

DUSSEHRA IS THE SYMBOL OF VICTORY ON TRIUMPH ON EVIL ON 10TH LUNAR DAY

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ABSTRACT

Ravana is a significant character in Hindu mythology, portrayed as a powerful antagonist and the lord of Lanka. He is known for his immense strength and his actions, including kidnapping Sita, which ignites the conflict with Rama. Ravana's character is multifaceted; he experiences rage, vulnerability, and the consequences of his deeds through various narratives. Despite his might, he faces losses and defeats, particularly with the impending threat from Rama and the *Vanar* army, showcasing the tragic elements of his story.

KEYWORDS: Dussehra, Ravana, Demon king, Lanka's king, Punya Maati, Brothel, Sindoor Khela, Garba, Dandiya Raas.

Etiology: *Dussehra* and *Vijayadashami* refer to the same festival celebrated on the tenth day (Dashami) of the Ashvin month in the Hindu calendar, but they emphasize different mythological stories, names, and regional traditions.

Meaning of the Names

Dussehra: Derived from the Sanskrit words "*Dasha*" (ten) and "*Hara*" (defeat or removal), it translates to the defeat of the ten-headed demon king Ravana.

Vijayadashami: Derived from "*Vijaya*" (victory) and "*Dashami*" (tenth lunar day), it translates to "the tenth day of victory".

Core Mythological Differences

Dussehra (Lord Rama): Focuses on Lord Rama's victory over the ten-headed demon Ravana in the

Ramayana, symbolizing the triumph of righteousness over evil.

Vijayadashami (Goddess Durga): Focuses on Goddess Durga's victory over the shape-shifting buffalo demon Mahishasura after a nine-day battle, concluding the worship of *Shardiya Navratri*.

Regional Traditions

North and West India (Dussehra): Marked by *Ramlila* theatrical performances and the ceremonial burning (Ravana Dahan) of massive effigies of **Ravana**, **Meghnad**, and **Kumbhakarna** at dusk.

East India & West Bengal (Vijayadashami): Marks the emotional conclusion of Durga Puja, where idols of Goddess Durga are immersed in water (*Visarjan*) and women participate in *Sindur Khela*.

South India (Mysuru Dasara & Ayudha Puja): Celebrated with grand royal processions for Goddess Chamundeshwari in Karnataka, alongside Ayudha Puja (worshipping tools, books, and instruments) and Vidyarambham for young children starting education. Vijayadashami is more commonly known as Dasara, or Dassahra, or Dussehra, and also known as Dashāhra or

Dashain in Nepali, is a major Hindu festival celebrated every year at the end of Durga Puja and Navaratri. It is observed on the tenth day of the waxing moon (Shukla Paksha) in the month of Ashvin, the seventh in the Hindu lunisolar calendar, and falls in the Gregorian calendar months of September and October.



Figure 1: Dussehra.

Vijayadashami is observed for different reasons and celebrated in various ways in different parts of India and Nepal. In the southern, eastern, northeastern, and some northern states of India, Vijayadashami marks the end of Durga Puja, commemorating goddess Durga's victory against Mahishasura to restore and protect dharma. In the northern, central, and western states, it marks the end of Ramlila and commemorates the deity Rama's victory over Ravana. Alternatively, it marks a reverence for one of the aspects of Durga.

Ravana Dahan is the symbolic burning of large effigies of Ravana (along with his son Meghnad and brother Kumbhakarna) on Dussehra or Vijayadashami. It marks the culmination of the festival and carries deep religious, moral, and cultural meanings.

- **Triumph of Good over Evil:** The ritual commemorates Lord Rama's victory over the demon king Ravana in the Ramayana, symbolizing the

eternal victory of *dharma* (righteousness) over *adharma* (unrighteousness).

- **Consequences of Pride and Ego:** Ravana was a scholar, powerful ruler, and devotee of Lord Shiva, but his arrogance, vanity, greed, and the abduction of Goddess Sita led to his destruction. The burning serves as a reminder that hubris eventually leads to a downfall.
- **Destruction of Inner Vices:** On a personal level, the fire represents burning away one's own inner demons—such as anger, lust, greed, jealousy, ego, and dishonesty.
- **Renewal and Agricultural Cycle:** Traditionally, it coincides with the end of the monsoon and the onset of the harvest season, representing new beginnings and prosperity.
- **Community and Tradition:** Public gatherings featuring Ramlila performances and fireworks foster social unity and shared ethical values.



Figure 2: 10 heads of Ravana.

Ravana's 10 heads symbols: In Hindu mythology and the epic Ramayana, the ten heads of Ravana (known as *Dashanan* or *Dashamukha*) symbolize his immense intellect, vast scriptural mastery, or his ten negative human traits.

