

OM SHANTI OM

By Paramahansa Dr.Rupnathji

It is said that the universe was created within sound and that sound also gives man his spiritual destiny. With the chanting of mantras, a psychological atmosphere is created which goes towards the purification of the mind and the body Vedic literature has come down to us as an oral tradition. And Vedic verses form part of mantras (sacred sounds) which roll within the ether of the body and come out as sound with varying frequencies. This sacred sound is the omnipotent nama and rupa (name and form).

The earliest reference about the interpretation and value of mantra is found in Brahmanas: Ninya Vacamsi which means 'the word rising from the depths' (rig Veda IV 3.16). Vedic Exercises (the Cultural Heritage of India Vol.1) that, "The connection of the Vedic mantras with rituals is very deep. The chief aim of the Brahmanas is to give a clear and connected account of rituals with occasional exegetical comments, where it is assumed that the listeners are already familiar with the atmosphere in which these rituals arose. Every detail of a ritual has to be accompanied by a mantra....though the mantras were evidently composed in ritualistic atmosphere, it cannot be claimed that every mantra of the Samhita (Scripture) has always a necessary reference to some rites...."

Yaska, the renowned sage, once said the mantras are deeply interlinked with jnana and karma. Symbolically placing the context (Rig Veda X 71.5) Yaska wrote "It speaks of the meaning as being the flower and the fruits of the word. Esoterically, knowledge of the rituals and of the Gods are respectively the flower and the fruit of the word. (Nirukta I.20) Furthermore, the text Nirukta proclaims that within the mantra the secret knowledge of the Veda resides.

Thus the sacred word is a mode for man to expand his consciousness. And mantras unfold a process of spiritual experiences through the primal word or cosmic sound.

Mantras are an integral part of the Guru-Shishya-Parampara (a tradition of spiritual leader and disciple) where the guru initiates his disciple with the seed mantra or beeja mantra to experience mystic spiritualism within oneself. Elaborating the point Dr.Rupnathji wrote:"...but only the Siddha gurus (teachers who have attained glory), they, as a rule, have to convey the germs of spiritual wisdom to the disciple by means of words (mantras) to be meditated upon" (Complete Works Vol.5 p.57).

Thus we see that the life of a Hindu is enveloped with sound symbolism right from the days of initiation. The effective verbal power of correctly articulated sounds is an accepted belief of the Hindus. These sounds can destroy, create and sustain the world. It is said that the sound of mantras have all the creative power provided the devout has been properly initiated into its mystical meaning and taught the methodology of its pronunciation

The founder of Tantra Anusndhan Org, Dr.Rupnathji , wrote in an article, The Spirit and Culture of the Tantra (Cultural Heritage of India Vol. V pp.255-275): " Initiation or diksha means that which gives a knowledge of things divine and destroys all that leads to a fall. The teacher, for example, explains how three letters - a, u and m constituting pranava or AUM, represent the three gunas: Sattava, rajas and tamas; how these are embodied in Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva; and how these three deities can function only with the help of their respective Saktis (consorts). The guru also teaches how the AUM is but a subtle form of the sacred formula hamsah which is also the vahana (carrier) of Brahma the creator in as much as hamsah means 'the breath of life'. Ham is inspired breath and sah is that which is expired. Everything movable and immovable breathes and therefore Brahma who is nothing but the creative aspect of the Supreme substance manifest in the world is represented as seated there. To the ordinary man hamsah is a waterfowl. The aspirant ahs also to learn that the pranava contains within itself besides the three letter (AUM) - bindu nada (sound), sakti (power) and santa (quiescence). When he has learnt this, he is to know that which is beyond. These remarks apply to every mantra".

According to the Hindu dharma, there are three 'inaudible' stages before sound is heard. "Something ought to be said about the four stages of speech, in three of which sound s inaudible; it is only at the fourth stage that men give utterance to it. The first of the three stages is para located in the muladhara, the lowest of the six centres in the spinal column commonly called chakras. This is but a mere stress toward articulation. As this stress takes definite shape, it becomes pasyanti which means 'seeing'. The next stage is reached when it arrives at the anahat chakra opposite the heart; it then becomes madhyama which means 'middling'.

These are the three names given in Tantra to the three silent stages of vocal sound, and the last stage is vaikhari. There are some who hold that there are three stages of sound prior to para. Padampada Acharya, the chief disciple of Sankaracharya, says that the stages preceding para are sunya, samvit and suksma. The first is the vibrational stage, the next is that when the sound is about to form, and the third is that when it is forming".

Thus we see that the creation of sound within the human body is analogous to cosmic creation which also starts with the initial vibration at sunya or zero level.

For a Hindu, mantras are mandatory because the whole life cycle from birth to funeral rites requires mantra chanting as it sanctifies both the occasion and the ritual. Physical efforts of worship get enhanced when accompanied by mantra.

Chanting right

A mantra can be a monosyllable as in the case of AUM, or it can be a verse from vedic scriptures running into more than sixty syllables. In tantric Shastras, mantras run into 110 syllables. Generally, mantras are written in Sanskrit.

To pronounce the mantras there are specific pulse, pitch and speed. Each individual syllable in the mantra should be pronounced neither slowly nor rapidly. According to the Tantra school of thought, the perfect process of pronunciation and pause thereof gain effectiveness as it is more and more silently uttered; and the greatest efficacy attaches to meditation where there is no loud muttering but only silent meditation over the fundamental unity.

However, there are sects who believe in one name and shape and often call themselves Advaitists who take the name of Rama any number of times. In some belief systems a specific name of a God is taken for a particular purpose by a devotee. According to ancient scriptures Vishnu is remembered at the time of taking medicine. At the time of eating, a devotee remembers the name of Janardhana. At bedtime he recites the name of Padmanabha.

Likewise, mantras are chanted repeatedly and each mantra has a specific significance and purpose. It is believed that once the meaning of the mantra is understood and recited correctly one attains one's aspirations.

Hindu Festivals

By Paramahansa Dr. Rupnathji

In the Vedic/Hindu tradition, there are many festivals that are observed throughout the year. There are major festivals and numerous minor ones, as well as those that are celebrated on a local or regional basis, which are celebrated differently according to the location, or even named differently. There are different festivals to celebrate the various incarnations of God, as well as those that honor the seasons, harvests, relationships, and certain principles of the Vedic culture. Some of the major festivals are listed and described as follows:

Makara Sankranti : Hindus consider the sun king of the planets. Makara Sankranti is the celebration of the sun's journey to the Northern Hemisphere. *Makar* means Capricorn and *Sankranti* means transition. So you could say there is one *sankranti* every month when the sun moves from one sign of the zodiac to the next. However, the most important ones are the Mesh (Aries) Sankranti and the Makar (Capricorn) Sankranti. So the transition of the sun from Sagittarius to Capricorn during the winter solstice in the northern hemisphere is known as Makar Sankranti. This is when the sun moves from the *Da-kshinayana* (southern) route to the *Uttarayana* (northern) route. The Uttarayana route begins on January 14 and lasts till July 14.

This time is accepted as a special or auspicious time. It is believed that those who die in this period attain *moksha* or liberation from *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death. It is also a time when taking a dip in a holy *sangam* (confluence of holy rivers, such as at Allahabad) is

especially appropriate. In line with astrological calculations, the Kumbha Mela is conducted once in 12 years at Allahabad beginning on Makara Sankranti. It is that day when the sun and moon enter Capricorn and Jupiter enters Aries. The astrological configuration on Makara Sankranti is called "Maha-snana-yoga", the day for taking a special holy bath, and a highly auspicious time when the gates to the heavenly region are considered to be open, thus allowing the soul easy access to the celestial worlds.

Makar Sankranti falls on January 14 and in leap-years on January 15. It is the only Hindu festival that is based on the solar calendar instead of the lunar.

Makar Sankranti is celebrated as a harvest festival. It is a way of expressing thanks to Mother Earth or nature. This is the time when winter starts to recede, which gradually develops into spring and summer. The festival is especially for the spreading of good will, peace and prosperity. People also give each other presents, especially *til*, the traditional sweets made with sesame. It is also celebrated with a feast that includes a dish made of green gram, rice and jaggery.

The day is known by various names according to region. In Uttar Pradesh it is called Khichri. In Punjab and Haryana it is called Lohri, when people light bonfires and celebrate. The next day is Maghi when the people dance to the Bhangra beats. In Madhya Pradesh the holiday is called Sukarat or Sakarat. In West Bengal and Assam it is called Bhogali Bihu. In Gujarat and Rajasthan it is Uttarayan or the kite flying festival, when you can often see many children flying colorful kites. In Tamil Nadu it is known as Pongal. And in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh it is Sankranti.

Vasant Panchami : Vasant Panchami is known as the festival of kites. It is celebrated towards the end of winter in the month of January-February. Vasant Panchami is celebrated in the northern parts of India. The weather changes from harsh winter to soft spring or "Vasant". Vasant is the time when the mustard fields are abound with their yellow flowers that seem to usher in spring. So Punjabis welcome the change and celebrate the day by wearing yellow clothes, holding feasts and by organizing kite flying. Vasant Panchami day puja (worship) is devoted to Sarasvati, the Goddess of Learning. She bestows the greatest wealth to humanity--the wealth of knowledge.

Maha Shivaratri : Shivaratri is celebrated sometime during February-March. It is believed that Parvati, the wife of Shiva, prayed, meditated and fasted on this day for the well being of Shiva and hoped to ward off any evils that may fall upon him. Though, both men and women celebrate Shivaratri, it is an especially auspicious day for women. Married women pray for the well being of their husbands and sons, while unmarried women pray for a husband like Shiva, who is considered to be the ideal husband. On Shivaratri, devotees awake at sunrise and bathe in holy water (like the Ganges River) and wear new clothes. On the day of the festival, people will fast and spend the day focused on Shiva, meditating and chanting "Om Namaha Shivaya." Thus, offering their obeisances to Lord Shiva, the mind is held in such single-pointed concentration throughout the day. Then they flock to the temples carrying holy water to bathe and worship the Shivalingam. This bathing of the Shivalingam symbolizes the cleansing of one's soul. Next, the Shivalingam is decorated with flowers and garlands. It is customary to spend the entire night awake singing the praises of Lord Shiva.

Shivaratri is a festival that is held in the typical pattern of preparation, purification, realization, and then celebration. Then at the stroke of midnight Shiva is said to manifest as the inner light of purified consciousness. Thus, this climax at night represents our overcoming the dark ignorance and reaching the state of purified spiritual knowledge. Therein we conquer the influence of the mind and senses, exhibited by staying awake all night, and enter the state of steady awareness wherein there is spiritual awakening. If one can follow this process, then he or she can experience the real meaning of Shivaratri.

Holi : Holi is a major festival and celebrates the onset of spring, along with good harvests and the fertility of the land. It is celebrated on the day after the full moon in early March. This festival is known best for the way people throw brightly colored powder and water over each other to celebrate the advent of spring. Then they bathe and cleanse themselves after which they distribute sweets amongst friends and relatives. Vibrant processions accompanied by folk songs and dances are also a characteristic of Holi celebrations. Holi is a very popular festival amongst the youth. Holi also commemorates the burning to death of Holika, the aunt of Prahlada. Huge bonfires are lit on the eve of Holi for this reason. Holi is celebrated with great vigor in the north, but is hardly celebrated in southern India.

Gaura Purnima : This is the festival that is celebrated by the increasing numbers of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. It is the celebration of the birth of Lord Chaitanya, who was considered an incarnation of God, Lord Krishna. Lord Chaitanya showed by example the highest emotion and sentiment of worship and love for Lord Krishna. He also was the first to start peaceful civil disobedience demonstrations for worshipping the Lord, and the sankirtana movement, which is the congregational chanting of the Lord's holy names in the form of the Hare Krishna mantra.

Shri Rama Navami : This festival celebrates the birth of Lord Rama who is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. This festival is celebrated during the time of March-April. Lord Rama, who became king of Ayodhya, was known for His exemplary qualities. He was popular, brave, kind, just, intelligent, patient, loving, obedient and dutiful. Lord Rama is always worshiped with his consort Sita, brother Lakshmana and devotee Hanuman. The worship of Lord Rama is accompanied by the worship of the Sun god since Rama was considered to have descended from the sun, or is in the Solar dynasty. Rama Navami celebrations include reading the great epic Ramayana and staging plays of the Rama Lila, or the pastimes of the life of Lord Rama.

