends, some of which are lesser-known yet profoundly impactful, illustrating intricate moral lessons and enhancing devotees' practices.

The Hunter and the Bilva Leaves

One poignant story tells of a hunter who, in an attempt to escape a lion, climbed a Bilva tree. To stay awake and avoid falling, he plucked Bilva leaves, unknowingly offering them to a Shiva Linga below. Pleased by these inadvertent offerings, Lord Shiva saved the hunter despite his past wrongdoings. This tale exemplifies how even unintentional acts of devotion can be deemed sacred, encouraging devotees to approach their spiritual practices with sincerity rather than perfection.

The Legend of King Chitrabhanu

According to the Garuda Purana, King Chitrabhanu possessed the extraordinary ability to recall his past lives. During a discussion with sage Ashtavakra, he revealed that in one of his past incarnations, he had been a hunter who unknowingly performed rituals for Shiva while trying to stay awake on Maha Shivratri. His actions had gained Shiva's favor, resulting in the king's prosperous reign in his subsequent life. This narrative highlights the transformative power of sincere devotion and the interconnectedness of one's actions across lifetimes, inspiring devotees to engage earnestly in their spiritual practices.

The Dance of Creation

A lesser-known aspect of Maha Shivratri is Lord Shiva's cosmic dance known as Tandava. It is believed that Shiva performs this dance to symbolize not only the rhythms of creation but also to invite devotees to participate in life's divine flow. This dancing invites practitioners to engage harmoniously with the cosmic order, deepening their spiritual practice.

The Curse of Brahma

Another essential story involves Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu's struggle for supremacy. In this legend, Lord Shiva manifested as an infinite column of fire to resolve their dispute, leading to Brahma's false claim of finding its end with a Ketaki flower. As a punishment, Shiva cursed Brahma, resulting in diminished worship for him. This narrative reinforces themes of humility, truth, and the dangers of ego, serving as a moral compass for practitioners who are encouraged to seek authenticity and selflessness in their devotion.

These lesser-known legends enrich the tapestry of Maha Shivratri's celebration and encourage devotees to reflect on the moral lessons they impart, cultivating a deeper understanding of their spiritual journeys.