



MAHASHIVRATRI

COLOUR IN THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

A study of colour in the festival of Mahashivratri

Place: Bangalore, Karnataka
Kadu Malleswara Temple (Malleswaram)

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Mahashivratri

Om Vande Shambhu Umaapatim Surgurum Vande Jagad Kaaranaam |
Vande Pannag Bhushanaam Mrigadharam Vande Pashunaam Patim|
Vande Surya Shashaak Vahninayanam Vande Mukundapriyam|
Vande Bhakta Janaashrayan Chavardham Vande Shivam Shankaram||

“I bow to Lord Shambhu /Shiva who is Uma/ Parvathi's husband, leader of the gods and goddesses, the cause of this world, protector of animals, wears king of serpent as an ornament, has eyes, which are the sun, moon and fire, dear to Lord Vishnu, generous with boons, compassionate to devotees, I pay my tributes to the great Shankara /Shiva”.





Mahashivratri

Introduction

Auspicious festival of Mahashivaratri falls on the 13th or the 14th night of the new moon during Krishna Paksha in the Hindu month of Phalgun. The Sanskrit term, Krishna Paksha means the period of waning moon or the dark fortnight and Phalguna corresponds to the month of February - March.

According to Hindu mythology, Shivaratri or 'Shiva's Great Night' symbolizes the wedding day of Lord Shiva and Parvati. Many however, believe, Shivaratri is the night when Lord Shiva performed the Tandava Nritya - the dance of primordial creation, preservation and destruction.

Origin

Puranas contain many stories and legends describing the origin of this festival. According to one, during the samudra manthan, a pot of poison emerged from the ocean. This terrified the Gods and demons as the poison was capable of destroying the entire world, and they ran to Shiva for help. To protect the world from its evil effects, Shiva drank the deathly poison but held it in his throat instead of swallowing it. This made his throat turn blue, and he was given the name Neelakantha, the blue-throated one. It is said that Shiva was strong enough to handle the poison, but he had to stay awake all night as part of his healing. The other gods helped get him through the night by entertaining him with dances and other distractions.

This is commemorated on Mahashivaratri, when Shiva's followers keep him company through the night.

Legends associated with all-night worship of Shiva

There are many stories associated with the reason for this festival being celebrated throughout the night. One of them narrates the story of a tribal who was great devotee of Shiva. One day he went deep into the forest to collect firewood. However he lost his way and could not return home before nightfall. As darkness fell, he heard the growls of wild animals. Terrified, he climbed onto the nearest tree for shelter till day-break. Perched amongst the branches, he was afraid he would doze and fall off the tree. To stay awake, he decided to pluck a leaf at a time from the tree and drop it, while chanting the name of Shiva. At dawn, he realized that he had dropped a thousand leaves onto a Linga to keep himself awake, the tribal plucked one leaf at a time from the tree and dropped it below which he had not seen in the dark. The tree happened to be a wood apple or bel tree. This unwitting all-night worship pleased Shiva, by whose grace the tribal was rewarded with divine bliss. This story is also recited on Mahashivaratri by devotees on fast. After observing the all-night fast, devotees eat the Prasad offered to Shiva.

There is another possible reason for the origin of the all-night worship.

The Festival

Shivaratri or 'Shiva's Great Night' symbolizes the wedding day of Lord Shiva and Parvati performance of the Tandava Nritya, which is recorded in the Natyashastra.



A devotee offers prayers beside the Linga after completing his Puja or worship. It is customary for one to visit a local temple and offer prayers so as to gain the Lord's blessings.



Some of the items used in the worship of the Linga on Mahashivratri day: Bel leaves, betel nut leaves, marigolds, turmeric and vermilion along with lamps, fruits and coconuts



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Being a moonless night, people worshipped the god who wears the crescent moon as an adornment in his hair, Shiva. This was probably to ensure that the moon rose the next night.

Immediately after Mahashivaratri, almost like a miracle, the trees are full of flowers as if to announce that after winter, the fertility of the earth has been rejuvenated. And this perhaps is the reason why the Linga is worshipped throughout India as a symbol of fertility.

Significance

Mahashivaratri is thus not only a ritual but also a cosmic definition of the Hindu universe. It dispels ignorance, emanates the light of knowledge, makes one aware of the universe, ushers in the spring after the cold and dry winter, and invokes the supreme power to take cognizance of the beings that were created by him.

