

GANESH CHATURTHI

Ganesh chaturthi is a religious festival celebrated all over India by Hindus. In Tamilnadu, it is celebrated as Vinayaka Chaturthi. Many states declare a public holiday to enable people to perform poojas. It is an annual festival. Ganesha is worshipped as SIDDHI VINAYAKA for Karya Siddhi. During freedom struggle, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak turned the annual observance of Ganesha worship into a national celebration for 10 days to unite the people of the land with a divine fervor. So Ganesha became not only a beloved God of each family but also a symbol of national integration. According to the lunar calendar, Ganesha chaturthi falls on Bhadrapada Shukla Chaturthi (in the month of August, the Tamil equivalent of Avani). After ten days festival and poojas the idols of Ganesha are taken in a procession and immersed in the sea with cries, "Ganapathi Bappa Moraya, Pudalya varshi lavkar ya".

Pooja procedure : On this day, clay idols of Ganesh (plain or painted) along with a beautifully designed paper umbrella are brought home, placed in a mantap and poojas are performed with flowers and leaves of various types including Durva or grass known also as Arugam pullu in Tamil. Modaks (steamed rice pudding, also called Kolakattai in Tamil) are offered as Naivedyam followed by Aarathi, finally ending with gunja (thoppukaranam). The pooja concludes with a feast. In temples, special poojas are performed to the Lord, people congregate in thousands, break coconuts and pray to Lord Ganesha to remove all obstacles in life as he is also called Vighna Vinashaka.

Lord Ganesha is accorded the foremost place in all poojas. He is called "Gana Nayaka" (Leader of all Ganas) No worship can be performed without an initial prayer to Lord Ganesha. At the time of annual examination, we see boys and girls going to school, pause before a Ganesha idol at a street corner and pray to Him to ensure success. Tourist buses and lorries carrying cargo make an unscheduled halt on a wayside Ganesha temple, break coconuts and pray for a safe journey en route. Even during the house warming ceremonies (Griha Pravasha) or for that matter inauguration of any new premises such as a clinic, office etc. starts with an invocation or a Ganesh pooja for the removal of any obstacle. Many write a symbol "7" called Pillayar Suzhi at the commencement of all writings, be it a letter or a book or an invitation for a wedding.

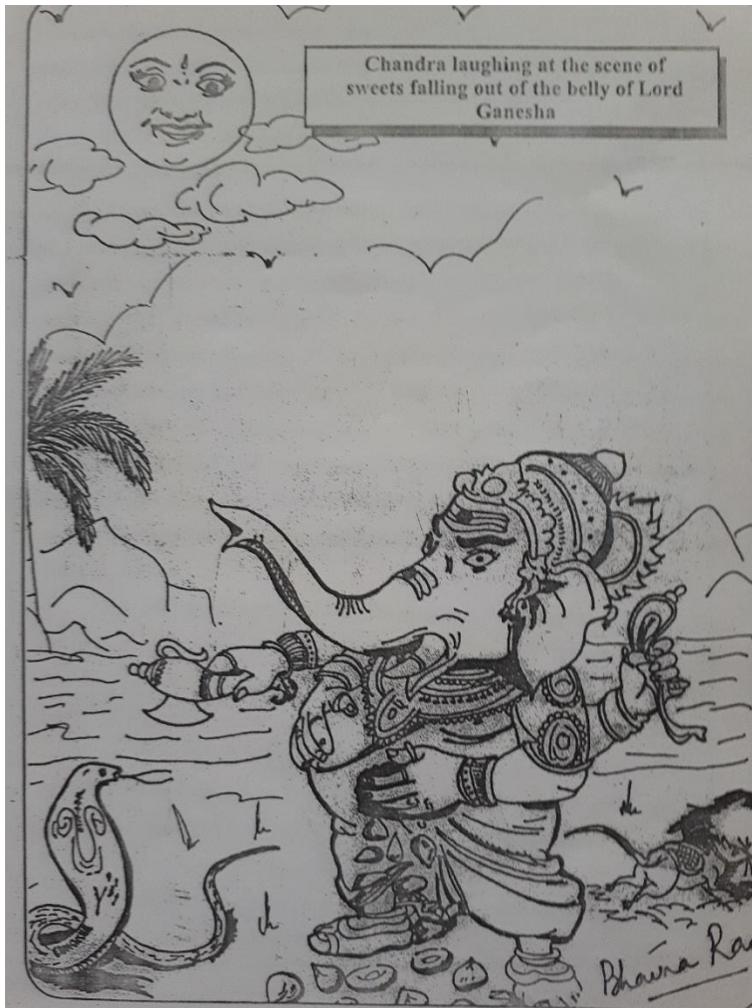
Lord Ganesha is known by many names such as Ganapathi (Lord of the Ganas), Vinayaka (Supreme leader), Vigneshwara (Remover of obstacles), Lambodara (Pot or huge bellied), Ekadanta (one with single tusk), Gajanana (Elephant faced), Vakratunda (One whose trunk is bent), Pilliar (Supreme son), Thumbikkai alwar (A devotee of Vishnu with a trunk) and so on.