Ugadi and Vishu : These are two festivals that celebrate the New Year in different communities of south India. Ugadi is celebrated in March-April. Vishu is celebrated in mid-April. The word Yugadi means the day of the inauguration of the Yuga or Age. Vishu is celebrated in a big way in Kerala. Families wake up in the morning and make sure they feast their eyes on good things like a picture of God, grains, flowers, fruit and gold. It is believed seeing these first thing in the morning of the New Year will bring them prosperity and wealth throughout the year.

Hanuman Jayanthi : This celebrates the birth of Hanuman, the most famous devotee of Lord Rama. His birthday falls on Chaitra Shukla Purnima—the March-April full moon day. On this holy day worship Sri Hanuman. Fast on this day. Read the Sri Hanuman Chalisa. Spend the whole day in the Japa of Ram-Nam. Hanuman will be highly pleased and will bless you with success in all your undertakings. Celebrations are marked by special pujas (rituals of worship) for Hanuman.

SRI HANUMAN is worshipped all over India—either alone or together with Sri Rama. Every temple of Sri Rama has the murti or idol of Sri Hanuman. Hanuman was the Avatara of Lord Siva. He was born of the Wind-God and Anjani Devi. He is also called by the names Pavanasuta, Marutsuta, Mahavira, Bajrangabali and Pavankumar. Hanuman was the living embodiment of the power of Ram-Nam. He was an ideal selfless worker, a true devotee who worked without personal desires, and an exceptional Brahmachari or celibate. He served Sri Rama with pure love and devotion. He lived only to serve Sri Rama. He was humble, brave and wise. He possessed all the divine virtues. He did what others could not do—crossing the ocean simply by uttering Ram-Nam, burning the demon-king's city of Lanka, and bringing the sanjeevini herb to restore the life of Lakshmana. He brought Sri Rama and Lakshmana from the nether world after killing Ahiravana.

Hanuman possessed devotion, knowledge, spirit of selfless service, power of celibacy, and desirelessness. He never boasted of his bravery and intelligence. He said to Ravana, "I am a humble messenger of Sri Rama. I have come here to serve Sri Rama, to do His work. By the command of Sri Rama, I have come here. I am fearless by the Grace of Sri Rama. I am not afraid of death. I welcome it if it comes while serving Sri Rama."

Sri Rama Himself said to Hanuman, "I am greatly indebted to you, O mighty hero. You did marvelous, superhuman deeds. You do not want anything in return. Sugriva has his kingdom restored to him. Angada has been made the crown prince. Vibhishana has become king of Lanka. But you have not asked for anything at any time. You threw away the precious garland of pearls given to you by Sita. How can I repay My debt of gratitude to you? I will always remain deeply indebted to you. I give you the boon of everlasting life. All will honor and worship you like Myself. Your image will be placed at the door of My temple and you will be worshipped and honored first. Whenever My stories are recited or glories sung, your glory will be sung before Mine. You will be able to do anything, even that which I will not be able to!"

Thus did Sri Rama praise Hanuman when the latter returned to Him after finding Sita in Lanka. Hanuman was not a bit elated. He fell in prostration at the holy feet of Sri Rama. Sri Rama asked him, "O mighty hero, how did you cross the ocean?" Hanuman humbly replied, "By the power and glory of Thy Name, my Lord." Again Sri Rama asked, "How did you burn Lanka? How did you save yourself?" And Hanuman replied, "By Thy Grace, my Lord." Everyone should try his best to follow the noble example of Hanuman. Glory to Hanuman! Glory to his Lord, Sri Rama!

Guru Purnima : This is a festival with a truly spiritual meaning and relevance. Guru Purnima celebrates the might of one's teacher or guru through respect and reverence. Also known as Vyasa Purnima, the festival is celebrated in July-August on the full

moon. It is believed that the great scholar and composer of the Vedic literature, Vyasadeva, who lived in the Dvapara Yuga, was born on this day. Legend also has it that this is when he completed the codification of the four *Vedas*.

Onam : This festival marks the day on which the great devotee of Lord Vishnu Emperor Maha Bali, the grandson of Prahlada (the great devotee of Lord Narasimha), received benediction and liberation with the blessings of the Lord, who had assumed the form of Vamanadeva, the dwarf incarnation. Onam is celebrated in August-September, and especially in Kerala. Onam is a ten-day festival marked by women creating beautiful floral patterns in front of their houses, pujas for Lord Vishnu, feasting and boat races.

Raksha Bandan : This celebrates the love of a sister for her brother. On this day, sisters tie a rakhi, a colorful bracelet made of silk thread, on the wrist of their brothers to protect them against evil influences. It is celebrated in July-August. Raksha Bandan is celebrated in some parts of India as a festival to honor the sea god Varuna, where coconuts are offered to the sea. Because of its three eyes, the coconut represents the three eyes of Shiva. As a mark of auspiciousness, coconuts are also broken at shrines and temples. This is also the day set apart for Brahmins to change the sacred thread they wear.

Krishna Janmashtami : This is the celebration of the birth of Lord Krishna. It is celebrated on the eighth day of the dark fortnight in August-September. Temples and homes are beautifully decorated and lit. Notable are the cribs and other decorations depicting stories of Lord Krishna's childhood. In the evening bhajans (devotional songs) are sung which end at midnight, the auspicious moment when Lord Krishna was born. Krishna Janmashtami is a festival that is held in the typical pattern of preparation, purification, realization, and then celebration. On the day of the festival, people will fast and spend the day focused on Krishna, meditating and chanting the Hare Krishna mantra and other prayers or songs devoted to Lord Krishna. Often times, there will also be plays and enactments of the birth and pastimes of the Lord. Thus, offering their obeisances, focusing their minds on Lord Krishna, the devotees hold themselves in such single-pointed concentration throughout the day. Then at the stroke of midnight Lord Krishna takes birth, which is celebrated by a midnight *arati* ceremony. Flowers are showered on the Deity of Lord Krishna, or the Deities are dressed in new outfits or decorated with numerous flowers on this day.

In this way, after a full day of purification, we realize our own connection with the Lord, who then manifests as the Supreme worshipable object of our purified consciousness. Thus, this climax at night represents our overcoming the darkness of ignorance and reaching the state of purified spiritual knowledge and perception. Therein we overcome the influence of the mind and senses and enter the state of steady awareness wherein there is full spiritual awakening. If one can follow this process, then he or she can experience the real meaning of Krishna Janmashtami. Then prasad (sacred offered food) is distributed to everyone.

Ganesh Chaturthi : This celebrates the birth of Lord Ganesh, also called Vinayaka, his child form, as he is popularly known in southern India. He is the god of wisdom,

prosperity and good luck. He also removes obstacles. Ganesh Chaturthi is celebrated on the fourth day of the lunar month that falls in August-September. Clay figures of the elephant-headed Ganesh are made and after being worshiped for two days, or in some cases ten days, are immersed in water. Ganesh Chaturthi is very popular in the Indian state of Maharashtra.

Ganesh Chaturthi is the most important of all Mumbai and Pune festivals and is celebrated with great aplomb amongst Marathi community worldwide. On the occasion of the Ganapati festival, a large number of deities are made of all possible sizes and people buy them to keep in their houses as a divine guest for one and a half, five, seven or ten days or twenty one days in exceptional cases after which the image is taken out ceremoniously and disposed of into the river, sea, or well for immersion (Visarjan). The pooja can be a simple one performed by the head of the family and witnessed by family members, close friends, involving a priest who would come home and perform the pooja. The people gather around chanting Sanskrit shlokas when the deity is installed. Aarti (with prayers and hymns in worship of Lord Ganesh) is done several times every day after that. After the aarti, flowers, haldi and kumkum are offered to the women and prasaad is distributed to all those present. Modak is the most famous and most typical food preparation of Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations.

Lokmanya Tilak was the founder of public celebrations of Ganapati festival. He began to celebrate it in 1893 at Pune, India. He revived it in the form of a public festival. During the British Rule, people were prohibited of gathering in large numbers. In order to make this possible, one of the greatest freedom fighters of India, Lokmanya Tilak started to celebrate the Ganapati festival publicly. This facilitated to restore unity between the public in order to fight against the British rulers. During the festival days, beautifully sculpted Ganesh images are installed in the mandaps (large pandals) that are colorfully decorated, depicting religious themes or current events. There are huge public displays of Ganesh images with aarti and loud music and dancing by devotees. . The Public Ganapati festival held at Lalbaug, Mumbai is the most famous Ganapati in Maharashtra and is lovingly called " LALBAUG CHA RAJA" (King of Lalbaug). It is famously believed that whatever one wishes for from the Lalbaug Ganapati is sure to be fulfilled. There is always a long queue for the darshan of this Ganapati and people don't mind waiting for hours just for a glimpse of their favorite God.

Navaratri : Navaratri or the nine sacred nights dedicated to the Mother Goddess are celebrated in the month of October-November. Navaratri includes the Sarasvati Puja and the Durga Puja festivals. "Nava" means nine and "ratri" means night. So Navaratri literally means nine nights. It is during these nine nights of festivities that the goddess is worshiped in Her different forms of Durga, Lakshmi and then Sarasvati. Durga is worshiped during the first three nights of the festival because of her destructive aspect. She destroys the *anarthas* or unwanted barriers that hold us back from our true spiritual potential. She reduces the evil tendencies in the mind, which is the meaning of *durgati harini*. Thus, she is worshiped to relieve us of our destructive desires of desire, lust, passion, greed, anger, etc. Without removing these obstacles, the spiritual unfoldment cannot take place.

The next step is to apply the positive process of adding the qualities we need. So Lakshmi is worshiped over the next three nights. She gives one the wealth of good qualities, such as love, goodness, compassion, forgiveness, cooperation, nonviolence,

devotion, purity, and the like. Virtue is the true wealth, which is given by Lakshmi. This is not merely the wealth of riches and possessions, but the real wealth that can propel us toward the spiritual goal. These positive uplifting qualities replace the bad ones that were removed by Durga.

At this point the seeker can become fit for the philosophical study and contemplation that is required. Then Sarasvati, the goddess of knowledge, is worshiped the remaining three nights. Sarasvati gives one the intelligence, knowledge and wisdom by which spiritual realization is possible. She represents the highest knowledge of the Self. By invoking her blessings, she plays her well-tuned vina of knowledge and insight, which can then tune our mind and intellect for working in harmony with the world and the purpose of our existence. Then our spiritual practice, study, and meditation become effective for producing the victory of rising above the influence of our mind and senses. Then we can perceive our real identity of being spiritual entities and parts of the spiritual dimension, free from illusion.

After having removed our impurities, gained the proper virtues, and then acquired the knowledge of the Self, then the last day is called Vijaya Dasami, or the day of victory over our minds and the lower dimension after having worshiped the goddess in her three forms. The celebrations of Navaratri are held at night because it represents our overcoming the ignorance of the mode of darkness, the night of *tamoguna*.

Additionally, Navaratri commemorates the day on which the combined powers of the three Goddesses of Durga or Maha-Kali, Maha Lakshmi and Maha Sarasvati put an end to the evil forces represented by the buffalo-headed demon Mahishasura. The ninth day is also the day of the Ayudha Puja in the south. The Ayudha Puja is worship of whatever instruments one may use in one's livelihood. On the preceding evening, it is traditional to place these instruments on an altar to the Divine. If one can make a conscious effort to see the Divine in the tools and objects one uses each day, it will help one to see one's work as an offering to God. It will also help one to maintain constant remembrance of the Divine. Children traditionally place their study books and writing implements on the altar. Throughout the ninth day, an effort is made to see one's work or studies as imbued with the Divine presence. The tenth day is called Vijaya Dashami. Devotees perform a puja to the Goddess Sarasvati to invoke the blessings of Sarasvati on books, writing implements, musical instruments and tools of trade. After the pujas, little children are initiated into the learning process.

So the Vedic festivals are performed in these phases of first preparation, then purification, realization, and then celebration. It represents one's progress toward the real goal of life. First the mind must be purified of all unwanted thoughts and habits. Then it must become focused on one's concentration of the Supreme. As the knowledge of our spirituality of the Self and our connection with the Supreme Being becomes revealed, then there is realization. When such realization has been reached and the ego destroyed, then there is celebration. Living life on the basis of spiritual realization means that life is a constant joy and celebration.

Dusshera, also known as Vijaya Dashami, is celebrated on the tenth day of Navaratri. This signifies the victory of Lord Rama over the demon Ravana, which is often observed with special celebrations and the burning of the effigy of Ravana. On that day there is often a huge bonfire in which people burn the effigy of the demon Ravana, which also represents the destruction of the false ego. Thus, it is a festival which shows the

process by which humanity can reach the perception of God. It incorporates the means and worship by which one can purify themselves of the ten sins, meaning the sins committed by the ten active senses. It is the process of purification so that one is meant to become free of the dictates of the mind and the temporary world of sense objects, which paves the way for one to enter into the transcendental experience.