1. Kaam [lust]
2. Krodha [anger]
3. Moha [delusion]
4. Lobha [greed]
5. Mada [pride]

6. Matsarya [envy]
7. Manas [mind]
8. Buddhi [intellect]
9. Chitta [will]
10. Ahamkara [ego]

Significance: Dussehra is celebrated to commemorate the victory of Lord Rama over Ravana and, in another major tradition, Goddess Durga over Mahishasura. It symbolises the triumph of good over evil and dharma over adharma. The deeper meaning of Dussehra is to overcome wrongdoing, arrogance, and destructive tendencies while choosing truth, courage, humility, and righteousness. Vijayadashami is commonly understood as “victory on the tenth day.” The name refers to the festival’s place on the tenth lunar day and its association with divine victory. Ravana’s effigy is burned to symbolise the defeat of evil, pride, and injustice. The tradition recalls Rama’s victory and encourages people to overcome negative qualities in their own lives. Sharad Navratri honours Goddess Durga and her manifestations over nine nights. Dussehra, or Vijayadashami, follows as the culmination of these celebrations and is associated with the victory of good over evil. Although Rama’s victory is the best-known explanation in many regions, Dussehra also celebrates Goddess Durga’s victory over Mahishasura and is observed through several distinctive regional traditions. The main lessons include humility, courage, truthfulness, self-discipline, compassion, respect for others, and the importance of fulfilling one’s responsibilities. Dussehra (Vijayadashami) marks the ultimate triumph of Dharma (righteousness, truth, and order) over Adharma (evil, ego, and chaos).

- **Lord Rama vs. Ravana:** Lord Rama represents the soul, virtue, and dharma, while the ten-headed demon king Ravana symbolizes immense knowledge and power corrupted by pride, ego, and desire. After a fierce battle in Lanka, Rama defeats Ravana on the tenth day of Ashwin Shukla Paksha, rescuing Sita and restoring cosmic balance.
- **Goddess Durga vs. Mahishasura:** In eastern and other traditions, the festival celebrates the divine feminine (Shakti) personified as Goddess Durga defeating the shape-shifting buffalo demon Mahishasura after a nine-day battle, concluding on Vijayadashami.
- **The Pandavas and the Shami Tree:** The Mahabharata is also tied to the day, commemorating when the Pandavas retrieved their hidden weapons from a Shami tree and triumphed over Adharma and the Kauravas.

Dussehra, in Hinduism, a festival that marks the end of *Sharad Navratri* in India. The term *sharad* means “autumn” in Sanskrit and *navratri* means “nine nights.” The festival celebrates the victory of good over evil, commemorated by the triumph of the Hindu deity Rama over the 10-headed demon (rakshasa) king Ravana, who abducts Rama’s wife, Sita, as recounted in the Sanskrit

epic Ramayana. The festival’s name is derived from the Sanskrit words *dasha* (“ten”) and *hara* (“defeat”). Dussehra is widely celebrated by Hindus across South Asia, particularly in India, and by the global Hindu diaspora. Navratri is a nine-day festival held in honour of the divine feminine. It is dedicated to the worship of the goddess Durga and her nine forms, each symbolizing different qualities such as strength, wisdom, courage, devotion, and protection. Dussehra is observed in various parts of India on the 10th day of the Hindu calendar month of Ashvina (September–October), following the nine nights of *Sharad Navratri*. The festival is celebrated with the appearance of the full moon, an event which happens during the “bright fortnight” or *shukla paksha*. Additionally, as Navratri depends on the lunar calendar, in some years it may be celebrated for eight days, with Dussehra falling on the ninth day. This is because the lunar calendar does not align perfectly with the solar Gregorian calendar, and sometimes tithis (lunar days) overlap or are skipped; when this happens, the total count of days can be reduced. Rama, also called Ramachandra, is considered to be the seventh incarnation (avatar) of the Hindu god Vishnu. A large crowd watches and records as a towering effigy of Ravana with ten heads burns in flames during Dussehra celebrations at night in Mumbai, India.

Ravana dahan (“burning”). The Sanskrit epic Ramayana describes how Rama, assisted by his brother Lakshmana, wages a war on Ravana for abducting Sita. In his quest to rescue Sita, he receives assistance from Sugriva, the king of monkeys (vanars); Hanuman, the commander of the army of monkeys; and Vibhishana, Ravana’s brother. After a fierce battle lasting many days, Rama slays Ravana with the Brahmastra (Sanskrit: “Brahma’s weapon”). A divine weapon of the Hindu god Brahma, Brahmastra has the power to destroy everything in its path. Dussehra coincides with Vijayadashami, the 10th day of the Durga Puja festival, which is celebrated primarily in eastern India. Durga Puja celebrates the descent of the goddess Durga to earth, her victory over the demon king Mahishasura (mahisa meaning “buffalo,” and asura meaning, “demon”), and her subsequent departure to Mount Kailash. The terms Dussehra and Vijayadashami are often used interchangeably, perhaps because Vijayadashami also marks the celebration of the triumph of good over evil. Although rooted in the Ramayana, Dussehra takes on varied cultural expressions across India, shaped by regional rituals and performances. In northern and western India the festival is marked by exuberant performances of Ramlila, a dramatic folk re-enactment of the Ramayana. Ramlila performances mostly conclude with the scene of Ravana’s defeat by Rama. At this moment Ravana dahan (dahan meaning “to burn”) is set into action. Effigies of Ravana—often along with those of Ravana’s son Meghanada and Ravana’s brother Kumbhakarna—are stuffed with firecrackers and set ablaze at dusk in open fields. This act is symbolic of Rama’s victory over evil. In Himachal Pradesh, the Kullu valley provides the

