

DUSSHERA: REALIZING ECO-FRIENDLY ELEMENTS

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When the year is coming to a close, the festive season is gaining momentum in India. Dusshera, the culmination of nine-day long 'Sharad Navratri', celebrates the victory of good over evil. Falassi defined festivals as, 'a sacred or profane time of celebrations,' while Getz identified them as 'themed, public celebrations.' Festivals celebrate community values, ideologies, identity and continuity and play a vital role in the life of people. Though, Dusshera is celebrated in almost every part of India, yet it has assumed mammoth magnitudes in the recent years.

We have been celebrating Diwali and Dusshera festivals with firecrackers, which pose threats, not only to the environment, but to the entire living world. The cumulative problem of smog, air and noise pollution has health implications. While Dusshera is supposed to be a peaceful homage for gods and goddesses, it has nowadays become commercialized festivities that wreck mayhem and chaos, mainly in context of environment. It has now turned out to be one of the major sources of pollution. Like other festivals, Dusshera too has had a religious and historic connotation, which varies across different states.

In Punjab, for instance, Dusshera is linked with harvest. On the first day of Navratri, barley seeds are sown in a mud pot. On the occasion of Dusshera, ten dung cakes, symbolizing the ten heads of demon king Ravan, are prepared, festooned with the newly harvested ears of wheat or rice, cotton balls and barley seedlings and later connected with a holy thread. After ritual worship, these are immersed in water. In Mangalore, the men dress-up as tigers and go around the streets performing 'Hulivesa' the tiger dance. Dussehra, in Chhattisgarh rejoices in nature and it starts with worship of forest and ends with a prayer and send-off ceremony for the local deities. Dussehra of Tamil Nadu teaches humility, where Mutharamman Temple gets thousands of people dressed-up as goddesses, beggars and monkeys, who beg for alms, which teaches them modesty. People worship goddesses and married women invite each other home, offer coconut, betel nuts and share gifts. The magnificence of Mysore Dussehra is the lighting of Mysore Palace. The procession of ornamented elephants walking towards festival ground is a beholding spectacle of Mysore Dussehra.





Likewise, Kullu Dussehra of Himachal begins with a procession of Lord Raghunath and hundreds of local deities. In Kullu, the festival starts from Dussehra and lasts for the next seven days. On the second last day of the festival, the people worship their cattle by offering freshly reaped walnuts and garlands of locally available grass and flowers. Thus, Dussehra has both spiritual and eco-cultural connotations. The animistic beliefs and veneration for nature has been the idea behind the way Dussehra is celebrated in different parts of India and has nothing to do with polluting environment. The ecological ethics emphasize on the communion between man and nature, which is exemplified and reflected in diverse forms of Dussehra celebrations that permeates across India thus furthering the concept of conservation.

What differentiates man from other living organisms is the reality that he has always placed the ultimate objective in life. The fundamental factor for man's steady progression has always been the natural environment and his relationship with the same. Through this association, he has passed through numerous ebb and flow, but the hidden notion has always remained untouched. Today, man has absconded all natural bonds which should have been retained. Materialistic thought is replacing the divinities of nature and wiping out animist beliefs. While flipping through the pages of epics we read about Ravan, and it seems that Ravan, our thoughts have been entrapped by some malevolence. When 'evil' is cited as a trait, it means we have blacks of impatience and selfishness that make us run in the mad race of development, where we don't contemplate on future while making our present comfortable.

Isn't it high time that we draw positivity and learn lessons from the traditional ways of respecting nature around us? The recent notions of '*going green*', '*green initiatives*', '*sustainability*' and similar concepts are paving the way for eco-friendly initiatives. The scientific community is coming up with new ideas for environmental protection. Eco-friendly festivals are gradually becoming popular among masses, as these are celebrated in a manner that causes insignificant loss to the environment. Since the festivals are assuming new meaning with globalization, we need to look back and learn lessons from the traditions which we have inherited from our forefathers. The scientists are looking for ways to combat the growing ecological problems. Using clay idols, organic colours, flowers & plants for decoration, energy saving lighting, avoiding firecrackers, and refraining from noise pollution can make the celebrations eco-friendly. Embracing the traditional ways of celebrations is far better than the obnoxious showcase of riches that the festivals are turning into. It is said that change is the law of nature, but some things are better if they remain unchanged. It is through the concern of each one of us that we can revive our innate traditions and make the festivals eco-friendly for years to come.