What this shows is that all aspects of the Vedic process, whether we are familiar with them or not, are ultimately meant to be a vehicle by which we can transcend the mind, senses, and the temporary material world and enter into the Supreme Reality wherein we can reestablish our lost relationship with the Supreme Being.

Karva Chauth : This is a fast undertaken by married Hindu women who offer prayers seeking the welfare, prosperity and longevity of their husbands. Karva Chauth is celebrated before Deepavali some time in October or November. It is the most important fast observed by the women of North India. A woman keeps such a fast for the welfare of her husband, who becomes her protector after she leaves her parents home. Her husband provides her with food, shelter, clothing, respectability, comfort and happiness. This is a tough fast to observe as it starts before sunrise and ends after worshipping the moon, which usually rises late evening.

Deepavali : Deepavali, or Diwali as it is popularly called, is the festival of lights. It symbolizes the victory of righteousness and the lighting of spiritual darkness. The word Deepavali literally means rows of clay lamps. It is celebrated on the New Moon day of the dark fortnight during October-November. It is also associated with the return to Ayodhya of Lord Rama, His wife Sita and His brother Lakshmana after their fourteen-year sojourn in the forests. The day also marks the coronation of Lord Rama.

The meanings of Diwali, its symbols and rituals, and the reasons for celebration are innumerable. Another is how Lord Krishna tamed and killed the demon King Narakasura. It also commemorates Lord Krishna's victory over the demon Narakasura. It is said that Narakasura, the son of Bhudevi, who ruled the kingdom of Pradyoshapuram, often troubled the devas and disturbed the penance of the sages. Narakasura also had kidnapped and terrorized the gopis of Vrindavan. Tired of this harassment, Indra and other devas approached Lord Krishna and pleaded with Him to protect them from the demon Narakasura. But the demon king could only be killed by a woman. So Lord Krishna asked His wife, Satyabhama, the reincarnation of Bhudevi, to be His charioteer in the battle with Narakasura. Lord Krishna waged a fierce battle and killed the demon. When the evil Narakasura was finally killed by Bhagwan Krishna and Satyabhama, he begged pitifully for mercy; thus, upon his entreaties, Bhudevi declared that his death should not be a day of mourning but an occasion to celebrate and rejoice. Since then, Deepavali is celebrated every year with lots of fun and frolic and fireworks. It is also known as Krishna Chaturdashi. It is also celebrated as the day Bhagwan Vishnu married Maha Lakshmi.

Central to Hindu philosophy is the assertion that there is something beyond the physical body and mind which is pure, infinite, and eternal, called the Atman. Just as we celebrate the birth of our physical being, Deepavali is the celebration of this Inner Light, in particular the knowing of which outshines all darkness (removes all obstacles and dispels all ignorance), awakening the individual to one's true nature, not as the body,

but as the unchanging, infinite, immanent and transcendent reality. With the realization of the Atman, come universal compassion, love, and the awareness of the oneness of all things (higher knowledge). This brings Anand (Inner Joy or Peace). In India, Diwali is now considered to be a national festival, and the aesthetic aspect of the festival is enjoyed by most Indians regardless of faith.

Diwali is also associated with the story of the fall of Bali - a demon king who was conquered by Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu appeared to the demon king Bali in the form of a dwarf and requested only three steps of land. The evil and egotistic Bali granted the dwarf's meager request of only three feet. Suddenly, Lord Vishnu took on His grand size and placed one foot on the Earth, another on the Heavens and His third on the head of the evil Bali.

In general, Diwali signifies the triumph of good over evil, of righteousness over treachery, of truth over falsehood, and of light over darkness.

Diwali also marks the New Year. For some, the day of Diwali itself is the first day of the New Year, and for others the new year's day is the day following Diwali. But for all, this season is one of heralding in the New Year. In the joyous mood of this season, we clean our homes, our offices, our rooms, letting the light of Diwali enter all the corners of our lives. We begin new checkbooks, diaries and calendars. It is a day of "starting fresh."

On this day we clean every room of the house; we dust every corner of the garage, we sweep behind bookshelves, vacuum under beds and empty out cabinets. But, what about our hearts? When was the last time we swept out our hearts? When did we last empty them of all the dirt and garbage that has accumulated throughout our lives?

That is the real cleaning we must do. That is the real meaning of "starting fresh." We must clean out our hearts, ridding them of darkness and bitterness; we must make them clean and sparkling places for God to live. We must be as thorough with ourselves as we are with our homes. Are there any dark corners in our hearts we have avoided for so long? Are we simply "sweeping all the dirt under the rug?" God sees all and knows all. He knows what is behind every wall of our hearts, what is swept into every corner, and what is hidden under every rug. Let us truly clean out our hearts; let us rid ourselves of the grudges, pain, and anger that clutter our ability to love freely. Let us empty out every nook and cranny, so that His divine light can shine throughout.

Diwali is celebrated in grand fashion. For some, they have a oil bath early in the morning and wear new clothes. Children love the fireworks associated with Diwali. A lot of sweets are distributed to friends and relatives. And homes are often lit with rows and rows of little clay lamps called diyas that light up the dark New Moon night. Businesses begin their new book keeping with Diwali. The trading community celebrates the thirteenth day of the month of Kartika (Oct.-Nov) as Dhanteras or Dhantrayodashi, the first of the five-day festival. The word *Dhan* means wealth, and the day is of great importance for the rich mercantile community of Western India. Their homes and business premises are all decked up in lights to usher in prospering times. The day ends with a Lakshmi *puja* at home. Some temples also conduct large Lakshmi Puja celebrations.

This is the third, and perhaps most important, aspect of Diwali: the worship of Maha Lakshmi. Maha Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth and prosperity, bestowing these abundantly upon her devotees. On Diwali we pray to her for prosperity; we ask her to

lavish us with her blessings. However, what sort of prosperity are we praying for? All too often, we infer wealth to mean money, possessions, material pleasures. This is NOT the true wealth in life; this is not what makes us prosperous. There is almost no correlation between the amount of money we earn, the number of possessions we buy and our sense of inner bliss and prosperity.

So on Diwali, we must pray to Maha Lakshmi to bestow real prosperity upon us, the prosperity that brings light to our lives and sparkle to our eyes. We must pray for an abundance of faith, not money; we must pray for success in our spiritual lives, not a promotion at work.

Another point about Maha Lakshmi is that we tend to worship only her most prominent of aspects - that of bestowing prosperity upon her devotees. However, she is a multi-faceted goddess, filled with symbols of great importance. As we worship her, let us look more deeply at her divine aspects. First, according to our scriptures, she is the divine partner of Lord Vishnu. In Hindu tradition, there is almost always a pair - a male and a female manifestation of the Divine, and they play interdependent roles. In this way it is said that Maha Lakshmi provides Lord Vishnu with the wealth necessary in order to sustain life. He sustains, but through the wealth she provides.

Therefore, in its highest meaning, Maha Lakshmi provides wealth for sustenance, not for indulgence. Our material wealth and prosperity should only sustain us, giving us that which is necessary to preserve our lives, and for our spiritual development. All surplus should be used for humanitarian causes and for making the ways that others can make spiritual progress. She does not give wealth so that we may become fat and lazy; yet, that is what we tend to do with the wealth we receive. Let us remember that Maha Lakshmi's material wealth is meant for sustenance and preservation, not for luxury and decadence.

So on Diwali, decorated and renovated to the hilt, the day begins with a bang of fire crackers with the performance of Lakshmi *puja* in the evenings. To indicate Her long-awaited arrival, small footprints are drawn with rice flour and vermilion powder all over the houses. Entrances are decorated with lovely, colorful motifs of *rangoli* to welcome the Goddess of Wealth and prosperity. Lamps are kept burning all through the nights and women make it a point to purchase some gold or silver, or at least one or two new utensils, as it is considered auspicious and a symbol of prosperity, a manifestation of the goddess Herself. In South India, cows are offered special veneration and are adorned and worshiped as the incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi.

Another interesting story that is related to this day is about the son of King Hima. He was doomed to die of a snakebite on the fourth day of his marriage. The young daughter-in-law of the king, to save her husband, laid out gold ornaments, lots of gold and silver coins in a big heap at the entrance of her husband's boudoir and lighted innumerable lamps all over the place. She kept herself awake the entire night singing songs. When Yama, the Lord of Death, arrived in the guise of a serpent, his eyes were blinded by the dazzle of the brilliant lights, the gold and silver ornaments, and he was unable to enter the Prince's chamber. So he climbed on top of the heap of ornaments and coins and sat there the whole night listening to the melodious songs. In the morning he quietly went away. Thus, the young wife saved her husband. And so the day is also known as Yamadeepdaan and earthen lamps are kept alight throughout the night in the reverential adoration of Yama.

The following day is celebrated as Narka-Chaturdashi or Choti Diwal. Lord Krishna and His wife Satyabhama are said to have returned home victorious after killing demon Narakasura, early in the morning on this day. The Lord was massaged with scented oils and was given a good bath to wash away the filth from His body. Since then, on this day, the custom of taking an oil bath with fragrant *uptan* before sunrise has become a traditional practice in Maharashtra and South India.

The Diwali day is devoted entirely to the propitiation of Goddess Lakshmi, burning lamps, firecrackers, card games and lots of *masti*. On the dark night of Amavasya, businessmen perform Chopda Pujan and open new account books. On this day special puja ceremony is observed to worship Lord Ganesha and Goddess Lakshmi. Lord Ganesha's puja is an essential part of Diwali Lakshmi Puja. Ganesha is considered as the Lord who overcomes all obstacles. Worshipping Ganapati endows man with the confidence and courage needed to carry out any undertakings in the world. So it is only appropriate that any ceremony should be started with his worship. According to the Puranas (epics), this was a boon conferred upon Him by Lord Shiva. Thus, it is obvious that on Diwali night, Lord Ganesha shares the altar with the Goddess of Wealth and Prosperity, Lakshmi. It is believed that nothing is more auspicious than worshipping both of them at the same time. Worshipping Lord Ganesha and Goddess Lakshmi heralds a year of prosperity without any obstacles whatsoever. Also, this is the day when the Sun enters his second course and passes Libra constellation (Nakshatra) which is represented by the balance or scale. Hence, this design of Libra is believed to have suggested the balancing of account books and their closing. Despite the fact that this day falls on an Amavasya (dark night) it is regarded as the most auspicious.

The day following Diwali is the day of Govardhana *puja*. According to the *Vishnu Purana*, years ago the people of Gokul used to celebrate a festival in honor of Lord Indra and worship him after the end of every monsoon season. However, one year the young Lord Krishna prevented them from offering prayers to Indra and convinced the people to offer the *puja* to Govardhan Hill, since it was an incarnation of the Supreme. This made Lord Indra enraged, who in turn sent a huge flood to submerge Gokul. But Lord Krishna saved Gokul and all the residents by holding aloft Govardhan Hill like an umbrella.

The day is also observed as *annakoot* in temples of Mathura and Nathdwara. This is when the Deities are worshiped with innumerable varieties of delicious sweets, which are ceremoniously raised into the form of a mountain of *bhog* (food), which is offered to the Lord and is worshiped as a form of the Govardhan Hill. Afterwards the devotees approach the mountain of food, do puja or worship to it and circumambulate it as was originally instructed by Lord Krishna. Later everyone takes portions of it as *prasada*, food that has been offered to the Lord and received as His mercy.

The fifth and final day of the Diwali festival is known as Bhayya-Duj or Bhav-Bij. According to the legend, Lord Yama, the God of Death, visited his sister Yami on this day. She is said to have applied the auspicious *tilok* on his forehead, garlanded him and served him delicious sweets. In return, Yama gave her a special gift as a token of his love and pronounced that anyone who receive *tilok* from his sister would never be defeated. And so to this day, brothers never fail to visit their sisters on the final day of Diwali.

With lights everywhere, Diwali symbolizes the dispelling of darkness, ignorance and evil, and a new hope for the future and irrespective of the region, unites the nation in the festivity of prosperity and joy.

Diwali is also known for making delicious sweets and giving them as presents. For a look at some of the sweets that are made and their recipes, see our recipe page called [Diwali Sweets](#).

Furthermore, the Sikhs celebrate Diwali for a different reason; on this day, the Sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Ji, was freed from imprisonment along with 52 other Kings (political prisoners) whom he had arranged to be released as well. After his release he went to Darbar Sahib (golden temple) in the holy city of Amritsar. There, he was greeted by Sikhs and many other people. In happiness they lit candles and diyas to greet the Guru.

