



THE KULASEKARAPATTINAM DASARA IN TAMIL NADU COMBINES COLOURFUL COSTUMES, MUSIC, DANCE AND DRAMA

Lankadahan ceremony when dry leaves, grass and twigs that symbolise Lanka are burnt on the banks of river Beas. In Karnataka the practice of a display of dolls in sequential form gives it the name Bombe Habba (that translates to doll festival). The dolls are usually images of Gods and Goddesses and also some contemporary ones make it to the display and is a huge draw with children and adults alike.

A similar tradition happens in Tamil Nadu - Bommai Kolu and Andhra Pradesh - Bommala Kolu. Hyderabad's Bathukamma is a floral festival celebrated as an ode to Goddess Gauri that starts on Mahalaya Amavasya and ends on Durgashtami. Likewise, Bastar Dussehra is a unique 75-day festival celebrated in Chhattisgarh to honour the presiding deity of Bastar Devi Danteshwari. If you are in Varanasi, the Ram Lila (plays based on episodes from the Ramayana) performed beside the Ramnagar Fort is a key attraction.

Delhi also has a fair share of the Ram Lila plays but do not miss the Kanjak Puja that includes puri-halwa-channa offerings and the burning of the larger than life effigies of Ravana, Ravana's son Meghnada and Ravana's brother Kumbhkarana on the last day. The Madikeri Dasara in Coorg includes a traditional Karaga, a ritualistic folk dance dedicated to Draupadi that is performed during the festival.

The Kulasekarapattinam Dasara that happens in Tamil Nadu's Kulasekharapattinam at the Mutharamman Temple combines colourful costumes, music, dance and drama. Kota in Rajasthan celebrates Dussehra with a 25 day fest or mela

that sees cultural performances, costume plays, fireworks and delicious festive food.

Like with any festival there are many interesting foods associated with Dusherra. Interestingly many people also fast during Navratri which is broken after a special offering is made to the Goddess. Fasting involves a typical vegetarian diet based on fruits and milk. Special foods like sabudana vada, arbi ki kadhi, coconut laddoos, Kacche Kele ki Chaat, kele ki subzi and rajgire ki puri are usually prepared at this time as part of the special fast.

The nine forms of the Goddess are offered special foods on each day. Day 1 has Pure Ghee to Maa Shailputri for health, day 2 has sugar to Goddess Brahmacharini for longevity and day 3 has milk or milk based sweets offered to Mata Chandraghanta for happiness. Day 4 sees Malpuato Mata Kushmanda to help improve intellect and decision making.

Day 5 sees bananas offered to Mata Skandmata for physical health. On Day 6 honey is offered to Maa Katyayani for physical appearance and day 7 has jaggery offered to Mata Kaalratri for pain relief. Day 8 is Durga Ashtami and Mahagauri is offered coconut and day 9 sees til or sesame to Goddess Siddhidatri that helps in protection against anything untoward.

Navratri delicacies do include a lot of sweets and savouries that are local to each of the areas where celebrations happen with gaiety. However the best takeaway from the ten day long festival is the key message that good always triumphs over evil – a lesson that matters so much especially in today's times.