

Shivaratri — The most significant of all festivals

Shivaratri is celebrated every year with a lot of religious fervour and devotion. Devotees keep fast, make offerings on *Shivaling* and stay awake all night (*jagarari*) to get the blessings of God Shiva. Unknown to most of the devotees the festival of Shivaratri holds the mystery to something most crucial namely, how God liberates the entire humanity from sorrow and suffering. Till this mystery is solved by God himself, Shivaratri is celebrated merely as an annual ritual sans its original significance and purpose. To truly celebrate Shivaratri it is vital to know as to who Shiva is and what the word 'Ratri' which means night has to do with Shiva.

The Supreme Soul is one and souls are many. The Supreme Soul is the Creator and Director of the eternal World Drama and souls are the actors in it. By becoming pure souls can become a great soul (*mahatma*), religious soul (*dharamatma*) and a divine or deity soul (*devatmd*) but they cannot become Supreme Soul i.e. *paramatma*. Souls are the progeny and not a part of the Supreme Soul.

God Shiva is the creator of all deities even Brahma, Vishnu and Shankar. Devotees worship them as *devtaya namaha* (salutations to the lords or deities). In comparison, Shiva is always worshipped as *Shiva Paramatmay Namaha* (Salutations to God Shiva) and *Om Namaha Shivay* (I salute Shiva). Lord Rama and Lord Krishna are shown as worshipping God Shiva at Rameshwar and Gopeshwar respectively. The light form of God Shiva has been idolized as *jyotirlingam* (pillar of light) in 12 famous *jyotirlingam* Shiva temples in India viz. in Kedarnath, Somnath and Mahakaleswar etc. The light form of God is worshipped in most of the faiths in the world.

Interestingly, Shivaratri does not mean Shiva's night. The festival commemorates God's descent on earth to end the unlimited *Ratri* (night) of ignorance and suffering and to usher in the golden dawn of peace, harmony and happiness. Here *Ratri* connotes that critical juncture in eternal world drama cycle when unrighteousness reaches its extreme and all human efforts to redeem the situation fail. It's a period of extreme sorrow and suffering when the vices of ego, lust, anger and attachment rule human thoughts and actions.

In Hindu scriptures there is mention of the night of Brahma (*Brahma ki raaf*) and also the night of the *shaktis* or goddesses (*Navratri*). The night of Brahma signifies the age of ignorance and unrighteousness in which God's first and purest creation, Brahma and the Brahmins, are clouded by ignorance and vices. When God Shiva comes and opens their third eye of wisdom by bestowing divine intellect, they are able to forge a mental link with Him and draw His power. They thus become *Shiva Shaktis* who destroy ignorance and vices in the world with the help of Shiva. The *Navratri* (festival of nine nights) is a memorial of the end of the unlimited *ratri* in which devotees invoke the blessings of Shiva Shaktis and sing praise of their divine actions.

It is at such a time when God intervenes to perform the divine acts of re-creating

the new world order of purity, peace and prosperity and destroying the old world order of viciousness, violence and deprivation, as described in the Gita. Just as night ends and day dawns when the sun rises, in the same way to end the night of ignorance God Shiva, the Sun of Knowledge (*Gyan Surya*) incarnates at the fag end of *Kaliyuga*, in Bharat. This period of spiritual enlightenment is sailed *Sangamyuga* (Confluence Age) in which the most auspicious confluence of the Supreme Soul Shiva and human souls takes place.

This is the most elevated period in human world when God incarnates in an ordinary man's body and names him Prajapita Brahma through whom He reveals the most profound knowledge about the Creator and His Creation. He reveals the supreme wisdom of Rajyoga which helps human beings absolve their sins and attain their original purity and perfection. That's why God Shiva is knowledgeable and *patitpavan* (purifier).

He is also the liberator and guide whose incarnation sets in process the destruction of the vicious, unrighteous iron-aged world - the present *Kaliyuga* - and consequently the liberation of ill souls from sin and suffering. God Shiva guides all souls to the land of liberation - the souls world where freed from their bondages they live in peace and silence. Thus He is also called *Ahakaal* (the great death or the eternal time) whose advent signals the return of everything in Creation to its original state. This purification leads to the creation of a new pure world order *Satyuga*. It is the lime in the world drama cycle (*Srishti Chakrad*) which is remembered as Paradise, Heaven, *Vaikunth*, *lahisht* or *Swarg* where complete purity, peace and prosperity prevailed. That is why the Supreme Father of all souls is called the Creator and Shiva, which means the benefactor of all, who does good to every soul by incarnating in this world.

And the happiest news is that this golden key which opens the gates of the Golden age, *Satyuga* or Paradise is being given right now by Supreme Soul God Shiva himself to His spiritual children who have recognized His incognito incarnation in the human medium of Adi Dev Prajapita Brahma.

It is now that we have to awaken the soul (*jagarari*) and stay in the remembrance of God Shiva (*up-vas* means to stay close) take the oath of celibacy, sacrifice the bitterness of vices on Shiva (the *uck* flower) and let the divine knowledge of Shiva flow drop by drop to all souls. By adopting this true method of celebrating Shivaratri we should claim the greatest blessing of liberation-in-life from God Shiva in this birth.