

NAVARATHRI FESTIVAL

The Navarathri Festival is held almost in every South Indian house. It commences on the Amavasya day of the month of Bhadrapada, the last day of Pitruapaksha. This is a nine day festival of women.

Pooja procedure : During these nine days, Goddesses Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathi are worshipped each for three days respectively. A traditional lamp called Akanda deepa is lit near the God, which is not allowed to extinguish for the entire period of nine days. An exhibition of dolls (Bomma Kolu) is arranged and women get together in the evenings.

Bomma Kolu

On the Amavasya day after finishing the rituals, like offering tarpana etc. the custom is to keep the kalash filled with rice, toor dal, haldi sticks, betel leaves and nuts or mango leaves with a coconut on it. The most important thing is to keep two wooden dolls (Marapachi dolls) specially brought from Tirupathi. The wooden dolls are anointed with oil and bathed and decorated as bride and groom. The auspicious time is chosen before placing the kalash and the dolls for worship, with which the Kolu festival begins. The wooden dolls are given to the girl from her parents during her marriage. From this day, she starts the ceremony of Kolu going on adding dolls from South.

Bomma means dolls and Kolu means display. Kolu is prepared by constructing wide tiers or steps in any number, maximum being seven. The number of tiers or steps should be in odd numbers like one, three, five and so on. One can erect nine steps too if space and time permits. Variety of dolls are displayed artistically and arranged beautifully on the steps.

The clay dolls displayed are mostly from mythological characters. All Gods and Goddesses of our Epics and Puranas are displayed on the tiers, which are beautifully decorated and look spectacular and colourful, for example, 'Garuda Vahana', i.e God Narayana taken in Garuda Vahana or vehicle is kept. One of the items exhibited is the marriage set called "Melam Talam" i.e the marriage procession of relatives and friends led by musicians like players of clarinet (melam) and mridangam (talam). The 'Dasavatar' set finds a constant place in the kolu. The festival lasts for nine days with arti, prayers and Prasad daily, in the mornings and evenings. The girls dress attractively and offer haldi kumkum with betel leaves with nuts and fruits. In the morning sweets and in the evening 'sundals' i.e different chanas are offered to the ladies. Kolu festival days are for rejoicing when ladies dress up in their finery and ornaments and find on apt occasion to dress up, especially their daughters.

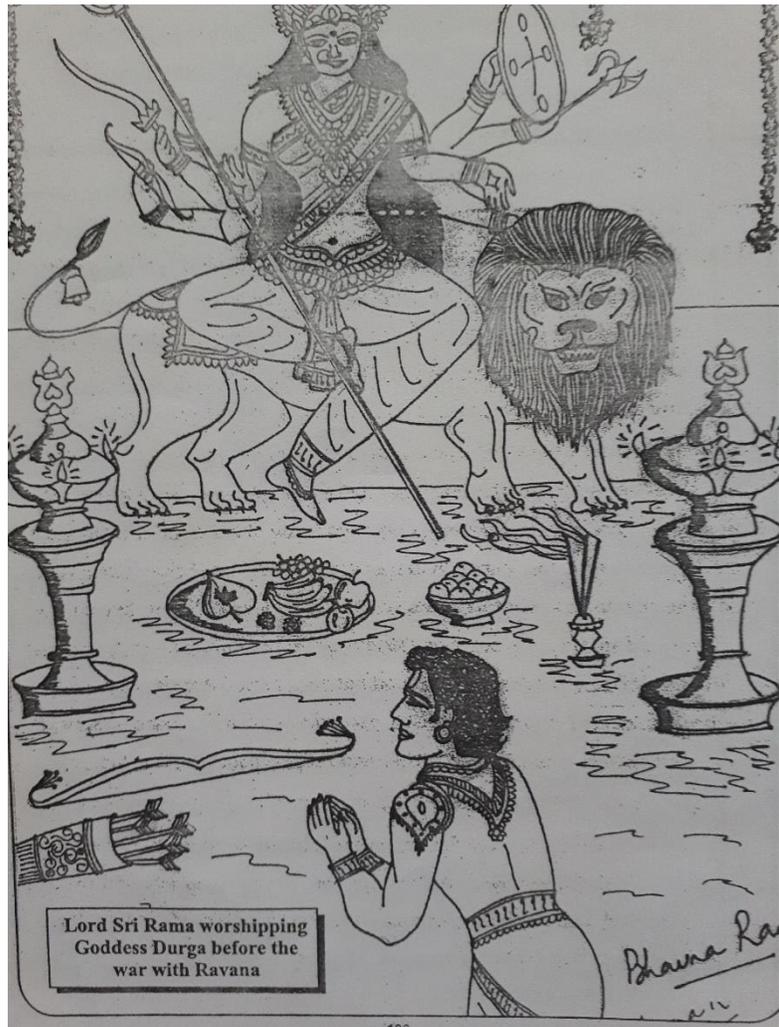
On the eighth day falls the Saraswathi Pooja. Goddess Saraswathi is the Goddess of Learning, and as such books, musical instruments etc. are decorated with flowers and worshipped. Ayuda Pooja is also performed on the ninth day, in which all tools for professional use, vehicles like cars and motorbikes are decorated and worshipped, with the prayer that they should work flawlessly in the ensuing year. Vijayadasami or the Dussera day, the tenth day is the auspicious day when all fine arts like, dance, music, or any new venture in learning is begun. It is the Learner's day. A child beginning his first lesson of alphabets begins on this day ceremoniously.

On the tenth night after the ceremonial Aarthi and prayers, the 'Marapachi' are put to sleep. And, the next day the exhibits are packed carefully in cloth or paper and preserved for use the next year. Vijayadasami and Navarathri are also the auspicious time for buying new clothes and feasting. In some households, the head of the family and his wife take tiffins or fruits and milk, and not rice. Navarathri Bommai Kolu is celebrated more out of enthusiasm, according to one's space, time and purse, and more for meeting each other and keeping good relationship.

Story of Navarathri

According to one hypothesis, in ancient times, this was a festival intended for the Kshatriyas. After the four-month long monsoon when military activity was not possible, this was considered a good time to start afresh on one's conquests. For nine days before starting on the war journey, kings prayed to the nine different aspects of Devi or Adishakti. They also prayed for their arms and ammunition. The tenth day was when the journey for the conquest began.

The origin of this custom can also be traced to the epic Ramayana. According to it, Rama had to pray to the nine different aspects of Devi to be able to kill Ravana. He then accumulated enough power to kill Ravana on the tenth day, which was called Vijayadasami or Victory day. Since then, the tradition of praying to Devi for nine days has continued and was especially pronounced amongst the Kshatriyas who believed that by doing so, they too would be able to defeat their powerful enemies.



Lord Sri Rama worshipping Goddess Durga before the war with Ravana