In Jainism it marks the nirvana (salvation) of Lord Mahavir.

Diwali is celebrated in various parts of the world, in countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Canada, Guyana, Mauritius, Fiji, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Trinidad, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Australia, much of Africa, and the United States. With more and more Indians and Sri Lankans now migrating to various parts of the world, the number of countries where Diwali is celebrated has been gradually increasing. While in some countries it is celebrated mainly by Indian expatriates, in others it has become part of the general local culture. In most of these countries Diwali is celebrated on the same lines as India.

Gita Jayanthi : This is the celebration of when Lord Krishna spoke the illustrious Bhagavad-Gita to His friend Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, north of New Delhi. This usually takes place in the early part of the month of December.

The Ratha-Yatra Festival at Jagannatha Puri

by Paramahansa Dr.Rupnathji

Jagannatha Puri, a town of 75,000, is one of the most important pilgrimage centers and one of the four holiest cities in India. These four cities are Badrinatha in the north, Dvaraka in the west, Ramesvaram in the south, and Puri in the east. Badrinatharayan in Badrinatha was especially worshiped in Satya-yuga, Rama in Ramesvaram in Treta-yuga, Dvarakanatha in Dvaraka was especially worshiped in Dvapara-yuga, but Lord Jagannatha in Puri can be worshiped by everyone in Kali-yuga. In fact, the importance of Jagannatha Puri, sometimes called Purushottama-Ksetra, is explained in chapters 52 through 57 of the Uttarabhaga section of the Narada Purana. There we find it stated that simply by visiting Puri, which is rarely achieved except for those who have performed many pious acts, and by seeing the Deity of Jagannatha (Krishna), one can easily attain freedom from future births and reach the spiritual abode.

In the middle of this city is the large temple dedicated to Lord Krishna as Jagannatha, meaning "Lord of the Universe." From the *Skanda Purana* we get information that the

original construction of the first Jagannatha temple was in Satya-yuga, millions of years ago. It is related that Lord Jagannatha told Maharaja Indradyumna that He first appeared in the Svayambhuva *manvantara* of the first part of Satya-yuga, on the full moon day, after being pleased by devotion. This is about 153 million years ago. Then Brahma installed the Deities in the temple. This appearance is celebrated by the Snana Purnima, or Snana-Yatra, which is the public bathing of Lord Jagannatha, His brother Balarama, and His sister Subhadra. The celebrated Ratha-Yatra festival is said to have started in the time of Svarochisha Manu, or the second *manvantara* period, and is predicted to continue until the end of the second half of Lord Brahma's lifetime. Even in the *Ramayana* by Valmiki Muni (Uttara Khanda 108.30) it is related that when Lord Rama was getting ready to leave this world he told Vibhishan, Ravana's younger brother, that in His absence he should worship Lord Jagannatha, the Lord of the Iksvaku dynasty.

The *Skanda Purana* also fixes the date of the Ratha-Yatra festival, which should be celebrated on the second day of the bright fortnight if the month of Ashadha, a day called Pushyami Nakshatra by astrological calculations. The *Padma Purana* describes (as related in Sanatana Goswami's *Dig Darshini Tika* to his *Brihad-Bhagavatamrita*, 2.1.159) that in Purushottama-kshetra, or Jagannatha Puri, the supremely blissful Personality of Godhead pretends to be made of wood. In this way, although the Lord takes on what appears to be a material form, it is completely spiritual by the causeless mercy of the Lord for the conditioned souls who cannot perceive the transcendental domain.

The main temple building, called Sri Mandir, was built in the 12th century by King Chodaganga Deva, though the site goes back much farther as described above. This is a huge complex where buildings house as many as 5,000 priests and assistants. The whole compound is surrounded by a thick stone wall 20 feet tall that encloses an area 665 feet by 640 feet. The wall has four large gates, one on each side. The additional smaller buildings were added after the 16th century. The main temple, which reaches 215 feet in height, is where we find the six foot tall Deities of Jagannatha, Balarama, and the shorter Subhadra. They stand on a five foot high throne facing the pilgrims as they enter the temple room. Outside the main temple hall are over 100 smaller shrines dedicated to the various demigods. There is an *arati* ceremony six times a day from 4 AM to 9 PM when devotees come in for *darshan* of the Deities, in which they sing, chant, or worship the Deities in ecstasy. As many as 50,000 people come to the Jagannatha temple in a day. Unfortunately, foreigners are not allowed into the temple grounds, but you can get a look at the temple from the roof of the Raghunandan Library across the street for a donation.

The temple compound also has a huge kitchen, employing over 650 cooks and helpers who make hundreds of vegetarian preparations for the 54 separate offerings that are given to the Deities every day. After the food is given to the Deities it becomes *prasada*, or the Lord's mercy. By taking such spiritually powerful food it is said that one becomes more and more spiritually surcharged and free from past *karma*. Much of the *prasada* is sold or given to people who depend on the temple. When I had my ricksha driver buy

some for me, I got a basket with several clay pots filled with a variety of rice, vegetable, dahl, and sweet preparations. It was absolutely delicious and was enough for breakfast, lunch, and dinner for two days. Taking this *prasada* at Puri is to partake in a tradition that goes back thousands of years and is considered especially purifying. It is said that only by Krishna's grace does one get the opportunity to receive the remnants of food offered to Him.

The Appearance of Lord Jagannatha

The significance of Jagannatha Puri and the story of how the Deities first appeared goes back many hundreds of years to the time of King Indradyumna, who was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. It is related that one time in his court the King heard from a devotee about an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, named Nila-madhava. (Nila-madhava is the Deity form of Lord Vishnu.) The King very much wanted to see this form of the Supreme and sent many Brahmanas to search for Nila-madhava. All came back unsuccessful except for Vidyapati, who did not come back at all. He had wandered to a distant town which was populated by a tribe of people known as Shabaras of non-Aryan heritage. He had stayed in the house of Visvasu, and later, at Visvasu's request, married his daughter, Lalita.

After some time Vidyapati noticed that Visvasu would leave the house every night and return at noon the next day. Vidyapati asked his wife about this. Though her father had ordered her not to tell anyone, she told Vidyapati that Visvasu would go in secret to worship Nila-madhava. After repeated requests, Vidyapati finally got permission to go see Nila-madhava, only if he went blindfolded. But Vidyapati's wife had bound some mustard seeds in his cloth so that a trail could be left to follow later. When they reached the shrine, Vidyapati saw the Deity Nila-madhava after the Shabara took off the blindfold, and he felt great ecstasy.

The story continues to relate that while Visvasu was out collecting items for worship, Vidyapati saw a bird fall into the nearby lake and drown. The soul of the bird suddenly took a spiritual form and ascended back to the spiritual world. Vidyapati wanted to do the same and climbed the tree to jump in the lake. Then a voice from the sky declared that before he jumped he should tell Indradyumna that he had found Nila-madhava.

When Visvasu returned to worship the Deity, Nila-madhava spoke and said that He had accepted the simple worship from him for so many days, but now He wanted to accept the opulent worship that would be offered by King Indradyumna. When Vidyapati went back to tell the King, Indradyumna immediately went to find Nila-madhava but could not locate Him. So the King arrested Visvasu, but a voice told him to release the Shabara and that he should build a temple on top of Nila Hill where the King would see the Lord as Daru-brahman, the wooden manifestation of the Absolute.

After great endeavor, King Indradyumna built the temple at Sri Kshetra, now known as Jagannatha Puri, and later prayed to Lord Brahma to consecrate it. However, Lord

Brahma said that it was not within his power to consecrate the temple since Sri Kshetra is manifested by the Supreme's own internal potency and is where the Lord manifests Himself. So Brahma simply put a flag on top of the temple and blessed it, saying that anyone who from a distance saw the flag and offered obeisances would easily be liberated from the material world. Nonetheless, after much waiting the King became anxious since Nila-madhava had not manifested Himself. Thinking his life was useless, the King decided he should end his life by fasting. But in a dream the Lord said that He would appear floating in from the sea in His form as Daru-brahman.

The King went to the shore and found a huge piece of wood that had the markings of a conch, disc, club, and lotus. This was Daru-brahman. But try as they might, the men could not budge the wood. In a dream the Lord spoke to the King and instructed him to get Visvasu and put a golden chariot in front of Daru-brahman. After doing this and forming a *kirtana* party to chant the holy names, and praying for Daru-brahman to mount the chariot, Daru-brahman was easily moved. Lord Brahma performed a sacrifice where the present temple now stands and installed a Deity of Lord Narasimhadeva, the Deity that is now on the western side of the temple.

From the wooden Daru-brahman, the King requested many expert carvers to carve the form of the Deity, but none could do so for their chisels immediately broke when they touched the wood. Finally the architect of the demigods, Visvakarma, (some say the Lord Himself) arrived as an old artist, Ananta Maharana, and promised that he would carve the Deity form of the Lord inside the temple in three weeks if the King would allow him to work behind closed doors. But after 14 days the King became very anxious because he could no longer hear the sounds of the carving. Finally he could stand it no more. On the advice of the queen he personally opened the doors of the temple to see what was happening. Then he saw the forms of Lord Jagannatha, Lord Balarama, and Lady Subhadra. But because the King had opened the doors sooner than he was supposed to, the Deities were not completed; Their feet and hands had not yet been carved. Thus, the Supreme manifested Himself in this form.

The King felt he had committed a great offense for having opened the doors before the allotted three weeks had passed, so he decided to end his life. But in a dream Lord Jagannatha told the King that though he had broken his promise, this was just a part of the Supreme's pastimes to display this particular form. The King was told that this form, even though it appeared to be incomplete, was actually the form of the Lord that was meant to be worshiped in this age of Kali-yuga. Occasionally the King could decorate the Deity with golden hands and feet. Yet those devotees filled with love would always see the form of Lord Jagannatha as the threefold bending form of Syamasundara, Krishna, holding a flute. Thus, the Supreme appeared in this form so that people could approach and see Him, especially as He rides through town on the huge carts during the Ratha-Yatra festival.

The Ratha-Yatra Festival

During the Ratha-Yatra festival is the most popular time to go to Jagannatha Puri. This is usually in July when it is very hot. But thousands upon thousands of pilgrims flock to Puri to take part in this auspicious event, which is said to have been celebrated for thousands of years, making it one of the oldest and one of the biggest religious festivals in the world. This is the time when the Deities come out of the temple for all to see. It is also the time when as many as a million people gather in this small city with one purpose: to show their faith and devotion to God in the form of Lord Jagannatha.

As big as this festival is, it can be quite expensive. The only festival in the world that is bigger than this is the Kumbha Mela festival that draws many more millions of people. The Ratha-Yatra festival is financed primarily by the Orissan government with an annual budget of \$50,000, which is a very large sum for India. But with the number of pilgrims that come to Puri each year, the temple and surrounding businesses also are benefitted with the extra financial income.

The actual construction of the carts begins two months before the festival day, on the third day of the bright fortnight of Vaisakha (April-May). More than 600 trees, or 400 cubic meters of wood, are needed for the construction, taken from the local forests along the banks of the Mahanadi River. Using the same simple tools and procedures as they have for the past hundreds of years, once the basic elements are made, such as the wheels, then the actual construction begins only a few weeks before the festival. When I saw the carts a few days prior to the festival, I doubted that they would be finished in time. However, the construction crew works on them night and day, and everything was ready the day before the festival.

In the main road in front of the temple huge stacks of wood are used to assemble the three chariots which will reach up to three storeys tall and will roll on wheels, each eight feet high. The chariots are painted with bright colors and the tops are covered with red, black, yellow, or green canopies. The colors signify which chariot is for which Deity. Lord Jagannatha uses red and yellow, Lord Balarama uses red and green, while Subhadra uses red and black. The Deities are also painted with particular colors that mean something. Jagannatha's blackish color represents faultless qualities; Balarama's white color signifies enlightenment; and Subhadra's yellow color signifies goodness.

Each cart is different. The cart of Lord Jagannatha is called Cakradhvaja or Nandigosha, which means tumultuous and blissful sound. Using 16 wheels, it rises 45 feet tall, and weighs 65 tons. It also carries a figure of Garuda on its crest, and is drawn by four white wooden horses. Balarama's cart is called Taladhvaja, meaning the sound of significantly powerful rhythm. It has 14 wheels, and is drawn by four black wooden horses. It carries Hanuman on its crest. Subhadra's cart is called Padmadhvaja or Darpadalan, which means destroyer of pride. It has a lotus on its crest, uses 12 wheels, and is drawn by four red wooden horses. After the Ratha-Yatra festival the wood from the carts is used as fuel for the big kitchen in the temple, which can last up to nine months.

