

Dusshera, Dashami — Traditions & Counter Traditions.....

Jawhar Sircar : (Member, Rajya Sabha.) 16th. October 2021. Hinduism accommodates a lot of conflicting rituals. For instance, while Dusshera is celebrated as the defeat of evil force such as Ravan or as Asura, the two are, in fact, worshipped on this day at several places.

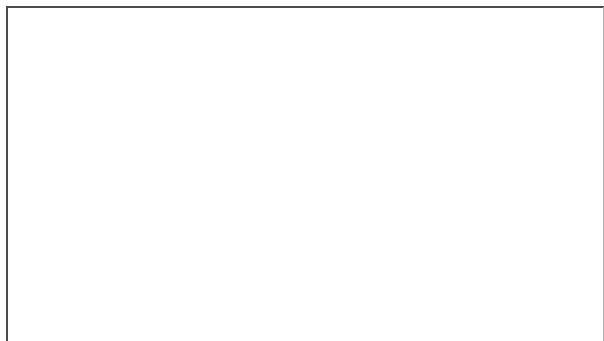
Dusshera in Kullu in Himachal, actually marks the beginning of a week long celebration — not the close of Navaratri. It was begun in the 16th century by Raja Jagat Singh who literally stole the deity of Raghunathji from Ayodhya and installed it. Different local deities from corners of Himachal are taken to Kullu when Raghunathji is brought out in a grand procession. This is followed by collective dances, music from the hills and lots of food, fun and fireworks.

Other than Ram's victory over Ravan and Durga's killing of Mahishasura, we are also reminded that on this very day, Arjuna single-handedly decimated the Kurus and crushed their chief warriors like Bhishma, Drona, Ashwatthama, Karna and Kripa on Dashami.

Ramlila performances are extremely popular in north and west India during this time. They are performed at outdoor venues and fairs, usually by local actors — the most famous of which is in Ramnagar, Varanasi.

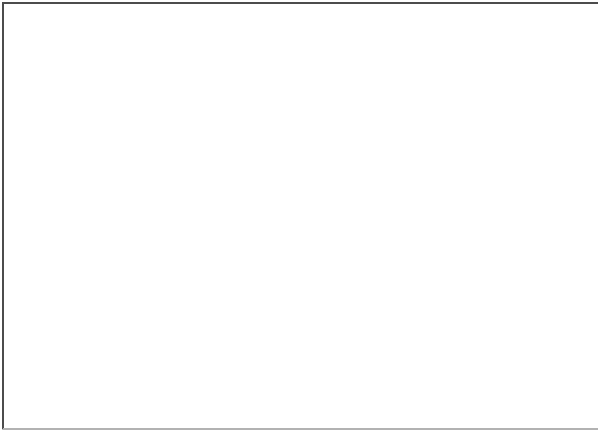
But what steals the limelight on Dusshera is the public fanfare when the giant effigies of Ravan, Kumbhakarna and Meghnad are set on fire.

At places like Ramnagar on the banks of the Ganga, special 'aartis' are held when lakhs take a holy dip, offerings incense and flowers. Devotional songs fill the air as they float countless lighted earthen lamps.



Bengalis, however, opt for Durga (not Ram) and bid her goodbye on Vijayadashami, ceremoniously. Married women smear sindoor on each other's cheeks and foreheads.

The immersion is a festive occasion and the deities are taken to the river in the best of floats on trucks. They are accompanied by singing and dancing troupes with brass bands, lighting, and colour.

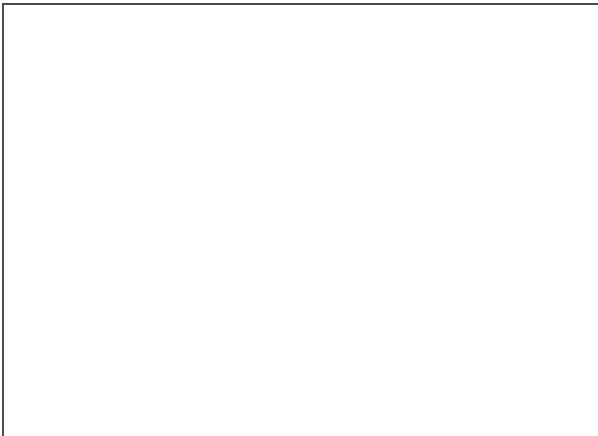


The Dussehra of Mysuru, also known as ‘Dasara’ is very famous. It was started six centuries ago by the Vijayanagar kings and was re-invigorated by the Wodeyars. It celebrates with great pageantry, enthusiasm and vigour the victory of Goddess Chamundeshwari over Mahishasura.

On the final day, the ‘Jumbo Savari’ takes place when an elaborately dressed elephant parades with her idol in a golden howdah through the bustling streets.

The same demon is, however, worshipped by the Asur tribe of West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. They consider themselves as his descendants and revere Mahishasur as a great king — who was unfairly killed by the Aryan Devi. Asur worship has spread with Dalit protests to other parts and the ‘SC, ST and Minority Students’ of JNU marked Dusshera as Mahishasur Martyrdom Day, with controversy.

Similarly, Ravan is worshipped at the Dashanana temple in Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh. Bisrakh in the same state is proud to be Ravan’s birthplace. Baijanth is a scenic temple town located on the banks of the Gomti river in the neighbouring hill state of Uttarakhand.

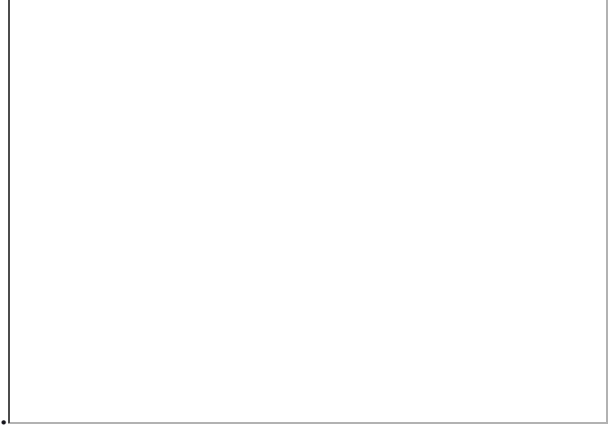


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It has a 800-year old Shiv Mandir where his Bhakt Ravan is held as a god. Shiv temples in Kangra of Himachal Pradesh in Mandya and Kolar of Karnataka also worship Ravan, especially on Dusshera day.

Mandore in Rajasthan is said to be the home town of Mandodari, wife of Ravana, while the Maudgalya Brahmans of Jodhpur believe their ancestors came from Lanka. They observe a 12-day

long 'sutak' from the day after Dusshera when death rituals like Shraadh and Pind Daan are observed. The air echoes with the chants of "Jai Lankesh" and Ravan followers chant the Shiva Tandav Strotra



that was dedicated by Ravana to his deity, Lord Shiva.

Gond villages in western Maharashtra like Gadchiroli begin their celebrations with the procession of Ravana on an almost 10 foot elephant float made from grass and mud.

This simultaneous celebration of culture and counter culture represents the very soul of Hindustan. The current attempts of intolerant fanatics to homogenise us actually spells the end of a great plural civilisation.