Look at the figure or form of Ganesha. He is an object of affection to the children and for the elderly. He is reverential. He has an elephant head, a long trunk, two big fan like ears, two small eyes, a broken tusk, a big pot belly (Lambodara) and a serpent girdle, a little mouse by His side as his Vahana (hence called Mooshika vahana gajanana) with Modak in his right hand. These features

should not be taken to be objects of curiosity and ridicule. They have much greater truths hidden behind them, if properly understood. The elephant head is symbol of majesty, strength, determination and profound intelligence. The long trunk signifies a huge reservoir of energy. It can lift heavy logs of timber. His ears are large enough to listen to the voice of everyone, but like the winnowing basket is capable of sifting good from the bad. The broken tusk represents the imperfect world, the two eyes though very small are capable of observing everything minutely like picking up a sewing needle on the ground with its long trunk. The big pot belly signifies that it is capable of containing all things offered and digesting them. His vahana, the mouse, though small, it is intelligent and succeeds in getting its way cleared of all obstacles.

An unusual form of offering pranams of Lord Ganesha is in vogue known as “Gunja” in Marathi and “Thoppukkaranam” in Tamil.

It is customary and also an injunction that, on Ganesh Chaturthi day, people should perform Ganesh Pooja in the morning, and in the evening see Chandra (Moon) in the sky only after throwing akshata towards the moon, as otherwise, they will fall victims of apavada or slander.



Story of Ganesh Chaturthi

There are two stories in connection with Ganesh chaturthi. They are :

1. Chandra (Moon) it seems, was very proud of his beauty and often used to boast of it. He also made fun of others, whom he thought, cannot equal him in beauty. Lord Ganesha accepts all offerings by his devotees including Modaks and is pleased with them. He blesses them with plenty and prosperity. Once, when He was returning home after partaking of the modaks in a festival dedicated to him on Chaturthi day riding on His mouse, a cobra came across the way, the mouse got frightened and ran helter skelter. Ganesha had a jolt and fell off his seat and his full big belly opened. All the sweet

he had taken fell out. Chandra happened to observe this at that time and loudly laughed at the awkward figure of Ganesha causing embarrassment. Ganesha got furious and gave a blow to Chandra with his tusk. Chandra took to his heels and hid himself in a lake. Ganesha cursed him saying that henceforth Chandra should not appear in the sky at night.

This resulted in the ecological imbalance. Other Gods were perplexed and appealed to Ganesha to relent. Ganesha agreed to pardon Chandra on condition that Chandra should wax during the first half of the lunar month appear full on Full Moon day. (we call this Pournami), and he should begin to wane during the second half and be completely out of sight on New Moon day (we call this Amavasya). His face will partially and permanently be defaced resulting in a Kalanka or blot. Also Chandra should sacrifice his ego. Ganesha also insited that Chandra also should perform Ganesh Pooja and also people should perform Ganesh Pooja and then only see Chandra. This incident happened on a Chaturthi day. Hence people should not see the Moon in the sky on Chaturthi night lest they fall victim of Kalanka or Apavada or Slander. This is reason why people see Chandra in the evening of Ganesh Chaturthi after throwing akshata (rice) towards the moon.