Significance of Mahashivratri in Karnataka

- Linagayats, people of the Shiva cult, worship Linga on Shivaratri.
- Following a tradition, married women wear a linga made of silver or gold on their body.
- In southern Karnataka, children are allowed to get into all kinds of mischief and asking for punishment is the rule of the day, probably originating from the mythological incident of Shiva punishing Brahma for lying about measuring the length of Linga.

Emotions and values associated

The main themes of this festival are ahimsa, satya, compassion and forgiveness and absence of jealousy. Following these principles, as also fasting and jagrana (keeping vigil in the night) are the main features of this festival.

How it is celebrated

This is an important day for the devotees of Shiva, who stay awake throughout the night, praying to him. From the very early morning, Shiva temples are flocked by devotees, mostly women, who come to perform the traditional Shivalinga worship and hence hope for favours from the god. Many also employ the services of a priest to perform special prayers. All through the day, devotees abstain from eating food and break their fast only the next morning, after the night-long worship.

In Karnataka, the added attraction for the devout is the Ganga Jal which is distributed in Shiva temples throughout some districts like Mysore.

Significance of worship for women

On this day women pray to Goddess Parvati also called 'Gaura', the giver of 'suhag' for good husbands, marital bliss and a long and prosperous married life. It consists of a full day's fast and anointing the idol of Shiva with milk, water and honey. Since it is believed that on this night, Shiva and Parvati tied the knot, this festival holds a special place in the lives of women, who offer prayers seeking a happy and blessed marital life.

The Festival

Devotees strongly believe that ritual worship of Lord Shiva on the auspicious day of Shivaratri absolves them of past sins and they are blessed with Moksha.



On this auspicious day, women pray to the Goddess Parvati to grant them a blissful and prosperous marital life. This festival thereby holds a special place in the lives of married women.



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Rituals involved in the overnight worship

The 12 hours of the night, beginning 6 pm, are divided into four quarters, each known as a Jaama or Yaama. Abhisheka of the Linga is performed with water, milk, curd, honey, rose water among others amidst repeated chanting of Rudra, Chamaka and Purushasookta, mantras dear to Lord Shiva.

- Lotus, tulsi, Shiva's favourite bilva leaves and the seasonal mango flowers besides vibhooti (holy ash) are offered; food offerings are made and aarti is performed.
- All the four Vedas Rig, Yajur, Saama and Atharva and the Panchaakshara mantra (Na-Ma-Si-Va-Ya) are chanted throughout the night.
- The night is also marked by singing of bhajans in praise of Shiva.

Rituals involved in worship on the following dawn

At dawn the next day, the fast is broken (known as Paaranaa) by taking the divine offerings. The devout skip sleep during the day, for that is said to fetch full benefits of the vrata.

Rituals during the day

- Devotees bathe at sunrise, preferably in the Ganga, or any other holy water source. They offer prayers to the sun, Vishnu and Shiva.
- This is a purificatory rite, an important part of all Hindu festivals.

- Wearing a clean piece of clothing after the holy bath, worshippers carry pots of water to the temple to bathe the Shivalinga.
- The temple reverberates with the sound of bells and shouts of devotees.
- They then circumambulate the linga, three or seven times, and then pour water over it. Some also pour milk.

Essentials of worship according to scriptures

According to the Shiva Purana, the Mahashivaratri worship must incorporate six items:

- Bathing the Linga with water, milk and honey, and Wood apple or bel leaves added to it, representing purification of the soul;
- The vermilion paste applied on the linga after bathing it, representing virtue;
- Offering of fruits, which is conducive to longevity and gratification of desires;
- Burning incense, yielding wealth;
- The lighting of the lamp which is conducive to the attainment of knowledge;
- And betel leaves marking satisfaction with worldly pleasures.

These six items, till today, form an indispensable part of Mahashivaratri, be it a simple ceremony at home or a grand temple worship. By offering water, hugging the linga, lighting the diya and incense, and ringing the temple bells, devotees call to protect the world from annihilation.

The Festival

The temples of Shiva wear a festive look and thousands of devotees throng these temples.