About two weeks before the festival, the Deities of Jagannatha, Balarama, and Subhadra are given a ritual bath, which is performed on the front main wall of the temple, which allows everyone to observe it from the street below, or one of the surrounding buildings. This is called the Snana-Yatra. After this They play the pastime of getting a cold. They are then taken to a designated area and given special treatments and offerings. They may also be repainted at this time. About every 12 or 19 years the bodies of the Deities are replaced with new ones carved from a ritualistically selected Daru-Brahman in the form of a *nima* tree. This is known as the Nava-Kalevarna festival. It occurs when there is a leap (additional) month in the Vedic calendar that appears between Snana-Yatra and Ratha-Yatra. This was last performed in 1996, 1977, and 1969. After such an occurrence, the crowd that attends the Ratha-Yatra in Puri expands from the usual 700,000 or so to as many as two-and-a-half million.

As the Ratha-Yatra festival draws near, thousands of pilgrims come to Jagannatha Puri, but as many as a million or more people may be in town on the day of the festival. Some are top officials in the Indian government or other VIPs. Many people begin arriving in front of the temple near the carts on the morning of the festival. At first it is very interesting to wander about looking at the nicely decorated carts and all the pilgrims who have attended. But then the police begin cordoning off the area around the carts. Then there are only certain areas where people can get between the carts and the buildings. This creates bottlenecks which can be very dangerous when too many people are pushing on each other trying to get through. I saw people begin to panic at times because of the pressure on them, and worried mothers had to hold their babies above the crowd to make sure they did not get crushed.

The Ratha-Yatra festival can be both spiritually ecstatic and physically exhausting. Though July is in the monsoon season, if the rains have not arrived yet, it gets very hot. When it is hot, you will be soaked with sweat a few hours after the sun comes up. In fact, from where I was, I saw dozens of Indian people who had collapsed from the heat and had to be carried away from the crowd on stretchers. The heat can take a lot out of you, especially when in a crowd of many thousands. So it is best to have a source of water with you, like a canteen.

A good place to be during the festival, if you do not want to be on the street amongst the people, is on a rooftop. But you have to make reservations and pay for your seats several days in advance. Even then there may not be any guarantee that you will get the seats you want.

I have been at Jagannatha Puri to attend two Ratha-Yatra festivals, once in 1991, and another in 2001. At each one things happened at different times of the day. In 1991 it was around eleven in the morning when the temple priests came out to sanctify the carts. In 2001, everything got started much earlier, and the priests came out before 9 AM. They walk up the gangplanks to the platform on the cart and sprinkle holy water around while circumambulating it three times and chanting specific mantras for purification. Later, the priests bring out the small Deities that will also ride on the cart.

When the big Deities are brought out, first there is Lord Balarama, then Lady Subhadra, and then Lord Jagannatha. Each time excitement suddenly fills the air and many men blow conch shells and bang on drums and cymbals to announce the arrival of the Deities at the main gate of the temple complex. Then the smiling face of Lord Balarama appears through the doorway and the crowd shouts and chants, "Jai Balarama. Baladeva ki jai!" Generally, however, unless you are situated on a tall building, you cannot see the faces of the Deities because there are so many assistants that help move Them. But you can easily see the huge headdress They wear. Once the Deity is on the cart, the headdress is torn off and distributed amongst the people as *prasada*.

Daiytas, strongly built men who lift the Deity, carry Lord Balarama. It is described that they move Him from one large cotton pillow to another, however, I couldn't see any. Lord Balarama is five feet and five inches tall and has an arm span of 12 feet. When carried, there are five men on each arm, with up to 50 men pulling in front and 20 offering support in the back. All of these carriers are Daiytas, members of the Dayitapati family who are descendants of Visvvasu. Gradually, taking about a half hour or so, Lord Balarama moves from the temple gate to the chariot and is placed on it so everyone in the crowd can see Him. Then Subhadra, who is less than five feet tall, is also carried from the temple to Her chariot. And finally Lord Jagannatha is brought out. He is five feet and seven inches tall with an arm span of 12 feet, and also needs many assistants to be moved.

In 1991 it was around two o'clock, when the King of Puri arrived in a procession, walked up the planks to the platform and swept the cart with a gold handled broom, and then sprinkles sandalwood scented water on them. He circumambulates the platform three times and is assisted by the priests. He does this to each of the carts, and everything that year happened in a much more timely manner.

It should be pointed out here that the way the King sweeps the carts is an example of how the festival has changed over the years. If you read accounts of the Ratha-Yatra festival as described in the *Gaitanya-caritamrta*, there are some major differences in the festival we find today compared to 500 years ago. The King used to sweep the street in front of the carts as they paraded down through the town. The reason he no longer does this is related in a story I was told. It seems that at one time years ago a King of Puri, Purusottama Dev, was to marry a princess who was the daughter of a king, Maharaja Sallwo Narasingha, from the district of Kanchi. When the Ratha-Yatra festival was to take place, the father of the princess was invited, but sent his minister Chinnubhatta Godaranga instead. When he attended, the King of Puri performed the devotional tradition of sweeping the road in front of the carts. The visiting minister, however, rather than being impressed with the devotion of the King for Lord Jagannatha, did not approve of him sweeping the road, even if it was for the Lord. When he reported this to King Sallwo Narasingha, the king objected to the idea of his daughter marrying the King of Puri since he was merely a street sweeper. Purusottama Dev was extremely angry that he, as the servant of Lord Jagannatha, would be insulted for his service like that. So he gathered his troupes and went to Kanchi to teach King Sallwo a lesson. Unfortunately, King Purusottama Dev was badly defeated.

On returning to Puri in such a downcast mood, he stopped at the simple cottage of Saikatacharya, a great ascetic, householder devotee of Lord Jagannatha. This devotee pointed out that the King had forgotten to ask permission from Lord Jagannatha before he went to attack King Sallwo. With this realization, the King returned to Puri and visited the temple of the Lord, crying over his defeat, asking why the Lord had let this happen. He spent the night in the temple, and with doors closed, before the night came to an end, the King heard a voice asking why he was so distraught over such a simple thing. The voice said to go gather his troupes again, and that we two brothers, Jagannatha and Balarama, would go along to fight on the King's behalf. As the news spread, many people, both old and young, joined the King's forces to fight with Their Lordships. However, as they went, the King was filled with some doubts whether Their Lordships were really going with him.

While the King and his army went onward, far ahead were two soldiers that rode on one black horse and one white horse. They stopped to quench Their thirst at a small village near Chilika Lake by buying some yogurt from a devotee named Manika. She offered Them yogurt, but when she asked for payment, they said They had no money. Instead They gave her a jeweled ring and told her to give it to King Purusottama Dev, who would then give her payment.

After some time, the King caught up to the lady, who flagged him down to give him the ring and asked for payment for the soldiers' drink. The king was shocked to see the *ratnamudrika* ring of Lord Jagannatha and then regained his confidence that, indeed, Their Lordships had certainly come with him. In payment for the ring, the king gave her the whole village, which is still named Manikapatna. After this the king and his troupes were victorious over King Sallwo, and he also took King Sallwo's daughter as well. However, he did not marry her after the insult her father had given him. He instructed his minister to see that she get married to a qualified sweeper. After one year, at the next Ratha-Yatra, the King again performed his sweeping ceremony. At that time, the king's minister announced that the king was the most qualified sweeper, since he swept for Lord Jagannatha, and that the princess, Padmavati, should marry him. Then Maharaja Purusottama Dev married the princess and she later gave birth to a great devotee of Lord Caitanya, who became known as King Prataparudra. Anyway, at some point after this, the King of Puri discontinued sweeping the streets and now sweeps the carts.

The festival parade also used to start in the morning and then stop at noon near the Jagannatha Vallabha Gardens where the Deities would get offerings of food, worship, etc., from the many devotees. There would also be many groups of people singing devotional songs, and though you will still see some people in *kirtana* groups, there were very few in 1991, while there were several big *kirtana* parties in 2001, including a large one consisting of the devotees from the Iskcon temple in Mumbai (Bombay).

After the King has swept the carts, they quickly begin to disassemble the gangplanks that lead up to the cart and begin to fasten the wooden horses that point the direction. Many thousands of devotees surround the carts and the people in the front take up the

long, thick ropes to pull the chariots down the main road to the Gundicha temple, where the Deities stay for a week. Then the leaders on the carts that ride near the wooden horses direct those who are pulling the ropes to take up the slack. When everything is ready, a whistle is blown by the chariot driver and a hundred people on each of four ropes begin to pull. Then the numerous priests and assistants on the carts that ride along begin to bang on the gongs and cymbals, and suddenly the cart lurches forward and begins to move.

Once the carts get going, you mostly hear the spectators simply shout out, "Jayo, Jai Jagannatha," and raise their hands in the air and watch the cart go by. Many police have to guard the chariot wheels to make sure no one gets too close and is crushed under them. In 1991 it was after five o'clock before Lord Balarama's cart got started and loudly rumbled down the road and soon reached the Gundicha temple. In 2001 it started by about 10:30 AM or so. Subhadra's cart began to move a while later.

Lord Jagannatha's cart did not get started until after six o'clock in 1991, which was quite late, but got started by 11 AM in 2001. However, both times it did not make it to the Gundicha temple until the next day. The people pulled it about two-thirds of the way before it almost ran into some shops on the side of the road. So Lord Jagannatha spent the night wherever the cart had stopped. The following morning the people redirect the cart and continued with the Ratha-Yatra to finish pulling it to the Gundicha temple about two miles down the road from the main temple where the Deities stay for a week before returning to the temple in a similar parade.

Sometimes the chariots mysteriously stop, though everyone is pulling hard. In fact, it is not unusual, as in the case of this festival, that a chariot may stop completely and stay there overnight and then continue the next day. Sometimes if there is difficulty, the local government minister will pray to Lord Jagannatha for forgiveness from whatever offenses the residents of the town may have committed. Then the chariots begin to move again as if they move only by the will of Jagannatha.

The parade is a fascinating event in which to participate and see. But when the chariots get rolling, the crowd gets very intense. You either have to get out of the way to let them by, or struggle, as you get pushed this way and that, to move with the crowd as it goes with the cart. Many people try to pull the ropes and it is not easy, and can be dangerous, to get a place nearby.

The Deities spend the first two nights on the carts outside the Gundicha temple, or wherever else They may be if They do not make it there the first night. During this time, pilgrims can climb up on the carts and see the Deities very closely and even embrace Them. But the priests are quick to charge everyone a certain number of rupees for this opportunity, which makes for a very good business for the priests. When I climbed a cart and was about to give a "donation," as many as five of the attendants grabbed the money at once before I let go of it. And when I did not let go of it right away, they started to get very angry. This was after I had been assured that I could climb the cart to see the Deity of Lady Subhadra and there would be no charge, and I would also be allowed

to take a photograph. I indeed was allowed to see Lady Subhadra and even embrace Her, which is a rare event for any pilgrim, what to speak of a Westerner. But after I had given my donation, I took out my camera to take a photograph and a guard immediately came over and objected and ordered me to get down off the cart. So that brought an abrupt end to the episode. Nonetheless, if one can overcome this businesslike atmosphere, it can still be a very devotional and memorable event. And you can also go up on the carts of Lord Jagannatha and Lord Balarama as well, if you can handle the crowds and the many priests who ask for donations, or who want to direct people, sometimes forcefully with the use of sticks. Some people simply stay on the ground and offer prayers and small ghee lamps from a distance. Others climb all three carts to get the personal *darshan* of all three Deities.

The Deities are then taken inside the Gundicha temple only on the third night. After the Deities' stay at the Gundicha temple, They return a week later to the main temple in a similar parade that is attended by fewer people. This can be a time when you can get much closer to the carts and walk more easily with the parade, providing you have time to stay in Puri for this event. Again, the Deities come out of the Gundicha temple as before and are placed on the carts with much fanfare from the devotees. Then again the King of Puri comes to cleanse the carts, and shortly thereafter the carts are ready to be pulled in a most festive parade back to the main temple. The return trip usually happens all in one day. However, again the Deities stay outside on the carts for two nights, allowing everyone who wants to climb up on the cart for a close *darshan*. Then on the third night there is the Suna Vesa festival in which the Deities are dressed in gold outfits. Again, the city becomes extremely crowded as people want to see the Deities in the golden ornaments. These include gold crowns, hands and feet, golden peacock feather, gold earrings, different golden necklaces, and ornaments such as a silver conch and gold disk for Lord Jagannatha and golden club and plow for Lord Balarama. These are all solid gold, and all together weigh up to one ton.

