

[Festivals](#)

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Festivals

Few occasions can arouse our fervor, fascination and felicity like a festival. Holy days beguile us, uplift us, unite family and nation in adoration of the One in all, the All in everyone. Here are Saivism's most sacred days.

What Are the Festival Days of Saivism?

Festivals are special times of communion with God and Gods, of family and community sharing and sadhana. Saivites observe numerous festivals in the temple and the home, and special holy days each week and month. Aum.

Monday is the Hindu holy day in the North of India, and Friday in the South, set aside each week for attending the temple, cleaning and decorating the home shrine, devout prayer, japa and scriptural study. These are not days of rest, for we carry on our usual work. Among the major Deity festivals are Mahashivaratri, Vaikasi Vishakham, Ganesha Chaturthi®, Skanda Shashthi®, Krittika Dāṅpa, Vinayaka Vratam, Ardra Darshana and Tai Pusam. Temples also hold a ten-day annual festival called Brahmotsava, often on the Uttaraphalguni nakshatra in March-April, as well as honor the anniversary day of their founding. Festivals are auspicious and sacred days of family and community togetherness, and of sadhana, fasting, meditation, worship and retreat from worldly concerns. Shaivites offer special prayers to Siva, Ganesha and Karttikeya on propitious days each month according to the Hindu sacred calendar. The Vedas proclaim, "Behold now a man who unwinds and sets the thread, a man who unwinds it right up to the vault of heaven. Here are the pegs; they are fastened to the place of worship. The Sama Veda hymns are used for weaving shuttles." Aum.

What Are the Primary Festivals to Siva?

Mahashivaratri, Siva's great night, venerates Parashiva. Krittika Dīpa celebrates the infinite light of Parashakti. ardra Darshana invokes the blessings of Parameshvara- Lord Siva Nataraja in His blissful Cosmic Dance. Aum.

Mahashivaratri is the night before the new-moon day in February-March. We observe it both as a discipline and a festivity, keeping a strict fast and all-night vigil, meditating, intoning Siva's 1,008 names, singing His praise, chanting Shri Rudram, bathing the Sivalinga and being near the vairagis as they strive to realize Parashiva. On Krittika Dipa, the Krittika nakshatra in November-December, we honor-with oil lamps everywhere, village bonfires and special temple arati-God Siva as an infinite pillar of light. This is an important festival in Murugan temples. On ardra Darshana, during the ardra nakshatra of December-January, Lord Nataraja receives elaborate abhisheka and is beseeched for yogic union, prosperity and matrimonial success. He is again lavishly invoked on the Uttaraphalguni nakshatra in June-July and on four other days each year. Special monthly days for Siva worship are the two 13th tithis, called pradosha. The Vedas proclaim, "The Lord, God, all-pervading and omnipresent, dwells in the heart of all beings. Full of grace, He ultimately gives liberation to all creatures by turning their faces toward Himself." Aum.

What Are the Major Ganesha Festivals?

Ganesha Chaturthi is a joyous celebration of Ganesha's birthday. Vinayaka Vratam is twenty-one days of fasting and daily temple worship. Pancha Ganapati is a five-

day family festival of harmony and gift-giving. Aum.

On Ganesha Chaturthi, in August-September, elaborate temple pujas are held. Worship is also given in the home shrine to a clay image of Ganesha that we make or obtain. At the end of the day, or after ten days, we join others in a grand parade, called visarjana, to a river, temple tank, lake or seashore, where we

immerse the image, symbolizing Ganesha's release into universal consciousness. During the twenty-one days of Vinayaka Vratam, in November-December, devotees vow to attend daily Ganesha puja, fasting on water and taking a full meal after sunset. Pancha Ganapati, December 21 to 25, is a modern five-day festival of gift-giving, dear to children. Families invoke His five shaktis, one on each day-creating harmony in the home, concord among relatives, neighbors and friends, good business and public relations, cultural upliftment and heartfelt charity. Ganesha's monthly holy day is Chaturthi®, the fourth tithi after the new moon. The Vedas implore, "O Lord of Categories, thou art the Lord, he seer of seers, unrivaled in wealth, king of elders, lord of the principle of principles. Hear us and take thy place, bringing with thee all enjoyments." Aum.

What Are the Main Karttikeya Festivals?

Vaikasi Vishakham celebrates the anniversary of Lord Karttikeya's creation. Skanda Shashthi® is a six-day festival honoring His conquest of light over darkness. Tai Pusam is a time of sadhana and public penance. Aum.

On Vaikasi Vishakham day, Lord Karttikeya's birthstar, Vishakha nakshatra, in May-June, elaborate abhisheka is conducted in all His temples. It is a time of gift-giving to panditas and great souls, weddings, feedings for the poor, caring for trees, spiritual initiation, diksha, and conclaves of holy men. Skanda Shashthi® is celebrated on the six days after the new moon in October-November with festive processions and pujas invoking His protection and grace. It honors Karttikeya's receiving the vel, His lance of spiritual illumination, jnana shakti, and culminates in a dramatic victory celebration of spiritual light over asuric darkness. Tai Pusam occurs on Pushya nakshatra in January-February. During this festival we fast and perform public penance, called kavadi, seeking Karttikeya's blessings to dispel our selfishness, pride and vanity. His special monthly days are Kritika nakshatra and Shashthi, the sixth tithi after the new moon. The Vedas say, "Like the cry of watchful birds swimming in water, like the loud claps of thundering rain clouds, like the joyful streams gushing from the mountain, so have our hymns sounded forth to the Lord." Aum.

What Are Other Important Festivals?

Besides the temple festivals, there is a multitude of home, community and national celebrations, notably Dipavali, Hindu New Year, Tai Pongal, guru puja days, kumbha melas, Jayanti and Guru Purnima. Aum.

Dipavali, the "festival of lights" in October-November, is a most popular festival, esteemed as a day of Hindu solidarity, when all sects gather in love and trust. It begins the financial year and is celebrated by opening new accounts, giving greeting cards, clothing and other gifts and by lighting rows of oil lamps. Family bonds are strengthened and forgivenesses sought. The several Hindu New Years are important observations. Tai Pongal, in January-February, is a harvest thanksgiving and invocation for prosperity. God Surya, the Sun, is honored, and daughters are presented with gifts. We venerate saints and sages by conducting guru puja on the anniversary of their passing, or mahasamadhi. We celebrate our satguru's birthday, or Jayanti, with special puja to his shrÃ® paduka, "sandals," or holy feet. We honor him again on Guru Purnima, the full moon of July. Kumbha melas, humanity's largest gatherings, are held at four pilgrimage centers in India every three years. The Vedas proclaim, "Thus have we now approached the All-Knower, the one who is the best procurer of good things. Endow us, O Majesty, with strength and glory." Aum.