A devotee walks along the lines of idols of serpent gods on the slopes of the hillock, atop which the main shrine stands. Devotees offer milk and flowers to these idols after completing worship of the Linga.



A folk singer sits beside the temple gates and earns a living by entertaining people with devotional songs on the day of the festival. His adornment, musical instruments and belongings give us a glimpse into the life of traveling folk artistes like him.



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The meaning of Rudrabhisheka or ritual bathing of the idol of Shiva on this day

- The Linga, which signifies Lord Shiva, is bathed in panchamrutha (a mixture of milk, curds, ghee, sugar and honey). The love of water, the primary element of life, is also remembered in this ritualistic action.
- After the ritual bathing, the Linga is then anointed with sandalwood paste, vermillion, etc.
- People offer bel leaves and fruit, milk, sandalwood, flowers and worship the Linga amidst vedic hymns (chanting of rudra mantra).
- Shiva is believed to be very hot tempered, and hence things which have a cooling effect are offered to him. People also offer incense sticks and fruit.

Cuisine in Karnataka

On the day of the festival, after performing the rudrahoma (rudrayaga) at temples and homes, people prepare delicious food items as naivedya to Lord Shiva. People either fast on this day or take light food.

Panaka/juice, Kosambari/salad, Sajjige/Semolina pudding, Huliavalakki/sour beaten rice, Rasayana/Banana dish etc., are prepared on this day.

People of some communities perform pooja and abhishekha to Lord Shiva and prepare Holige/Sweet bread as offering and do not fast on this day.

Reason for the chanting of Shlokas

People repeat the Panchakshara Mantra "OM NAMA SHIVAYA" as it is said he who utters the Names of Shiva during Shivaratri, with perfect devotion and concentration, is freed from all sins. He reaches the abode of Shiva and lives there happily. He is liberated from the wheel of births and deaths. Many pilgrims flock to the places where there are Shiva temples.

Scientific explanation of Shlokas/ chanting and usage of Bel leaves

The mantras used in the abhisheka or in the worship are definite energy states which produce a specified quantum of energy if recited. This energy is absorbed by the molecules of the body and they in turn radiate heightened infrared band of energies.

These energies radiated are picked up by the Acu Points or Adharas which distribute the energy for all the systems of the body for the energy correction.

That is the reason why the Rudra Namakam, Chamakam and Mahanyasam and other powerful Vedic Mantras are recited on Mahashivaratri.

According to Ayur Veda the Bilwa Leaves have a power full preventive medicine for all the Respiratory Diseases including the Cardiac Problems and other disorders that arise during this time of year due to the ascent and descent of the moon. These leaves therefore induce a certain amount of immunity through aroma therapy.

The Festival

Mahashivaratri is thus not only a ritual but also a cosmic definition of the Hindu universe.



A woman dressed in a bright orange silk saree with golden work over it looks resplendent in the early morning sun as she offers worship at the temple shrines. On this day, women make an effort to adorn themselves well and dress in the choicest of clothes to celebrate this grand festival.



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Introduction

Kadu Malleswara Temple, situated at Malleswaram in Bangalore is a historic temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is also known as Kaadu Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple since the presiding deity is Lord Shiva worshipped as Mallikarjuna Swamy.

Malleswaram: an ancient residential locality

It was the year 1848. Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV was the Maharaja of Mysore. A plague epidemic had hit Bangalore. Perturbed by living conditions in the cramped city area (primarily in and around present day Majestic), the forward-looking Dewan of Mysore, Sheshadri Iyer, initiated the creation of Malleswaram and Basavanagudi. His vision was to create new and clean suburbs to accommodate the city's burgeoning population.

History of the temple

The temple dates back to the kith of Chatrapati Shivaji. The word 'kadu' literally means forest, referring to the thick vegetation that marked the surrounding places. Malleswaram suburb derives its name after this temple.

Built in one of the oldest areas in Bangalore - Malleswaram, the temple is on a hillock. As the legend goes, the temple belonged to Chatrapati Shivaji's stepbrother Venkoji, who came upon a 'shivalingam' in 1669 and consecrated the temple around it.

