



श्री सनातन धर्म सभा – दक्षिण आफ्रिका

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NAAG PANCHAMI

Introduction

The festival of Naag Panchami is observed in the Hindu month of Shraavan during Shukla Paksha (bright half). On this day, worshipping Lord Shiva, the serpent holder, is considered auspicious. According to astrology, the God of the fifth date is the snake. On the day of Naag Panchami, a fast is kept to appease the God Snake. There is a procedure of worshipping Goddess Manasaa on Naag Panchami in the month of Shraavan. Goddess Manasaa is considered the Goddess (Devi) of serpents.

Snake worship, no doubt, owes its origin to human beings' natural fear of these reptiles. However, in Hindu culture, they own a prominent place. Hindu mythologies are filled with stories and fables about snakes, the most important being the Sheshnaga of Lord Vishnu (it is on this Snake that Lord Vishnu reclines while sleeping in the sea). Thus, it is quite understandable that a festival called Naag Panchami is observed in the honour of snakes every year.

Naga Panchami is one of Hinduism's most ancient festivals and is also mentioned in the Puranas. According to the Bhavishya Purana, when human beings bathe the snakes Vasuki, Takshaka, Kaliya, Manibhadra, Airavata, Dhritarashtra, Karkotaka, and Dhananjaya with milk, on the fifth day of the bright fortnight of Shraavan, they ensure freedom from danger for their families.

Legends associated with Naag Panchami

There are some legends associated with Naag Panchami. One has it that on this day while tilling his land, a farmer accidentally killed some young serpents. The mother of these

serpents took revenge by biting and killing the farmer and his family, except for one daughter, who happened to be praying to the Naagas (snakes). This devotion resulted in the revival of the farmer and the rest of his family. Since then, Naag Panchami has been celebrated in India. It is believed that in reward for worship, snakes will never bite any family member.

There is yet another legend related to the festival. It goes that young Lord Krishna was playing with the other cowherds near river Yamuna when the ball got entangled in the high branch of a tree. Krishna volunteered to climb the tree and fetch the ball. Below the tree, a terrible snake Kaliya used to live in the river. Suddenly Krishna fell from the tree into the water. The terrible snake came up angrily, but Krishna started jumping on its head. Finally, Kaliya said sorry to Lord Krishna, and He forgave the snake and let it go free. Since then, on Naag Panchami day, the victory of Krishna over the Kaliya snake is commemorated.

Importance of snakes in Hinduism

In India, snakes are so revered that temples have also been erected in their honour. There is a particularly famous one in Mysore called Subramania (Sheshnaga). The Naag culture was fairly widespread in India and continues to be an important segment of worship in certain areas. Naga Panchami is another form of honouring snakes.

History reveals the significant role that snakes have played in Hinduism. In Chapter 10 and verse 29 of the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Krishna says:

अनन्तश्चास्मि नागानां

anantaśh chāsmi nāgānām

Amongst the snakes, I am Anant

Anant is the divine serpent on whom Lord Vishnu rests. The Supreme Lord Vishnu is depicted as resting on the many-headed snake, Sheshnaga, the symbol of eternity – the eternity of The Lord and the Lord’s limitless qualities. He possesses ten thousand hoods. It is said that he has been describing the glories of God with each of his hoods since the beginning of creation, but the description has not yet been completed.

Hinduism also accommodates a “so-called” negative view of the snake. We see Lord Shiva adorned with snakes, symbolising the ability to control the poisonous qualities within through

discipline and tapasya and thus benefit others. We all need to ensure that discipline and tapasya help us restrict and control evil tendencies and activities, which are like poison that leads to our spiritual downfall.

Conclusion

How Naag Panchami is usually observed differs from region to region; however, the essence shows respect to all creation. The common practice is to make offerings of water (some offer milk) at an anthill – where snakes are believed to reside. In some parts of the world, Hindus offer worship using an image of a snake representing all serpents.

The deeper significance of this observance can be summarised as follows: It is a recognition of the important contribution that every created being makes to every other created being. It highlights the close interdependence among all creations as representations of divinity. In Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says

ईश्वरः सर्वभूतानां हृद्देशेऽर्जुन तिष्ठति ।

īśvaraḥ sarva-bhūtānāṃ hṛid-deśhe 'rjuna tiṣṭhati

The Supreme Lord dwells in the hearts of all living beings, O Arjun.

Taking care of the natural environment, the animals, trees, snakes, and fish, is an expression of respect to the creator, the Supreme Lord.