

Significance of Sharad Poonam/Poornima

There are several practices and interpretations of this auspicious day.

A. Sharad Poornima, also known as Kojaagari Poornima, is celebrated on a full moon day of the Hindu lunar month of Ashwin. It is also known as Kaumudi (moonlight) celebration, as it is believed that on this day, the Moon through its beams showers amrit or elixir of life on earth. The brightness of the full moon brings special joy, especially after monsoon.

The 'Sharad' in Sharad Poornima signifies the 'Sharad ritu' (season) of the year. Basically a harvest festival, it also has religious significance. It is believed that whoever worships Goddess Lakshmi on this night and observes a fast is blessed even if Lakshmi Yoga does not exist in his/her horoscope.

Another belief is that Goddess Lakshmi was born on Sharad Poornima. Anyone observing this fast avoids solid foods. Upon completion of the fast, he/she must first taste a mixture of cold milk and rice flakes.

The practice of drinking cold milk during this fast has its origins in science. Sharad ritu brings in very hot days and cool nights. During such weather, 'pitta' or acidity becomes predominant in our body. Consumption of milk & rice flakes is a good remedy for 'pitta'.

In Gujarat, the festival is known as Sharad Poonam. After Durga puja, this is another important festival celebrated in almost every house in West Bengal. In Orissa, it is celebrated as Kumar Poornima. Kumar or Kartikeya, the handsome son of Shiva, was born on this day.

Unmarried girls who wish for a handsome husband worship Kumar, who was the most handsome of the Gods. No particular God is worshipped on this day. It's actually the Sun and Moon that are worshipped.

On Sharad Poornima, girls wake up early, take a bath, wear new garments and offer food to the Sun God. They observe fast throughout the day and in the evening, when the moon rises, they again make special offerings, this time to the moon. They consume this offered food after the rituals are over. For girls, it is a festival to rejoice, dance and sing special songs.

B. Sharad Poornima is also referred to as Kumar is a harvest festival of India celebrated on the full moon day of the Hindu lunar month of Ashvin, which corresponds to September-October of the Gregorian or English calendar. By the time this festival is celebrated, the rainy season is over and the brightness of the full moon brings special joy. It is mainly celebrated in Maharashtra, West Bengal, Orissa, and Gujarat and also in Andhra Pradesh to some extent.

The first full moon day of the month of Ashwin is known as Sharad Poornima. It is also referred to as Rasa Poornima, or Sharath Poornima. The festival is also referred as Kaumudi Festival, Kaumudi means moonlight in Sanskrit.

C. Another practice of Sharad Poornima the full moon day in the month of October and is closely associated with **Lord Krishna and Radha and Gopis**. According to the Srimad Bhagvad Purana, the famous **Rasa Lila of Lord Krishna with Radha and Gopis took place on the night of Sharad Poornima**, in 2016, date of Sharad Poornima is October 15.

On this night of Sharad Poornima, it is believed that Lord Krishna invited his faithful devotees, the Gopis of Vrundavan, to play the Maha Raas (traditional folk-dance) with him. They had earned his grace by overlooking society's disdain on them ('loklaaj'), to offer him unalloyed devotion. When they left their homes in Vraj and arrived in Vrundavan, Shri Krishna welcomed them. Yet to further test their love for him, he averred: 'Women of character such as you, should not leave home to meet another man in the middle of the night!' These words seared the Gopis' hearts. In extreme grief, they uttered: 'Our feet will not budge the slightest from your lotus-feet. So how can we return to Vraj?'

Pleased with such immutable love for him, Shri Krishna initiated the Maha Raas, by assuming as many forms as there were Gopis. At this point, they beamed with pride that, 'Nobody's devotion can excel ours, by which the Lord favored us.' Instead of accepting the Maha Raas as the Lord's grace, ego marred their devotion. Therefore he instantly vanished from the Raas mandal! Now filled with remorse, the Gopis repented. Recalling Shri Krishna's divine episodes - 'lila', they lamented their pangs of separation, and sang kirtans known as 'viraha geet'. On this very night of night of Sharad Poornima, became the most resplendent. With the Gopis, Shri Krishna roamed the banks of the Yamuna, as if imprisoning everyone in his lila!'

D. The Sanatkumar Samhita cites the story of 'Kojaagari Punam' in ancient times, a poor Brahmin by name Valit lived in Magadhadesh - Bengal. While he was a learned and virtuous man, his wife always used to quarrel with him and behaved totally opposite to his wishes. Once on the occasion of his father's 'Shraddh' - day of paying homage to the deceased- she flung the 'pind' offering in a sewage pit, rather than the sacred Ganga, as custom required. This infuriated Valit. Therefore he renounced his home and wife to search for wealth. In the forests, he met several 'Naagkanyas' - girls of Kaliya Naag's ancestry. These Naagkanyas had performed the 'Kojaagari Vrat' - staying awake on Aso sud Punam. They then sat gambling with Valit. The night happened to be Aso sud Punam or Sharad Poornima. Valit lost everything. At that moment, Lord Vishnu and his consort Goddess Lakshmi, happened to pass by. Since Valit had incidentally observed the 'Kojaagari vrat', Goddess Lakshmi graced him handsomeness similar to that of 'Kamdeva' - the deity of love. Now attracted to him, the Naagkanyas married Valit and gifted him their riches. He then returned home with the riches, whence his wife received him warmly. After this episode,

the Sanatkumar Samhita declared that those who remain awake on this Punam will be graced with wealth.

Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami, the choicest devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan was born on Sharad Punam, Samvat 1841. He granted 'wealth' by blessing spiritually 'awake' devotees with God-realization.

E. How it is Celebrated?

Sharad Poornima has a great religious significance. It is said that anyone who observes fasting on this day will be bestowed of ever virtuous life of health, wealth and happiness. Some believe Lakshmi devi, the goddess of fortune, was born on this day. Anyone who worships Lakshmi devi on this day and remains vigilant whole night will be blessed with everlasting money even though he does not have Lakshmi yoga in his/her horoscope.

It is believed that one should drink cold milk during the fast on this day. This is verified scientifically as follows: During this weather the days are hot and nights are cold. The body gets more 'pitta' due to this environment. By consuming milk and rice flakes one can decrease 'pitta' in the body.

Many people observe fast on this day. Anyone who observes this fast should avoid solid foods. If the person likes to fast completely during the day, he should take a mixture of rice flakes and cold milk in the night.

In the states of Gujarat and West Bengal, Sharad Poornima is celebrated as a grand festival.

In Orissa, this day is celebrated as Kumar Poornima. Kumar Swami is the handsome son of Lord Shiva who was born on this day. Unmarried girls who wish a nice, handsome husband worship Kumar Swami on this day.

In some parts of India the Sun God and Moon God are worshipped on Sharad Poornima. In some areas, the full moon is not seen directly instead it is seen on a container filled with boiling milk. Some people thread a needle on this full moon night under the rays of the moon. This is said to improve one's eyesight. The most common practice is of keeping the prepared kheer, poha or rice flakes or sweets in moonlight through out the night and distributed as Prasad on the next day.