

## A Glimpse of the Great Mother Festival in India

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*Navaratri* or the *Great Mother* festival in India takes place every year in October for ten days. Almost the *entire country celebrates* through traditions at home, work, outdoor parks, and temples. About 95 percent of Indians are Hindu and this is one of their most important festivals of the year. At this time, they reaffirm that the force of good prevails and it's a good time to make personal changes. The festival also tells of Rama's victory over the demon Ravanna, from an epic poem, the Ramayana and celebrates Durga's victory over the buffalo.

This festival honors the goddess *Durga*, who is both a fierce warrior and the mother of the universe. She is gentle yet gets things done and at the same time she can be ferocious and angry.



The goddess Durga is celebrated for both a fierce warrior and the Great Mother



**The Great Goddess is dedicated to Vishnu, the creator**

### **The Ramayana**

I discovered that Hindu parents told their kids about the Ramayana. Written more than two thousand years ago, the story has been told and retold, painted on bamboo strips that were considered books that were passed on and eventually made into movies in Bollywood.

The Ramayana is the story of Prince Rama and his beautiful bride, Sita, who decided to see the world outside of their palace after their marriage. Until then they lived behind the palace walls. They encountered many difficulties including a demon with seven heads and ten arms, who abducted Sita. Rama sent his army of monkeys and bears to find her and eventually they did and took her back to Rama, who was afraid he'd never see her again. After the terrible demon was killed, Rama and Sita returned home where they were embraced as part a hero and heroine.

Later in Agra, where the Taj Mahal is located, I saw a woman who represented Sita dressed in a golden sari with dozens of orange, yellow and pink garlands draped around her neck. She was paraded around an outdoor stadium on the back of a convertible waving to the crowd somewhat like a prom queen. People dressed as monkeys and bears chased the car and the huge crowd in the stadium that night was cheering loudly as she passed by.

At the park, there was a colorful 20-foot high papier-mâché effigy of the demon and his two brothers. They were set ablaze which triggered a fusillade of firecrackers. The loud

sounds and sparks in the sky were a great final. Killing the demon symbolized that viewers would be protected from harm during the next year.

The festival even took place at private companies and government departments, and some workers got a week's vacation. In Bangalore that is considered India's Silicon Valley, I visited the famous Tata Company that designed computers and built them. After an interview with the vice president, he asked if I wanted to join their celebration of Navarre. Fortunately I arrived on the right day at the right time.

I saw a swami bless the things that made the techies' work possible by putting a marigold on each monitor. What a surprise when the swami sprinkled holy water on the workers and me too. One of the techies told me it was an auspicious time to make personal changes since they would have the discipline to follow through. After flying back to Chennai, we continued our journey to New Delhi, Agra and Kullu.

### **Kullu in the Himalayas is Celebrated a Different Way**

Kullu's ten-day festival began after the one in India and Nepal ended. The festival began with many men carrying images of Durga on platforms into the valley at night. The statues rested on a platform held on their shoulders as they ran down the mountain paths into the center of the village. In front of small tents, young men blew long horns and the runners warmed themselves at small fires in the cold air at night.

I passed many swamis sitting on the ground doing nothing except smoking marijuana, blitzed out on the weed that grew on the side of many roads and easy to pick.

It was like a county fair with kids lined up for rides on elephants. Kids danced on an open-air stage in the bright warm sunlight. Their parents, friends, tourists and many tourists watched. This was the last chance for friends to meet before the snows separated them until spring.

### **Goddess Images Were Found in India's Indus Valley Civilization**

The concept of goddesses began more around 2,000 BCE in India's Indus Valley. Archaeologists have found hundreds of small clay figures of women about five inches tall that have large breasts, small waists and large hips. They wore heavy jewelry around their neck, wrists and ankles and each had a different elaborate headdress.

Women could have held one of these goddess images in their small hands as they danced around a fire at night under the stars performing rituals to ensure a good harvest or a safe childbirth. Many of these delicate clay goddesses are in museums around the world such as the collection of the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.



**Goddess from West Bengal, clay, 2500 BCE**

Photo taken from the web

This two-dimensional plaque shows one of the oldest goddesses with her hands on her hips above her hip ornaments. She is wearing heavy earrings, a necklace, and many bracelets. Made of clay, it was found in West Bengal, and made about 2,500 BCE.



**Goddess from Northern Western India, dated 2,500 BCE**

Photo taken from the web

This goddess' elaborate headdress seems to have energy radiating from it. She wore heavy jewelry around her neck, wrists and ankles. Since it was hot in the Indus Valley, she wore only a diadem around her hips. By the 1c BCE at Sanchi temple, one three-dimensional fertility goddesses, a "yakshi," was so powerful that when she kicked the tree behind her with her right foot, the tree came alive!