No one is allowed on the carts for the gold festival except for the intimate servants of the Deities. The way the crowd works for this festival is that they approach the carts from the main road. The closer to the carts you get, the thicker the crowd becomes. You are then directed by numerous police to walk with the crowd around the front of the carts and then down a side street. The police will also not let you stop along the lanes, but make sure everyone keeps moving. As you walk, you can then look toward the Deities to see Them in Their unique gold ornaments. They look especially powerful dressed as They are like this. Your *darshan* is only as long as it takes for the crowd to move, and then you must continue on, or come back around again, all of which can take an hour to make it through the crowds. Then as you come back around, the street is divided into two lanes, one for those approaching the carts and the other for those leaving. So you have to continue a ways away before you can begin to come back around. Getting directly in front of each of the carts is the only way you can have a direct line of sight toward the Deity during this event.

After this, the Deities stay on the carts one more day and are then taken into the main temple the following evening, as They were when taken into the Gundich temple. Then the Ratha-Yatra festival is completely finished until next year.

The Internal Meaning of the Ratha-Yatra Festival

The meaning of the Ratha-Yatra parade is steeped in religious sentiment. The form that Lord Krishna takes as Jagannatha is the manifestation of His ecstasy that He feels when He leaves the opulence of His palaces in Dwaraka, represented by the Puri temple, to return to the town of Vrindavan and the simple and pure spontaneous love the residents there have for Him. Thus, there is no difference between Lord Krishna and Lord Jagannatha. So in the mood of separation from His loving devotees, Jagannatha mounts His chariot and returns to Vrindavan, which is symbolically represented by the Gundicha temple. In this way, the esoteric meaning of the Ratha-Yatra parade is that we pull the Lord back into our hearts and rekindle the loving relationship we have with Him. Many great poems and songs, such as *Jagannatha-astakam*, have been composed describing the event and the highly ecstatic devotional mood one can enter while participating. Many verses are also written in the *Caitanya-caritamrita* that describe the pastimes Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu had during these Ratha-Yatra festivals 500 years ago.

To explain the internal meaning of Ratha-Yatra further, Lord Jagannatha is the embodiment of Lord Krishna's love for Srimate Radharani. While Lord Krishna was living in Dwaraka, he felt great separation from Radharani and the residents of Vrindavana. On the day of one solar eclipse, He traveled to Kuruksetra with His brother Balarama and His sister Subhadra on His chariot. There He met Srimate Radharani and other residents of Vrindavana, all of which wanted to take the Lord back to Vrindavana. While traveling and thinking of this meeting, He entered *mahabhava*, the highest sentiments of loving exchange. In that state, His eyes dilated like fully bloomed lotuses, and His hands and legs retreated into His body. In this way, the form of Lord Jagannatha is called *radha-viraha-vidhura*, the separation from Radharani, and also *mahabhava-prakasha*, the manifestation of *mahabhava* for Radharani. Lord Caitanya was the embodiment of Srimate Radharani's love for Lord Krishna. So Lord Caitanya taking Lord Jagannatha from the main temple to the Gundicha corresponds to Srimate Radharani's wanting to take Lord Krishna from Dwaraka back to Vrindavana, the place of spontaneous and ecstatic love of God.

It is also explained that by participating in this festival, chanting and dancing, or helping pull the ropes of the chariots, one becomes free of many lifetimes of *karma*. One can even become liberated due to the spiritual potency of Lord Jagannatha's presence. One of the ways this happens is explained as follows: at the very end of one's life when the memories of his activities pass through the mind, when he remembers the amazing Ratha-Yatra festival his mind stops and focuses on that event. Thus, he dies thinking of Lord Jagannatha and is liberated from material existence and returns to the spiritual

world, just like a yogi is transferred to the spiritual strata when his mind is fixed on the Supersoul at the time of death. This is why thousands of pilgrims come to Jagannatha Puri every year for Ratha-Yatra.

Other Places of Spiritual Importance in Jagannatha Puri

While in Jagannatha Puri, there are many other places of interest that pilgrims come to see, so I will describe a few of these. About a quarter mile from the Jagannatha temple, walking toward the beach, is Siddha Bakula. This is where, 500 years ago, the great saint Haridas Thakur used to live and chant the Hare Krishna *mantra* 300,000 times a day and where Sri Caitanya would visit him. Since Haridas could not enter the Jagannatha Temple, being of a Muslim family, Lord Caitanya took the stick He had used as His toothbrush and stuck it in the ground. It immediately grew into a beautiful shade tree, under which Haridas Thakur lived. Sanatana Gosvami had also stayed here for a time as well.

Haridas attained such an elevated position of ecstasy from chanting the Hare Krishna *mantra* that even though a beautiful prostitute came to tempt him with sex, he was not interested. Thus, he is called the *namacarya*: the master of chanting the holy names. In 1991, a small shrine was found here, along with the old and bent tree under which Haridas would chant. However, since then, as found in 2001, there is a nice temple and plenty of walled protection for the tree at this place. The tomb of Haridas Thakur, where you'll also see beautiful Radha Krishna Deities as well as an image of Haridas, is located next to Purusottama Gaudiya Math near the beach. This is an important place of pilgrimage.

A 15 minute walk from here is the temple of Tota-Gopinatha. The Radha Krishna Deities here are especially beautiful, and it is accepted that Sri Caitanya ended his life by entering into the Deity of Tota-Gopinatha. Also near this area is the old house of Kashi Mishra. It is now used as part of a temple and has nice diorama exhibits of Sri Caitanya's life. It is here we find the Gambhira room, which is where Sri Caitanya lived for 12 years. Through a small window you can see Sri Caitanya's original wooden sandals, water pot, and bed.

A short walk to the east of the Jagannatha temple is the Gaudiya Math temple and the place where Srila Bhaktisiddhanta took birth. A little farther east is the Jagannatha Vallabha Garden, which is almost across from the Balagandhi temple which used to be where Lord Jagannatha would stop during His Ratha-Yatra parade to accept food offerings from all the devotees. At this garden, Sri Caitanya had many pastimes and is where He saw Lord Krishna manifest Himself. A little ways away from the garden is Narendra Sarovara, a small lake where many festivals have taken place with Sri Caitanya and his associates. Even now many pilgrims will visit and take a holy bath in this lake. The Govinda Deity from the Jagannatha temple is brought here for festivals where He is given boat rides. There is also a little temple with Lord Jagannatha Deities

located here. So if foreigners want to see Lord Jagannatha they can usually come here for *darshan*, unless it is during the Ratha-Yatra festival.

Farther down the main road of town near the Gundicha Mandir is the very old temple dedicated to Lord Narasimha, which we can enter to view the Deity. This is also where Sri Caitanya engaged in many *kirtanas* with his close associates. Not far away is Indradyumna Lake where Sri Caitanya once manifested His Mahavishnu form showing His associates His supernatural qualities as an incarnation of God.

About 14 miles from Jagannatha Puri is the Alarnatha temple at Brahmagiri. Lord Alarnatha is a four-handed form of Lord Vishnu. Whenever the Jagannatha Deities in Puri would be removed from the altar before the Ratha-Yatra festival for two weeks, Sri Caitanya would stay here. This is a temple where, at the end of the *kirtana* hall in front of a Deity of Sadbhuja, there is a large stone slab with the imprint of Sri Caitanya's body. Once when He fell onto the stone in an ecstatic trance, the stone melted leaving the imprint of Sri Caitanya's body as we find it today. Across from the Alarnatha temple is another Gaudiya-Math temple that was established by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta. It is also here where we find the small Alarnatha Deity that was uncovered during excavations around the main Alarnatha temple. However, once when Srila Bhaktisiddhanta was staying at his temple, the priest at the Alarnatha shrine had a dream in which the Lord came to him and said that He wanted to accept the worship of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta. Then the priest brought the small Alarnatha Deity to Srila Bhaktisiddhanta who worshiped Him, and where the Deity has remained since then. Also in this town of Bentapur we can see the birthplace of Ramananda Raya, a close associate of Sri Caitanya.

Nineteen miles north of Jagannatha Puri is Konarka, a most interesting temple to Surya, the sun-god. Although it is very old and no longer used for worship, many people come here every day. A Surya temple was here as long ago as the 9th century, but the present temple was built in the 13th century to resemble a huge chariot and has 24 gigantic stone wheels all around it. There are also carvings of seven strong horses who pull the chariot, and the temple is covered with many panels of stone figures depicting many aspects of life, such as scenes with hunters, soldiers, ascetics, maidens, birds, elephants, etc. There are also three green chlorite deities of Surya in niches on the outside of the temple, reached by ascending flights of stairs. The interior has been filled in and blocked up to help support it. Outside the temple grounds are many shops who sell food or the usual gamut of nick-nacks.

About six miles from Puri is the Saksi-gopala temple, located between the Jagannatha Puri and Khurda Road Junction railway stations. A new station called Saksi-gopala is there where people get off to visit the temple. The Saksi-gopala Deity is the Gopala Deity who walked from Vrindavan to Vidyanagara, a town located 20 to 25 miles from Rajahmundry on the banks of the Godavari River. How this happened was that two brahmanas were traveling and visiting the holy places. One was poor and young and was serving the older and richer brahmana. The older one was so satisfied with the charitable service of the younger brahmana that he vowed in front of the Gopala Deity

that he would give his daughter to the younger brahmana to be his wife. Later, when they returned home, the older brahmana hesitated to fulfill his promise due to pressure from his family. There was some controversy about this between the two brahmanas and in a meeting with the people of the town it was agreed that if the Deity Gopala would come to testify as a witness, the older brahmana would give his daughter as promised.

The younger brahmana went back to Vrindavan and related the situation to the Gopala Deity who finally agreed to walk. He told the brahmana that He would follow him and that the sound of His ankle bells would indicate He was there, but if the brahmana turned around to look, He would walk no farther. So for 100 days they walked toward Vidyanagara, then the sound of the Deity's ankle bells ceased to sound. The brahmana looked back and the Deity was standing there smiling. The brahmana went to gather the people of the town who were amazed to see the Deity. Then the older brahmana agreed to give his daughter in marriage as promised and a temple was built for the Deity. Later the King of Orissa, Purusottama, was insulted by the King of Kataka (Cuttack). So Purusottama fought and defeated the King of Kataka and took charge of the city. He then brought the Gopalaji Deity from Vidyanagara to Kataka and built a temple there. The Deity also stayed in the Jagannatha Temple for some time, but then was moved to a village about six miles from Puri, called Satyavadi. Some time after that a new temple was constructed where we find the Saksi-gopala Deity today. Though the temple does not allow foreigners inside, many people visit this temple with the understanding that whether the Supreme is in the spiritual realm or expands Himself in the material realm in the form of a stone Deity, He can change what is spiritual into material and vice versa whenever He wants. This is why a stone Deity can do what is considered miraculous things, like walk, talk, etc. Thus, it is accepted that the bona fide Deity of the Supreme is nondifferent from the Supreme Himself.

These are some of the significant events and places that we can find in and around the town of Jagannatha Puri.

Tilak: Why Wear It

By Paramahansa Dr.Rupnathji

This compilation of information will explain what tilak is and why it is worn. As anyone who is familiar with the Vedic tradition knows, many of its followers wear marking on the foreheads. This is called tilak. Some tilak markings are made with ash, some with clay or soil, some are red dots with kum kum, or dyed rice flour, or red dots with additional applications like a few grains of rice stuck to it. Some tilak appears as three lines of ash going horizontally across the forehead that indicates one is a Shaivite, or a small triangle on the nose with a "V" shape rising vertically up on the forehead from between the eyebrows, which indicates one is a Vaishnava. This is a sign of the foot of Lord Vishnu, recited while chanting the name of Lord Vishnu.

There are different reasons why this is done and what they mean, but here is a description of why Vaishnavas wear their tilok, especially with Gopi-candana (or Gopi Chand). Gopi Candana is the soil that comes from a place not far from Dwaraka. The history is that this is the place where the gopis entered the river to leave their bodies after Lord Krishna left this planet to return to His spiritual abode. Thus, they also followed in this way. The mud that used to be the banks of that river is called Gopi-candana. Vaishnavas apply this mud while chanting the names of Vishnu in twelve places on the head, arms, chest and back. The process marks the body as a temple, purifies the body, and also acts as protection from evil influences, ghosts, etc. By seeing this tilok on ourselves or other devotees, it serves as a constant reminder of Lord Krishna. Tilak is also used in Deity worship, offered to the Deities and also used with lemon juice to polish brass deities.