Gods are no exception to this. Lord Krishna also became a victim of apavada when he saw Chandra in a bowl of Kheer. But those who worship Lord Ganesha on Chaturthi day of Sukla Paksha of Bhadrapada month will receive all bounties by the grace of Ganesha, who henceforth became Siddhi Vinayaka. Since then, Ganesh Pooja has become an important pooja in the Hindu calendar.

Even Gods like Sri Rama, Krishna, Dharmaraja have performed Ganesh poojas before they performed their important duties.

2. SYAMANTAKA MANI

Syamantaka mani is a valuable gem. It belonged to Surya, the Sun god. It is capable of yielding daily eight loads of gold. It has the power of protecting the wearer from all kinds of dangers, if he is pure in body and mind. If he is unholy and bad, it may even bring about his death.

King Satyajit, the father of Sathyabama got this rare gem from Surya after a long penance in the jungle without food and water for several days. He also wore it round this neck. Once Lord Krishna, desirous of having this gem for himself requested Satyajit to give it to him. The king refused but gave it to his brother, Prasena. Once Lord Krishna accompanied Prasena to the forest for hunting. They parted in different directions after sometime. Prasena was killed by a lion. Jambavat a bear-chief killed the lion and took the gem from it. He took it away to his abode. Lord Krishna, who had accompanied Prasena, apparently not aware of his death went in search of him and finally landed at Jambavat's cave. There he met, Jambavati, daughter of the monkey-chief, who, on seeing Krishna, fell in love with him and gave the costly gem, and at the same time alerted him to be out of sight of her father, who may kill him. Lord Krishna however, blew his conch loudly which brought Jamabavat to the scene and a tough fight ensued

which lasted for 21 days. Finally, Lord Krishna vanquished Jambavat, who accepted defeat. He presented the gem to Krishna and also gave his daughter Jambavati in marriage. As Krishna did not return for a longtime, his followers suspected that Krishna was too greedy and might have even killed Prasena and stolen the costly gem from him. Thus a slur was cast on Krishna unwillingly for no fault of his. Later Krishna returned to his home town, Dwaraka and after sometime gathered all his people and in their presence returned the Syamanataka Mani to its original owner, Satyahit who was pleased and gave his daughter Sathyabama in marriage. But a slur once cast is always a slur, atleast for sometime. Lord Krishna was branded a jewel thief.

At another point of time, when Krishna was with the Pandavas Sathyabama was in her father Satyajit's house with the gem. A yadava chief by name Akrara, desired to get the gem for himself. He befriended Sathadhanva and managed to kill Satyajit. Sathyabama who came to know of her father's death, informed Krishna who got enraged. He cleverly involved his elder brother Balarama, known for his fits of anger and both of them resolved to kill Sathadhanva and get the gem back. However, Sathadhanva had already passed on the gem to Akrara, who left for Kasi. When Balarama and Krishna could not trace the gem from the slain Sathadhanvu, Balaram was enraged and scolded Krishna for having hastily killed a person of his own clan. He cursed Krishna calling him, a liar, a thief, an unreliable brother and so on. Once again Lord Krishna was a victim of abuse, apavada and slander. Meanwhile, Akrara who had gone to Kasi with the gem, performed penance for many years, built temples, earned name and fame and lived happily. Krishna, who came to know of this, allowed Akrara to return the jewel and convinced his people that he had not stolen it.

Krishna could not easily reconcile to such unnecessary infamy and apavada being heaped on him time and again and was in a pensive mood.

Sage Narada happened to call on Krishna at that point of time and seeing him in a pensive mood, asked him the reason. Krishna narrated the two episodes and asked him to explain the reason for such unforeseen happenings. Narada, with his foresight, explained that Krishna had unwittingly seen Chandra (Moon) on Bhadrapada Shukla Chaturthi night which he should have avoided and reminded him of Ganesha's curse to Chandra, which is equally applicable to one and all.

These two episodes remind that even the all-pervading, Lord Krishna is also no exception and had to acknowledge Ganeha as Gana Nayaka (leader and foremost among all Devaganas)
