Festivals are celebrated with a lot of zeal and enthusiasm in the Hindu culture; rightly so, because they serve many purposes. At the most superficial level it is an opportunity for social gatherings and meeting friends and family to share the joyous occasion. Young, old, married, unmarried, children, and adults - everyone gets together to celebrate. The festivities, traditions, and rituals are seamlessly carried over many generations because the children have an opportunity to watch and imbibe their observations from the earlier generation. These special-occasion karma to be done, also referred to as Naimitya Karma, allows us to acknowledge and repay the debt we owe from birth. The debts are Devata Runa (duty towards God by worshipping God and remember to stay on the stay on the spiritual path), Rishi Runa (appreciate the seers who have helped pass the traditions to the next generation; repay the debt by propagating the knowledge), Pitru Runa (being thankful to ancestors because of whom we are here), Manushya Runa (give back to the society and pay our societal dues), and Bhoota Runa (repay our environmental debts). At the subtlest level, each festival inches us closer to reach the core of our being and fulfill the purpose of a human birth.

Navaratri festival marks the change of season. Mind lunges into lethargic patterns during cold season. We note the highest occurrence of depression during this time. So during this festival we channelize the mind into the right direction and embark on a journey to reach the Divine Self. We prepare the mind by removing negative features and enrich ourselves by cultivating positive attributes. Such a fertile mind, when it reaches the core of its essential nature to realize the divine Self within, dances in ecstasy. Only then can we truly celebrate Navaratri.

During this festival, we invoke and worship the divine Mother as Jaganmata, Mother of entire universe. Invoking the feminine form of divine Mother is found only in two religions – Greek and Hindu. Sanatana Dharma believes that God showers blessings where women are respected. Yatra Naryaastu Pujyate, Ramyantye Tatra Devata - Abundant grace flows where we have undivided respect for Mother in divine form.

**Intense Desire**

During the nine-day Navaratri festival, we invoke a different form of Mother deity every day. The nine forms are of Durga, Laxmi, Saraswati. These are divided into three sets. Why should we worship for three days? Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa reminds us that we get darshan (divine vision) to see the Lord if we pray intensely and contemplate sincerely for 72 hours. The revelation is a given and it depends on our intensity, sincerity and focus. However, in spite of the presence of these elements, there are many hurdles to be overcome. Hence we seek Mother’s grace and blessing to help us be triumphant – for that extra umph in our trials – that will enable us to reach our goal.

Before starting any new endeavor, always be mindful that we are enveloped with layers of negativity. Pray that we can rid ourselves of these vices before spiritual growth can take place. First and foremost, we must stop doing bad deeds before doing anything good! Else it is difficult to make progress. For example, prior to cultivation, we remove all weeds. Plow the terrain so that it is equipped to withstand the onslaught of all seasons. Divine grace must be invoked to help our human effort purge all the weeds.
Preparation

Durga devi is the expression of the divine Mother in a terrible fierceful form. Durgateem Nashayati Iti Durga – She annihilates and destroys all our negativities. Invoke the powerful form of Mother riding a tiger who multitasks with eight hands and arms. She wields eight powerful weapons to eradicate negativities. She is called as Kali because she is a form of time. The feminine form of Kala (time) is Kali. Time is unbiased - whether one is rich, poor, educated, illiterate, beautiful, ugly, famous or not – we all eventually merge in time. Time remains constant and is the substratum on which everyone and everything undergoes changes.

To bring back the Bhadrattva (auspiciousness and balance), She assumes the furious ferocious form of Bhadrakali, born on the platform of love and concern. Balance is achieved only when there is no negativity. We invoke Bhadrakali who displays her success stories around Her neck as a garland of skulls. The skull represents the ego that She annihilates. The legend explains of a demon who had a boon that every drop of his blood which fell on earth would produce another demon who would also attack the person trying to kill the demon. No one was able to thus kill the demon because his army of demons just kept on increasing by springing up another demon with the blood that oozed out. At that time, Bhadrakali took up the battle and drank every single drop of blood so that it wouldn’t touch the earth to produce more demons.