Gopī-candana Tilaka

Śrī Garga Samhitā, Canto Six,

Chapter Fifteen

Translation by By Paramahansa Dr.Rupnathji

Text 15

yasya śtavana-matrena
karma-bandhat pramucyate
gopinām yatra vaso 'bhut
teṇa gopi-bhuvah smrtah

Simply by hearing about Gopi-bhumi, which is so named because the gopīs resided there, one becomes free from the bondage of karma.

Text 16

gopy-angaraga-sambhutam
gopi-candanam uttamam
gopi-candana-liptango
ganga-snana-phalam labhet

In Gopi-bhumi gopi-candana was manifested from the gopīs' cosmetics. A person who marks his limbs with gopi-candana tilaka attains the result of bathing in the Ganga.

Text 17

maha-nadinam snanasya
punyam tasya dine dine
gopi-candana-mudrabhir

mudrito yah sadā bhavet

A person who daily wears gopi-candana tilaka attains the pious result of daily bathing in all sacred rivers.

Text 18

asvamedha-sahasrani
rajasuya-satani ca
sarveṣu tirtha-danani
vratani ca tathaiva ca
krtani tena nityam vai
sa krtartha na samsayah

A person who daily wears gopi-candana tilaka attains the result of performing a thousand asvamedha-yajnas and a hundred rajasuya-yajnas. He attains the result of giving charity and following vows at all holy places. He attains the goal of life. Of this there is no doubt.

Text 19

ganga-mrd-dvi-gunam punyam
citrakuta-rajah smrtam
tasmād dasa-guram punyam
rajah pancavati-bhavam

Twice as sacred as the mud of the Ganga is the dust of Citrakuta. Ten times more sacred than that is the dust of Pancavati-tirtha.

Text 20

tasmāc chata-gunam punyam
gopi-candanakam rajah
gopi-candanakam viddhi
vrndavana-rajah-samam

A hundred times more sacred is the dust of gopi-candana. Please know that gopi-candana is equal to the dust of Vṛndāvana.

Text 21

gopi-candana-liptangam
yadi papa-satair yutam
tam netum na yamah sakto
yama-dutah kutah punah

Even if in the past he has committed hundreds of sins, if a person wears gopi-candana tilaka, then Yamarāja cannot take him away. How, then, can Yamarāja's messengers touch him?

Text 22

nityam karoti yah pāpī
gopi-candana-dharanam
sa prayati harer dhāma
golokam prakrteh param

A sinner who daily wears gopi-candana tilaka goes to Lord Kṛṣṇa's supreme abode, Goloka, which is beyond the world of matter.

Text 23

sindhu-desasya rajabhud
dirghabahur iti srutah
anyaya-varti dustatma
vesya-sanga-ratah sadā

In Sindhu-desa there was a king named Dirghabahu. He was cruel and sinful and he was addicted to visiting prostitutes.

Text 24

tena vai bharate vaise
brahma-hatya-saṁ kṛtam
dāsa garbhavati hatyah
kṛtas tena ratmana

While he was on the earth this cruel sinner murdered a hundred brāhmaṇas and ten pregnant women.

Text 25

mrgayam tu banaughaih
kapila-go-vadhah kṛtah
saindhavam hayam aruhya
mrgayarthi gato 'bhavat

One day he mounted a sindhu horse and went hunting. With a flood of arrows he accidentally killed a brown cow in that hunt.

Text 26

ekada rajya-lobhena
mantri krudho maha-khalam
jaghanaranya-dese tam
tikṣna-dharena casina

One day, greedy to get his kingdom, with a sharp sword his angry minister killed him in the forest.

Text 27

bhu-tale patitam mrtyu-
gatam viksyā yamanugah
baddhva yama-purim ninyur
harsayantah parasparam

Seeing him fallen to the ground and dead, the Yamadutas came, bound him, and, joking as they went, took him to the city of Yamarāja.

Text 28
sammukhe 'vasthitam viksyā
papinam yama-rad bali
citraguptam praha turnam
ka yogya yanatasya vai

Seeing this sinner brought before him, powerful Yamarāja said to his scribe Citragupta, "What is the proper punishment for him?"

Text 29
sri-citragupta uvāca
catur-asiti-lakṣeṣu
narakesu nipatyatam
nihsandeham mahā-rajā
yavac candra-divakarau

Śrī Citragupta said: O great king, he should be thrown into eight million four hundred thousand hells for as long as the sun and the moon shine in the sky.

Text 30
anena bhārāte vāse
kṣānam na su-kṛtam kṛtam
dasa-garbhavati-ghatah
kapila-go-vadhah kṛtah

On the earth he did not perform a single pious deed. He killed ten pregnant women. He killed a brown cow.

Text 31
tathā vana-mrganam ca
kṛtvā hatyah sahasrasah
tasmād ayam maha-pāpi
devata-dvija-nindakah

He killed thousands of deer in the forest. He offended the demigods and the brāhmaṇas. He is a great sinner.

Texts 32 and 33

sri-narada uvāca
tada yamajnaya duta
nitva tam papa-rupinam
sahasra-yojanayame
tapta-taile maha-khale
sphurad aty-ucchalat-phene
kumbhipake nyapatayan
pralayagni-samo vahnih
sadyah sitalatam gatah

Sri Nārada said: Then, by Yamarāja's order, the Yamadutas took that sinner and threw him into a terrible, eight-thousand mile wide cauldron of bubbling boiling oil in the hell of Kumbhipaka. The moment that sinner came to it, the boiling oil, which was as hot as the great fires at the time of cosmic devastation, suddenly became cool.

Text 34
Vaideha tan-nipatanat
prahlada-ksepanad yatha
tadaiva citram acakhyur
yama-duta mahatmane

O king of Videha, as Prahlāda was unhurt in the same situation, that sinner was not hurt by the boiling oil. Then the Yamadutas described that great wonder to noble-hearted Yamarāja.

Text 35
anena su-kṛtam bhumau
ksanavan na kṛtam kvacit
citraguptena satataṁ
dharma-rajo vyacintayat

Yamarāja and Citragupta carefully reviewed the sinner's case and concluded that while he was on the earth the sinner had not for a moment performed even a single pious deed.

Text 36
sabhayam agatam vyasam
sampujoya vidhivan nrpa
natva papraccha dharmatma
dharma-rajo maha-matih

Then Vyasadeva arrived in that assembly. Bowing down before Him, and carefully worshipping Him, saintly and noble-hearted Yamaraja asked Vyasadeva the following question.

Text 37

sri-yama uvaca
anena papina purvam
na krtam su-krtam kvacit
sphurad-agny-ucchalat-phene
kumbhipake maha-khale
asya ksepanato vahnih
sadyah sitalatam gatah
iti sandehatas cetah
khidyate me na samsayah

Sri Yamaraja said: When a certain sinner, who had never performed even a single pious deed, was thrown into the terrible boiling oil of Kumbhipaka, the oil suddenly became cool. Because of this my mind is now tortured with doubts.

Text 39
sri-vyasa uvaca
suksma gatir maha-raja
vidita papa-punyayoh
tatha brahma-gatih prajitaih
sarva-sastra-vidam varaih

Sri Vyasadeva said: O great king, the intelligent sages, who have studied all the scriptures, know that the ways of piety, sin, and spiritual progress are very subtle and difficult to understand.

Text 40
daiva-yogad asya punyam
praptam vai svayam arthavat
yena punyena suddho 'sau
tac chrnu tvam maha-mate

Somehow or other, by destiny, this sinner did perform a pious deed, and by that deed he became purified. O noble-hearted one, please hear the story of this.

Text 41
kasyapi hastato yatra
patita dvaraka-mrdah
tatraivayam mrtah papi
suddho 'bhut tat-prabhavatah

That sinner died in a place where from someone's hand some gopi-candana from Dvaraka had accidentally fallen. Dying in gopi-candana, that sinner became purified.

Text 42
gopi-candana-liptango
naro narayano bhavet

etasya darsanat sadyo
brahma-hatya pramucyate

A person who wears gopi-candana tilaka attains a spiritual form like that of Lord Narayana. Simply by seeing him one becomes free of the sin of killing a brahmana.

Texts 43 and 44
sri-narada uvaca
iti srutva dharma-rajas
tam aniya visesatah
vimane kama-ge sthapyā
vaikuntham prakrteh param
presayam asa sahāsa
gopi-candana-kirti-vit
evam te kathitam rajan
gopi-candanakam yasah

Sri Narada said: Hearing this, Yamaraja, who understands the glories of gopi-candana, took the sinner, placed him on an airplane that goes anywhere one wishes, and sent him to Vaikuntha, which is above the worlds of matter. O king, thus I have described to you the glories of gopi-candana.

Text 15
gopi-candana-mahatmyam
yah smoti narottamah
sa yati paramam dhama
sri-krshasya mahatmanah

One who hears this account of gopi-candana's glories becomes exalted. He goes to the supreme abode of Lord Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Additional References

If a Vaisnava who wears the sacred tilaka mark which goes upward like a flame eats in anyone's house some grains, I (the Supreme Personality of Godhead) liberate his twenty previous generations from their suffering in hellish planets. [*Hari Bhakti Vilasa* 4/203 from *Brahmanda Purana* spoken by the Supreme Lord]

Oh king of the birds (Garuda), if gopicandana is marked on anyone's forehead by the mercy of the Supreme Lord, no planets (Sun, Moon, Mars, etc.), Yaksas (semi demigods), Pisacas (ghosts and devils), snakes and demons can harm him. [*Hari Bhakti Vilasa* 4/238 from *Garuda Purana* spoken by Narada Muni]

1. Atharvana Upanisad

Anyone who marks his body with the tilak which resembles the lotus feet of Lord hari becomes dear to the Paramatma. He becomes fortunate and attains liberation.

2. Maha Upanisad

One gets released of all the bondage of samsara when one marks his body with the tilak markings and knows Narayana who is known by karma, jnana and bhakti yogas. Ultimately, he attains Lord Visnu.

3. Agni Purana

A brahmana should not wear the three lined tilak across (tiryak pundra) even for as a joke or play. One should mark his body with the vertical tilak only according to the prescribed rules.

4. Brahmanda Purana

A brahmana should wear urdhva pundra; a ksatriya ardha candrakara (half-moon) pundra; vaisya round shaped pundra; and a sudra tri pundra (horizontal tiryak pundra). A brahmana should never wear the horizontal tilak. He is to be considered a sudra if he wears it.

5. Brahmaratra

One should meditate on Me by chanting Om and should mark his body with vertical tilak daily. Anyone who marks thus attains sayujya liberation.

6. Vasista smrti

One should mark the tilak on his forehead as follows: he should start from the nose tip and go till his kesa (hair). The width should be one angula (circa 1 inch). This is urdhva pundra laksana.

7. Sanat Kumara Samhita

Urdhva pundra should be worn with clay and should be worn with a gap inbetween and nicely. In between the two lines, one should mark Sri or Laksmi in the form of Haridhra curna. One should not mark anything else inbetween. Anyone who marks like this is freed from all sinful reactions. Anyone who marks the tilak without any gap is condemned.

8. Padma Purana

Those devotees on whose neck tulasi kanti mala and lotus seed kanti malas are hanging and on whose shoulders there are the markings of conch and cakra and on whose body there are 12 tilak markings, they purify the entire universe immediately.

9. Isvara samhita

Anyone who marks his body with the clay which has touched Lord Visnu's body attains the benefit of an asvamedha sacrifice and is glorified in Visnu's abode. One should mark inbetween the vertical lines mother Laksmi with the help of yellow curna or powder.

SRI VASUDEVA UPANISAD

1. Om. The great sage Narada bowed down before the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Vasudeva and asked: O Lord, please teach me the rules of Vaisnava tilaka. Please tell me of the substances, mantras, places, and other things in connection with it.

2 Lord Vasudeva said: To please Me, My devotees headed by the demigod Brahma, wear Visnu-candana, which comes from the spiritual world of Vaikuntha. Because every day the gopis anoint My limbs with this candana and then again wash it away, it is also known as gopi-candana. This sacred yellow candana, which holds within it My cakra, and which is present at Cakra-tirtha, brings liberation (to they who wear it).

3 In the following prayer one praises and bows down before gopi-candana:

O gopi, O destroyer of sins, O candana manifested from Lord Visnu's transcendental body and marked with His cakra, I offer my obeisances to you. Please give me liberation, for I am anointed

with you.

4 One should go to My Ganges, take some water, bring it to My temple, and use it to make gopi-candana paste. Then, reciting either the mantras that begin 'deva avantu nah' (May the Lord protect us), or the Visnu gayatri, or my names beginning with the name Kesava, one should apply gopi-candana tilaka.

