

Navratri

What is Navratri?

Navratri, is a festival of worship and dance. The word Navaratri literally means nine nights in Sanskrit; The festival is celebrated for nine nights every year during September or October based on Hindu calander.

There are many legends attached to the conception of Navratri like all Indian festivals but all of them are related to Goddess Shakti (Hindu Mother Goddess) and her various forms. Navratri is divided into three-day sets, each devoted to a different aspect of the supreme goddess. The first three days are devoted to Goddess Durga (Warrior Goddess to destroy all our vices, impurities, and defects) dresses in red and mounted on a lion. The next three day set is devoted to Goddess Lakshmi (the giver of spiritual and material wealth) dressed in gold and mounted on an owl, and the last set is devoted to Goddess Saraswati (the goddess of wisdom) dressed in milky white and mounted on a pure white swan. In some communities people undergo rigorous fasts during this season that lasts for the nine days of the festival, only to be opened on the tenth day of Dussehra. Traditionally, Navratri was celebrated by Hindu women only, in the honor of goddess Amba/Durga. Amba/Durga is believed to be a Shakti, originating from Lord Shankara.

On the tenth day of Navratri, the holiday of Dussehra, an effigy of Ravana is burnt to celebrate the victory of good (Rama) over evil.



During this colorful event of Navratri, young men and women dance around an earthen lamp, representing Goddess Durga, kept in a decorated mud jar called Garba, singing songs accompanied by the rhythmic clapping of hands – an expression of gratitude towards goddess Durga for saving the world from the atrocities of the Mahishasur.

Though it is one of the most celebrated festivals of Hindu calendar, it holds special significance for Gujaratis and Bengalis and one can see it in the zeal and fervor of the people with which they indulge in the festive activities of the season.

Garba

The name Garba comes from the Sanskrit term Garbha Deep. Garbha, when translated, most closely resembles the English preposition inside, and Deep is a small earthenware lamp.

Garba is a dance that originated in the Gujarat region. Traditionally, either the lamp (the Garba Deep), or an image of Amba is placed in the middle of the concentric rings. People dance around the deity clapping rhythmically. At every step they gracefully bend sideways, the arms coming together in beautiful sweeping gestures, up and down, left and right, each movement ending in clap. The songs of the Garba are often historic and melodious and have been handed down through generations. The origins of them seem to be a tribal dance revolving around a hunt; later it was transformed into an agricultural ritual dedicated to the goddess Ambika. Today in the cities and town the dance is a social activity and entertainment rather than religious agricultural or fertility symbol. People clad in chaniya-cholis and dhoti-kurtas dancing in a synchronized manner. There are variations in the garba in different regions and communities. Dancers have involved their own style and steps.

The Garba of Gujarat is the most popular women's folk dance of Gujarat. During Navratri, a pot is ceremoniously placed attractive designs are made on the pot and a light is placed inside. Village girls bearing pots (garbis) on their heads go from door to door and dance around the respective house.

Dandiya

Although Dandiya Raas is also somewhat associated with garba, it is originating from a totally different root. The origin of the Rasa is traced back to the legends connected with the life of Lord Krishna. It is essentially associated with the agricultural rites. Dandiya raas was traditionally performed by men only. Traditionally, this was a pseudo practice of the sword fight with footwork, you can call it as in poomse in Tae Kwon Do or Kata in Karate. You will still find these traditional movements and forms of Dandiya raas in Saurashtra (Western Gujarat). This was an excellent social tradition of incorporating goddess with an art of swords and also with entertainment, when there were many invasions happening on small kingdoms and almost every man in society was responsible for his region's and community's safety. The Rasa dances of Saurashtra are closely related to agricultural functions and are for the best part grain-ritual dances.

Dandiya Raas is performed in groups of pairs, with a pair of sticks in their hands played to the beat of a dhol. These sticks, which can vary from 1.5 to 2 feet in length, and is meant to represent the sword of the avenging Goddess Durga. The circles formed by men and women move in clockwise and anti-clockwise directions. Raas is a very energetic, colorful and playful dance providing an opportunity for acting and exchanging messages through eye contact. The most impressive artistry of the Rasa dances of Gujarat and Saurashtra is displayed in the Dandiya Rasa by men. It is a counterpart of the Garba of the women. The dancers use sticks at the end of which tiny bells (ghungrus) are tied so that

they give off a clear jingling sound when they strike one another. This dance has a very complicated rhythm pattern and even though the dancers begin in a slow tempo, the dance develops in such a manner that each person in the circle not only performs a solo dance with his own sticks, but also has a complex multiple relationship with both his partners on either side as also partners opposite him in the circles. The circle keeps breaking sometimes into two concentric circles and sometimes into three or four circles within the orbit of a larger circle.

Garba and Dandiya Raas are now amongst the dances representative of India and have been seen in several world cultural festivals. One of the most important factor of the Garba/ Dandiya Raas is the quality of singers. Today there are famous choral groups like Falguni Phatak, Babla, Adesh Srivastava, Preeti-Pinki group, Vijay Shah are some of the favorite Dandiya Raas singers. There are also training academies at which you are taught many different styles/steps like Dodhiyu, simple five, simple seven, popatiyu, Trikoniya (hand movement which forms an imagery triangle), Lehree, three claps, butterfly, hudo, two claps and many more.

Dandiya Choice

Traditionally Dandiyas were bamboo sticks about a feet in length. Today, Dandiyas come in numerous size, color and style. The revolving dandiyas are the metallic ones with a socket and ball bearing in the center, to give a good effect when the stick goes whirling in the air. Acrylic dandiyas are colorful, light and attractive. Among wooden ones, there are a wide range of stick to choose from – from ones with tiny bells and trinkets to those with silk or fabric coatings. The wooden dandiyas give a definitive sound of clashing sticks

Ahmedabad and Vadodara are two of many great places to enjoy Navratri. All kinds of Rasa-Garbas, Dandia ras etc. are practiced in this period, feasting and fasting are important cultural aspects of this day, and various rituals are performed at temples. The atmosphere is electric and revelry is in the air. Dabeli is far the most popular snack that most dandiya revelers consume during the Navratri in many parts of India.

Categories

Duha: Is in opening fast tracked song, at a very high pitch and after that the 'geet' follows! Men display an energetic form of dance synonymous with the tunes.

Raas: It's roots lay from the days of Lord Krishna who played 'raas' on the shores of Yamuna river on a moonlit night with his beloved Gopis. The tradition still continues! nowadays, men and women play in pairs with bamboo sticks called 'dandiya'!

Garba: Is a very graceful form of dance among the Gujaratis and it is performed on 9 nights, 'Navratri' to Goddess Ambica, where women dance gracefully in circles sometimes also using, 'Bedu, Kanjari' or just 'Taali' and 'Chapti' They are dressed in exquisitely embroidered, set in mirrors 'Choli', 'Ghagra' and 'Bandhani' dupattas, silver oxidized jewellery where in 'Tika' and 'Anklets' are a must! the dress code of men is Kehediyu, Chudidar and a Turban.

Aarti: Is sung in the beginning genuflecting the Goddess. Prayers are offered and Praises are sung and danced with diyas in hand.