Story behind the building of the temple

There is no document of exact date or period of this temple. History shows that this temple had a relation with the period of the Great Maratha leader Shivaji. Bangalore was a village (Grama) that belonged to the Bijapur rulers. It was given to Shivaji's father, Shahji who ruled Bangalore as a jagir. It was then inherited by his youngest son Venkoji (Ekoji), Shivaji's stepbrother. In the year 1669 A.D., Venkoji on a visit to this region with his minister Baji Rao Peshwa for implementing taxes (Chouthaya), visited the Mallapura's Mallikarjuna Swamy and came across a shivalingam, which was believed to be a 'swayamboo'. Venkoji consecrated the temple and its surroundings. This place influenced Venkoji to grant Medharananganahalli, a village for this temple and enforced that there should not be any kind of unfairness against dharma.

Architecture

All this description can be seen even today beside the Narasimha temple that was laid by Venkoji himself. The Mallikarjuna Temple Bangalore is identical but smaller and more compact.

Exquisitely carved pillars of the interior hall depict scenes from the Panchatantra, the animal fable. The walls surrounding the temple complex and the Nandi pavilion in front of it are incomplete.

The Temple

This ancient temple existed even before the Malleswaram locality was built. Dedicated to Malleswara Esawar, this Shaivite temple is still in use today.



Devotees form queues leading up to the temple of Kadu Malleswara Swamy on the day of the festival of Mahashivratri. The temple is built on a hillock and is centuries old. Devotees throng to it especially during the festival to offer worship to Lord Shiva.



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The temple is said to have a linga in the temple called Viswanath. This linga was believed to have been brought to the temple by sages. The temple has an idol of Sri Vishnu in the premises too thus making the temple accessible to both the saivaites and the vaishnavaites.

The temple is now part of Archeaological Department of India and is a very popular landmark for old timers of Bangalore.

The yearly chariot festival, the Mahashivaratri celebrations invite a huge crowd of devotees.

Nandi temple

The Nandeeshwara Temple situated opposite to this has a more fascinating story. This ancient temple was apparently buried under thick layers of soil. According to the priest, when a local politician tried to sell this place a few years back, the people from the neighbourhood opposed the move and demanded an excavation. To their amazement, this underground temple and the kalyani (tank) was intact, complete with water pouring out of a Nandi statue's mouth onto a Shiva linga (idol) directly below it.

Lakshmi Narasimhaswamy temple

Adjacent to Kadu Malleswara stands yet another old temple, the Lakshmi Narasimhaswamy temple, built in Dravidian style with the traditional gopuram. I would recommend sitting under the tree in the temple courtyard as a wonderful therapeutic experience.

Ideal site for research regarding the cultural context

The Kadu Malleswaraswamy temple is a confluence of people, sights and sounds especially during festivals centered around Lord Shiva since this temple is dedicated to this god. Since it is situated in the heart of the city amidst a bustling market and residential localities, it is the ideal place to catch a glimpse of devotees belonging to a variety of regional, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The history and legends associated with this temple, along with its architectural style and location make it a good site to study the usage of colour in the cultural context.

The Temple

The temple was also known as 'Kadu Malleswara' referring to the jungle like territory in which it was built.



The lines of devotees on the slopes leading up to the Sanctum can be seen here against a backdrop of the Gopuram or monumental temple tower at the entrance gate. The beauty of this temple lies in its architecture and colour palette of red and white, amidst lush greenery in an area that once used to be covered in thick forests.



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Methods adopted during the research visit to gather information