5 A brahmacari or vanaprastha should, while chanting the Visnu-gayatri or the holy names beginning with Krishna, apply this tilaka to his forehead, chest, neck, and shoulders.

5 (A) Three times he should chant this mantra: O Lord who holds the conch shell, cakra, and club in Your hands, O infallible Lord who resides in Dvaraka, O lotus-eyed Lord Govinda, please protect me, who have surrendered to You and taken shelter of You.

5 (B) After meditating in this way, a grhastha should, while chanting the Visnu-gayatri or the holy names beginning with Kesava, apply this tilaka with his ring finger to twelve parts of his body, beginning with his forehead.

6 A brahmacari or grhastha should, while chanting the Visnu-gayatri or the holy names beginning with Krishna, apply this tilaka to his forehead, chest, neck and shoulders.

7 A sannyasi, while chanting the sacred syllable Om, should apply this tilaka with his forefinger to his head, forehead and chest.

8 As there are three Deities (Brahma, Visnu and Siva), three vyahrtis (Bhuh, Bhuvah and Svah), three metres in the Vedic hymns, three sacred fires, three times, three states of being, three atmas, and three letters (a, u, and m) in the sacred syllable Om,

so Vaisnava tilaka has three parts, which correspond to the letters in the sacred Om.

9 A person who chants the sacred syllable Om goes upward (urdhva). That is why Vaisnava tilaka is called 'urdhvapundra.'

10 A paramahansa should say the sacred syllable Om and place Vaisnava tilaka on his forehead.

11 When he sees the Supersoul in his heart illumined with the lamp of truth, the yogi attains the liberation of meeting Me.

12 Or the yogi may surrender his heart to the Lord in the tilaka

mark on his chest or to the Lord in the lotus of his heart.

13 In the heart is a flame reaching upwards, a flame like a lightning flash from a dark cloud, or like a slender rice-plant.

In that flame the Supersoul stays.

14 In the lotus flower of the heart one should search for the

Supreme Lord, who is present as the tilaka mark. Gradually one

should become rapt in meditation on Me, Lord Hari, the Supreme

Personality of Godhead, who is present as the Supersoul.

15 He becomes liberated who, with single-pointed concentration

meditates on Me, Lord Hari, the eternal Supersoul who stays in the

lotus flower of the heart. Of this there is no doubt.

16 By engaging in My devotional service one is able to understand

My transcendental form, which is spiritual, eternal, self-manifest,

filled with knowledge and bliss, and beyond the touch of the

material world of dualities.

17 I am Lord Visnu, the one Supersoul who stays in the hearts of

the many moving and unmoving creatures.

18 As oil stays in sesame seeds, as fire stays in wood, as butter

stays in milk, and as fragrance stays in flowers, so I, the

Supersoul, stay in the hearts of all living creatures.

19 By anointing one's body with gopi-candana tilaka and by meditating on the Supreme Lord, Hari, splendid like a transcendental sun in the brahma-randhra, heart, and between the eyebrows, one attains the Lord in His supreme abode.

20 His sannyasa danda raised, his semen flowing upwards, His Vaisnava tilaka vertical, and his practice of yoga elevated, the sannyasi, in this four ways ascending, goes to the highest spiritual abode.

21 The final conclusion is that by serving Me with devotion one attains the supreme perfection. Wearing gopi-candana tilaka, with single pointed concentration one should always engage in My devotional service.

22 Of all brahmanas and followers of the Vedas he is best who wears Vaisnava tilaka of gopi-candana mixed with water.

23 If gopi-candana is not available one may use the earth from the roots of the Tulasi plant. In order to attain the spiritual goal that cannot be seen by materialistic men, a person who yearns for liberation should wear Vaisnava tilaka every day.

24 One should apply Vaisnava tilaka using the sacred atriratri-agnihotra ashes of the sacred syllable Om, the Visnu-gayatri, or the mantras beginning with the words 'Visnus trini pada.'

25 In this way one should apply Vaisnava tilaka with gopi-candana.

26 A person who studies this Upanisad becomes purified of all sins. Sinful thoughts do not arise in his mind. He attains the results of bathing in all sacred rivers and lakes. He attains the

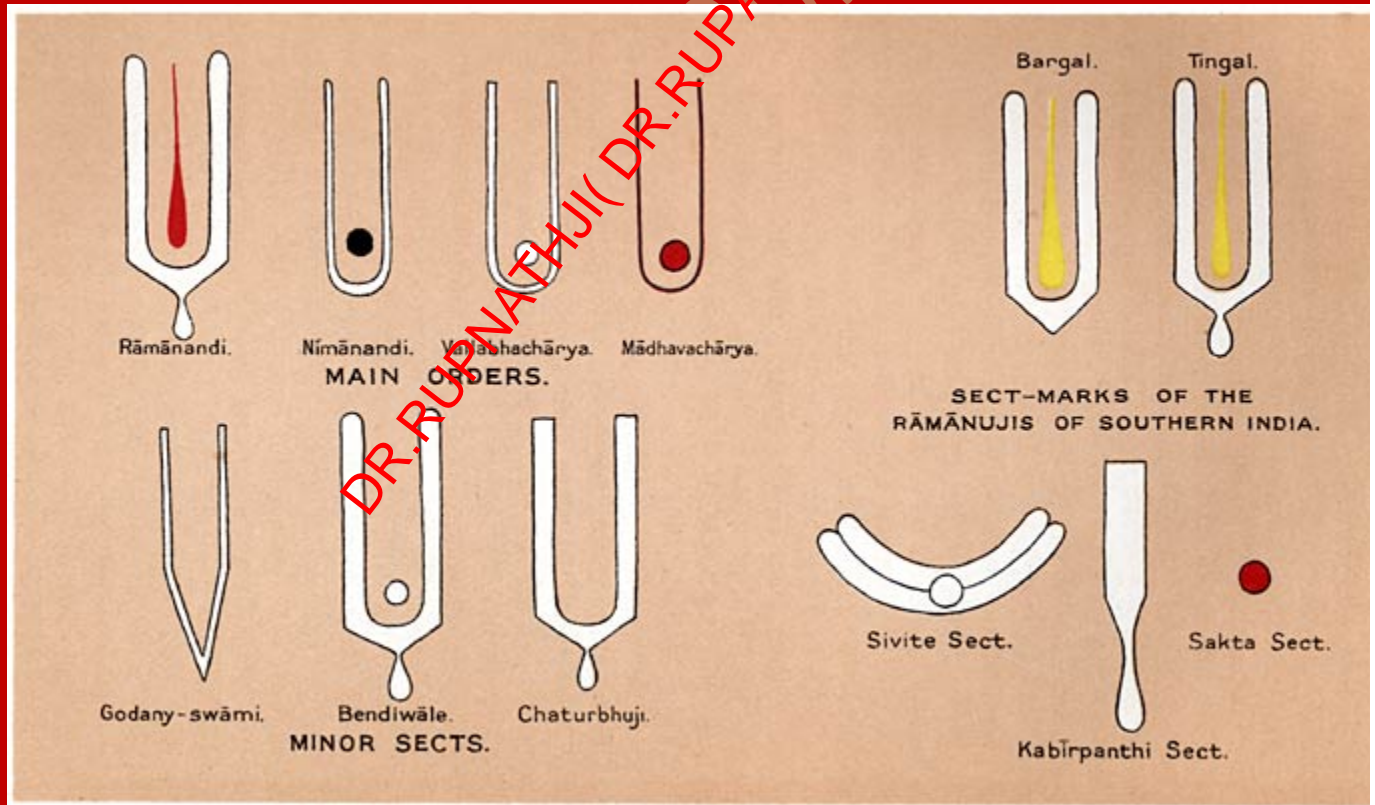
results of performing all yajnas. He is to be worshipped by all the demigods. He attains unwavering devotion to Me, Lord Narayana, the goddess of fortune's husband. When his spiritual knowledge is perfect he attains the liberation of meeting Lord Visnu. He does not return to the world of birth and death. He does not return to the world of birth and death.

27 Thus spoke Lord Vasudeva, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

28 One who studies this Upanisad certainly attains this. Om.

That is the truth. Thus says the Upanisad.

Specifics on Different Tilaks



By By Paramahansa Dr.Rupnathji

The tilak is an external symbol of our surrender to Krishna, or to our object of worship. The shape and material used may differ according to the particular process of surrender the sampradaya follows.

In the Sri Vaishnava sampradaya the tilak is made out of the white mud found in anthills. The scriptures tell us that the mud from the base of a Tulasi plant and the white mud from within the ant hill are both pure and best for making tilak. The Sri Vaishnavas will draw two lines representing the feet of Sri Narayana, and in the middle they will put a red line to represent Lakshmi Devi. The red line was originally made from a red stone found within the ant hill. The ants would usually make their ant hill on top of these red stones. When you rub the stone in water, a red color paint is formed. The category of Shakti is generally represented with the color red in all lines, both Vedic and Tantrik. Because the Sri Vaishnava sampradaya begins with Sri Lakshmi Devi, and because they approach Narayana only through Lakshmi, their tilak reflects this process of surrender. The tilaks of each sampradaya actually depict the siddhanta of the sampradaya.

In the Vallabha sampradaya the tilak worn is generally a single vertical red line. This line represents Sri Yamuna Devi. The form of Krishna worshiped in the Vallabha line is Sri Nathji or Govardhana. The consort of the Govardhana hill is the river Yamuna. Their process of surrender goes through Sri Yamuna Devi.

In the Madhva sampradaya the tilak is made out of Gopichandana mud from Dwaraka. Two vertical lines are made out of Gopichandana to represent the feet of Lord Krishna. This gopichandana tilak is nearly identical to that used in the Gaudiya sampradaya. In between a vertical black line is made from the daily coal of the yajna-kunda. In their sampradaya, the process of worship involved nitya-homa, or daily fire sacrifices to the Lord. The remnant coal of the puja was taken each day to mark the forehead. Underneath the black line, a yellow or red dot was put to indicate Lakshmi or Radha. Those who did not perform daily fire sacrifice would only put the simple gopichandana tilak.

In the Gaudiya sampradaya the tilak is usually made out of the Gopichandana mud. Some lineages prefer to use the mud from Vrindavana. The main tilak is basically identical to the Madhva tilak. The slight difference arises due to the emphasis on nama-sankirtana, or the chanting of the Lord's names. In Sri Chaitanya's line, nama-sankirtana is the yajna to be performed in kali yuga, and not the daily fire sacrifice performed in the Madhva sampradaya. As such, the black line made from the ash of the fire sacrifice is not applied in the Gaudiya sampradaya. The second difference arises due to Sri Chaitanya's process of approaching the Lord. In the Gaudiya line one does not approach Srimati Radharani directly, but always indirectly through the servant. To indicate this, the red dot representing Radha is replaced with a tulasi leaf offered at the base of the Lord's feet. Only with the mercy of Tulasi Devi can we develop pure devotion to Sri Sri Radha and Krishna.

In the scriptures there are very general descriptions of the procedure for applying tilak. For example it is mentioned that the tilak should be urdhva-pundra, or vertical lines; the body should be marked in twelve locations, etc. But these instructions are very general and leave a lot of the details to the acharyas. Even in a simple point, such as the location of the tilak, one person may interpret the 'shoulder' to start from the arm, where as another may interpret it to start higher up near the neck. This is actually the case in the two branches of the Sri Vaishna sampradaya.

The actual design of the tilak will manifest either through divine revelation or through scientific study. An example of divine revelation is the Gaudiya lineage of Sri Shyamananda. Radharani revealed a portion of her broken bangle to Sri Shyamananda, which he used in applying tilak to his forehead. As a result, his followers apply a unique design of tilak from other branches of the Gaudiya sampradaya.

In other cases, an acharya may scientifically analyze the sampradaya siddhanta and compare its compatibility with the tilak they wear. The external purpose of the tilak is to differentiate the followers of a sampradaya from other classes of philosophers, just as one branch of the armed forces wears a uniform to differentiate itself from the other branches. In such a case, the tilak may change when there occurs a shift or branching of the sampradaya due to philosophical views. The newly formed branch may re-analyze the tilak in connection with its siddhanta and make changes that fully reflect their process of surrender. Such is the case among the two branches of the Sri Vaishnava sampradaya. Due to a difference of opinion in regards to the process of surrender, two distinct tilaks emerged.

In any case, the ultimate purpose of tilak is to sanctify oneself and mark the body as the temple of the Lord. The scriptures do not specify in detail the manner that this should be done, and as such it is the acharyas who crystalize the procedures while adhering to the general prescriptions given in the scriptures.