Our desires are similar to those blood drops. Ego is the demon that has so many desires. We can’t satiate desires because they are never-ending and multiply themselves. So we get to the root cause and cut off that head which causes the desires to erupt.

Our failure on the spiritual path is often a result of rushing to increase the positive traits without weeding out the negative characteristics. We thus become the biggest stumbling block in our own growth! The most difficult obstacle to overcome is our ego. Once we offer ourselves to Her altar, She will whip us to remove all negative traits. When even minute traces of negativity are burned up, it becomes the Vibhooti (ashes) that adorns the Lord. We then invoke the next form, Goddess Laxmi.

Prosperity

After weeding, you enrich the land by tilling and cultivation. Once the mind is rooted off the negative characteristics, we nourish it with rich resources to make it fertile. Richness is most popularly associated with Laxmi devi who represents wealth and prosperity. However, wealth is just one of the shades that She symbolizes. Of the various forms, we invoke Ashta Laxmi (eight forms) – Veerya, Dhairya, Dhanya, etc. All these are indicative of opulence of positive resources. We run after Laxmi devi in expectation of affluence and richness and forget that Laxmi Devi is Lord Vishnu’s divine consort. Who in their right minds would like people chasing their beautiful wife? So Lord Vishnu puts a chakra (wheel) of Janma-Maran (life and death) until you get the Su-darshan (divine vision). Realize sooner than later not to go after the riches. One of the 108 names of Laxmi devi is Chanchala (unsteady). In Her pursuit, we also fall prey and constantly waver; thereby becoming irregular and unreliable. Hold on to Lord Vishnu, and She
will automatically be there. Rather than pursuing success, be successful in placing Narayana in our heart. She will undoubtedly follow there too! With such a treasure-chest, all resources are within us to dictate our own fortune. Inculcate the eternal values of Sanatana Dharma in our daily living and develop abundant internal strength. This energizes us to remain on the spiritual path and allows us to enjoy the bounty of knowledge that follows in the next three days.

**Essential Knowledge**

Our will power is strengthened once we have cleaned out the negativities and invoked positivity. Currently our will is weak and hollow. Empower and enrich the will by eliminating the negative aspects, and invoke the positive elements. Once our will power is reinforced and augmented with positive qualities, we can direct that fertile mind towards Sat-vidya, invoked through Goddess Saraswati who is an embodiment of Knowledge. The highest form of knowledge is Atma vidya, the knowledge of Self or the Divine within us. We can reach this divinity only when we have removed all the obstacles and hurdles of negativities within us. The positively charged mind can be then directed towards the divinity.

**Raas-Garba**

*Vijaya Dashami* is the culmination of these three 3-day journeys and *Dusshera*, the tenth day, is the victory over our ego that sustains all negativities. Sacrificing the ego, our inner animal, to reveal our swaroop, our Self is the true joyous celebration of Navaratri.

We mark the festivity by going around the consciousness or the sanctum sanctorum in the form of a lit pot, the *Garbha*. This pot has nine holes which represents the nine holes of the human body (2 eyes + 2 ears + 2 nostrils + 1 mouth + 2 lower organs = 9 holes). Consciousness beams forth through each of these nine holes. *Nava dwaarey purey dehi* – we can function only due to the Supreme Consciousness, which enlivens these organs. When we reach that core of our essence, we reach the sanctum sanctorum of our divine Self. Life transforms such that every moment is a celebration.

*Rasa*, is the essence. It is the taste of merriment of rhythmic dance movements witnessed on the screen of Time. *Raas* is the expression of inner *rasa* identified with the knowledge that core *garbha* is the Supreme Consciousness. Once we reach the core of our being, the *Rasa* expands as *Raas*, as though in celebration. Expression of the *Rasa* (essence) is *Raas*. Hence *Raas Garba* is the joyous dance of celebration of life manifestation.

Reveling in our blissful nature, every expression is balanced; thus every interaction, every moment is a delightful joyous celebration of the Supreme manifestation. Divine consciousness is all there is.

Om Tat Sat