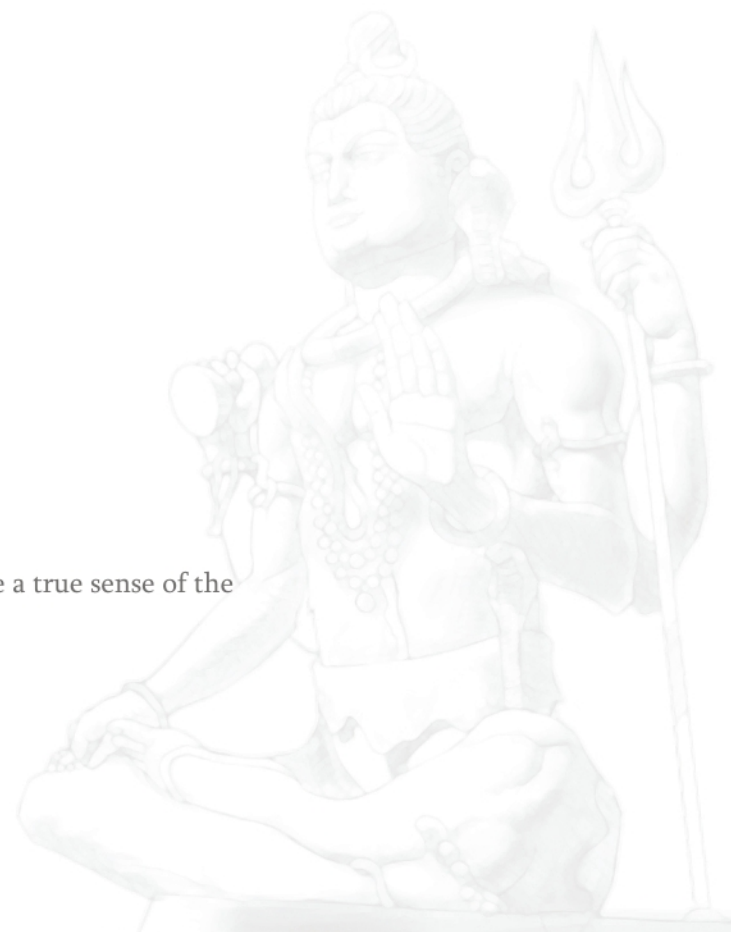
In order to understand the nuances of the festival and the detailed rituals associated with it, the researchers undertook informal discussions with devotees at the temple and posed objective questions while they performed the essentials of worship.

Extensive photography along the streets leading up to the temple, beside it, within the premises and inside the Sanctum, after obtaining due permission of authorities was undertaken.

The process of capturing moments of the festival through the lens was essentially to understand colour in the following contexts:

- Colour on the streets
- Colour in architecture (exteriors and interiors)
- Colour in adornment
 - ✓ Flowers
 - ✓ Ornaments
 - ✓ Forehead markings
 - ✓ Clothing
- Colour in decorations
- Colour in idols
- Colour in rituals performed by
 - Men
 - Women (South India)
 - Girls (North India)

Note-taking and observations along with personal involvement in the rituals and ceremonies to imbibe a true sense of the festival were other methods as part of this process.





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Colour on the Streets



Flower markets are a riot of colour and sound, lining the main street beside the entrance to the temple. Most vendors offer the same assortment of flowers and fruits though prices vary among them.



A lady sits with her basket of fresh flowers strung into garlands. She offers white and red roses too as part of her sale.

The street outside the temple gates are covered in Pandals or cloth hangings overhead. These use red fabric with white satin frills and golden edges.



Mounds of marigolds both loose and strung into chains are piled onto carts and taken out onto the streets so as to cover more area and reach more devotees.



Center: A lone vendor sells peacock feathers outside the temple gates adding colour to the scene.

Another lady sits beside her basket of fresh flowers and Bel leaves which are essential for worship of Lord Shiva on this day.





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Colour in Architecture

Top entrance



The Nandi or bull, a vehicle of the Gods, stands guard on the corners of the temple walls with brightly painted cloth coverings and golden bells strung around the neck.



Chariots like these are lined up outside the temple on the main street, to be taken out into processions later during the day. These are mostly painted in green and yellow with red embellishments.

An elderly gentleman walks past one of the entrances with idols carved into the wall. The walls on the outer side of the temple are again painted in red and white.



Crowds queue up outside the entrance to the Sanctum, which is decorated with red cloth overhead, plantain leaves and flowers in shades of orange, yellow, red and lavender. A giant idol of the serpent god made of brass stands outside the doorway.

Center: The walls of the old temple are made of stone, covered in red paint. Red and white is a traditional combination for temple exteriors in South India.

A closer look at the idols of deities shows usage of bright colours, floral motifs and repetitive patterns to form borders.





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Colour in Architecture

Lower entrance



The entrance into the courtyard of the main shrine is covered with flowers and plantain leaves on this auspicious day. Overhead one can see the Lord depicted sitting on a bull and an attendant on either side waving a traditional fan made of animal hairs.



Further down the steps, and the wider shot of the entrance reveals a repetitive pattern of white and red all along.

Along the slopes of the hillock on which the temple stands are lines of idols mainly of serpent gods all made of black stone against the backdrop of red and white painted stripes.



The Gopuram or monumental temple tower at the second entrance below the hillock is adorned with figures of mythical creatures, deities, animals and birds all brightly painted.



Center: A closer look at the temple tower shows the same combination of red and white for detailing as well.



A smaller shrine near the exit stands on pillars of blue with floral carvings and bare stone walls.





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Colour in Architecture

Outside temple gates



A view of the monumental tower from the outside, with stripes of red on white walls and black borders along the doorway frames.



The Nandi temple opposite the main shrine possesses an elaborate entrance of floral carvings and molding with the Nandi depicted sitting gracefully atop wearing garlands of flowers and bells, gold ornaments and a covering cloth with intricate work.

Another chariot stands outside the temple gates with the deity depicted holding the reins of horses and angels, tigers, demon heads and other mythical creatures adorning it.



A new temple complex adjacent to the ancient temple is painted in bright gold to attract passers-by



Center: A close-up of the step leading into the temple entrance guarded by mythical creatures in black stone and white Rangoli lines with turmeric and vermilion sprinkled beside.

When one glances above into the underside of the temple tower, a large floral pattern is visible, painted in pink and purple and white details.





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Colour in Adornment Flowers



A woman wears bright orange flowers on her neatly plaited braid. All women essentially adorn their hair with flowers especially during festivals.



Strings of orange flowers interspersed with jasmine are also common.



Lighter shade of the flowers combined with beaded/ jeweled hair pins and clips can be found on most women.

A woman is in the process of adding marigold flowers received at the temple to her existing string of orange flowers.



Center: Young girls too use orange flowers for adornment.



An elderly lady wears jasmine flowers mixed with smaller amount of orange buds in between.



A lady wears multiple chains around her neck, with strings of Rudraksh or holy beads of Lord Shiva. The typical jeweled nose ring and chained earring can also be seen here.



A flower vendor outside the temple gates wears round nose rings and earrings with precious red stones inlaid among white ones on solid gold.

An elderly lady wears a piece of traditional jewellery with a clove shaped nose ring. The nose piercings are meant to honor the goddess of marriage, known as Parvathi.



Floral motifs with round patterns and combination of red precious stones and small pearls is common in earrings. 'Kamphul', i.e., 'ear-flowers' are considered particularly auspicious, being a large, round metal flower-form earring, with a central stud at the back being the equivalent of a flower stem.



Center: A newly wed woman wears a set of bright red glass bangles mixed with white and gold, while using pearls for her necklace. Bangles are considered auspicious as well as a part of womanhood with red and gold symbolizing positive energy/fertility and fortune respectively.



Gold earrings with a chain going around the earlobe are a traditional ornament and many women wear them on a daily basis.



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One of the most visible external symbols of being a Hindu is the mark made on the forehead. This is called *tilak* (for men), *pottu* or *bindi*. Here a young girl wears the traditional mixture of vermilion (symbolic of purity, positivity) and turmeric (as good-omen) on her forehead above the Bindi or dot worn by Hindus.



The lady in this picture can be seen wearing multiple markings, each on a successive line above the other.

Some people keep the marking simple with a line of Vibhooti or sacred ash only which is traditionally said to cool the forehead as well.



Colour in Adornment

Forehead markings

Little girls too are dressed and adorned with jewellery and forehead markings though they use only sacred ash and sometime vermilion on the forehead, without any turmeric.



Center: An aged devotee with the Vaishnavite mark of Urdhva-Pundra or religious symbol with a white vertical lines on either side of a red line. Form and colour of marking vary according to one's caste, religious sect or the form of the Lord worshipped.

Another devotee with multiple forehead markings and turmeric smeared across the cheeks.





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Colour in Adornment Clothing



Festivals are a time for women to take out all their heritage silk sarees in bright colours and detailed borders, be it the Kanjeevarams of Tamil Nadu or the Mysore silks of Karnataka found commonly here in the South. Women look resplendent in these colours and many choose shades of red and orange for festivals since it symbolizes fertility and positive energy..



A close-up of the cloth that the priest hangs over his shoulder shows borders of yellow, red and green lines.

An old lady wears a bright red saree with deep yellow Pallu or part of the saree over the shoulder. Yellow and red is a favourite combination due to its association with turmeric and vermillion.



On the day of the festival, the temple committee hands out badges such as these to volunteers. These are made of yellow and red satin in the form of a flower with the deity's image within.



Center: Red sarees with golden borders and embroidery or work on them are also very common among married women.

A group of female singers within the courtyard of the Sanctum make for an interesting sight dressed only in shades of blue. Since blue is Shiva's colour, this is chosen by them to be worn during recitals.





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The idols in any temple dedicated to Lord Shiva are the Nandi or bull generally in black stone or granite, the Linga or idol of Shiva and the Trishul or triple-ended spear of the Lord.



Brightly painted idols with multiple hands and heads dot the temple premises and are covered in marigolds and garlands.

An idol of Lord Hanuman within the smaller shrines surrounding the main sanctum shows the monkey faced god in bright orange, though the idol is made of black stone.



One of the many Lingas or idols of Shiva stands in a corner with the yellow flowers and turmeric markings creating a stark contrast against the black stone.



Center: A close-up of the giant serpentine idol beside the entrance to the sanctum shows embossing and intricate carvings on the hood of the serpent made in brass.

Smaller Lingas within the surrounding shrines lie covered in red cloth and Bel leaves. Yellow and red commonly adorn these idols.





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Colour in Decorations Within Sanctum



As soon as one steps into the courtyard of the main shrine from where the Sanctum is visible, a huge pillar of bronze stands in the center decorated with mango leaves. Cloth coverings overhead are in red and yellow with frills and circular patterns.



A colourful assortment of offerings to the Nandi of bananas, marigolds, lamps, charcoal and groundnut oil. Holy ash created by burning cow dung along with milk, ghee, honey, etc. is a principle sacrament in the worship of Lord Siva, representing His burning away of our ignorance to ashes.

Different shades of yellow and ochre can be seen here in the flames, bananas, flowers, turmeric and coconuts against the bark of a tree.



Strings of yellow and maroon flowers are used to line the arches and doorways of the Sanctum shrines.



Center: A close-up of the pillar with carvings of deities and mythical creatures. Mango leaves add greenery to the scenes within the temple.



Plantain leaves are used for decorations in bunches, often clustered at corners or on stone pillars.



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Colour in Rituals Performed by men



A devotee offering worship to Lord Shiva at one of the many smaller shrines on the hillock outside the main temple.



First vermilion is applied in three horizontal lines at equal intervals along the Linga or idol.

The Linga is washed with water from a small copper vessel as a way of performing Abhisheka or bathing of the idol.



Next these intervals are filled with two dots and a vertical line of turmeric and smaller dots of vermilion over them.



Center: The application of turmeric and vermilion ends with the making of a circular ring in red symbolizing the moon that Shiva bears on his head, toward the top left corner. Bel leaves are then offered over the Linga.

After completing all associated rituals, the devotee then bends down, places the thumb and index finger on either of the Nandi's horns and views the Linga through this aperture. This is customary in Shiva's worship since it originates from the scriptures and stories about Shiva.





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Worship and rituals associated with a single deity or festival are performed differently in different parts of the country. One such instance is seen here on Mahashivratri where a North Indian girl offers prayers at the Shiva temple in Bangalore, South India.



Worship begins with the Abhisheka or bathing of the idol, in this case with milk.



A pumpkin is then offered to the Lord, this being a uniqueness of offerings made in North India.

Fruits are offered and lamps lit at the base of the idol.



Center: Flowers are offered over the Linga and only white flowers are used to worship Shiva. This finds its reason and source in legends about the Ascetic God.



Finally worship is complete and prayers are offered to the Lord after bowing to the Nandi.



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Women in South India perform worship of Lord Shiva in their own traditional way, with certain aspects being customary for married women such as the application of turmeric from the Linga onto one's forehead as can be seen here.



First turmeric is sprinkled between the horns of the Nandi, which is very auspicious and this is where Shiva is said to have performed his dance, in legends.



The customary viewing of the Linga through the Nandi's horns is then done.

Next turmeric is applied on the rear end of Nandi along with some vermillion and Bel leaves are placed along with flowers on the Linga.



Center: Jasmine flowers are then placed over the Linga and the horns of the Nandi.



Coconuts are broken and the water from within is poured onto the Linga as a way of worship.



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