setting for the Kullu Dussehra festival. Instead of burning effigies of Ravana, locally worshipped deities are carried in procession to the town. Lord Raghunath, a regional form of Rama, is honoured as the presiding deity, and dozens of temple gods are also revered during the week-long fair. On the final day a bonfire of dry bushes is lit to represent the burning of Lanka, an

episode in the Ramayana wherein Hanuman sets fire to the island with his tail. In southern India Navratri and Dussehra are marked by the celebration of Navratri (or Bommai) Golu and Ayudha Puja. Navratri Golu centers on the creative arrangement of dolls, figurines, and idols on stepped platforms, usually in odd numbers of tiers.



Figure 3: Garba & Dandia Raas of Gujarat in Dussehra.

These displays depict deities and scenes from the ancient epic Ramayana. On the ninth day of Navratri, Ayudha Puja is observed in many southern Indian states. During the festival the goddesses Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Parvati are worshipped. The festival focuses on reverence for tools, instruments, and objects of knowledge. For many Dussehra marks the beginning of preparation for Diwali, which occurs 20 days after Dussehra. Diwali symbolizes the royal homecoming of Rama along with Sita, Lakshmana, and Hanuman to the city of Ayodhya after defeating Ravana.

In the vibrant tapestry of Hindu festivals, Navratri and Dussehra stand out for their deep cultural significance and their celebration of the triumph of good over evil. Although they are two distinct events, they are intertwined in purpose, ritual, and meaning. Navratri, meaning “nine nights,” is dedicated to the worship of the Divine Goddess Durga, honoring her various forms. Dussehra, also known as Vijayadashami, marks the culmination of these nine days and celebrates the victory of Lord Rama over the demon king Ravana, symbolizing the triumph of righteousness.

The Hindu Roots of Navratri and Dussehra: Navratri and Dussehra are closely related Hindu festivals that together celebrate the victory of good over evil, but each has distinct meanings, practices, and timing. Navratri is a nine-day festival dedicated to Devi (the Goddess), celebrated with fervour and devotion across India. Each day is associated with a different form of the goddess, representing qualities such as strength, wisdom, love, and prosperity. The festival’s significance is closely tied to the story of Goddess Durga and her battle against Mahishasura, the buffalo demon.

According to Hindu mythology, Mahishasura was a powerful demon who received a boon that he could only be defeated by a woman. The gods, troubled by his tyranny, created Goddess Durga, who fought Mahishasura for nine days and defeated him on the tenth. This victory is symbolic of the power of the Divine Feminine and the triumph of good over evil. Dussehra, also known as Vijayadashami, is celebrated on the tenth day following Navratri.



Figure 4: Sindoor Khela of Bengal in Vijaya Dashami.

In northern India, this festival commemorates Lord Rama's victory over Ravana, the ten-headed demon king of Lanka. As told in the Ramayana, Ravana abducted Sita, Rama's wife, leading to a fierce battle. With the blessings of Goddess Durga, Rama defeated Ravana on the tenth day, symbolizing the victory of righteousness, or dharma, over evil. Dussehra thus marks not only the end of Navratri but also the end of Rama's struggle against Ravana, linking the two festivals through the theme of conquering evil forces. During Navratri, devotees engage in various rituals to invoke the goddess's blessings, such as fasting, chanting, and dancing. The ninth day, known as *Maha Navami*, is a day of special worship and reverence. The celebrations then culminate on the tenth day, Dussehra, when devotees celebrate the victory of the Divine.

Ramlila Performances and Ravana Effigies: Across northern India, the story of Rama's victory is re-enacted through Ramlila performances, which depict scenes from the Ramayana. On Dussehra, effigies of Ravana, Meghnath, and Kumbhakarna are burned to symbolize the destruction of evil. These plays are often held throughout the nine days of Navratri, building up to the grand spectacle on Dussehra.

- **Durga Visarjan:** In eastern India, particularly in West Bengal, Durga Puja takes place during the last five days of Navratri, celebrating the goddess's arrival and her victory over Mahishasura. On Dussehra, Durga Visarjan (the immersion of the idol) is performed, symbolizing the goddess's return to her celestial abode. The ritual signifies letting go of negative energies, allowing devotees to begin anew.
- **Ayudha Puja and Shami Tree Worship:** In southern India, Dussehra is celebrated with Ayudha Puja, a ritual where tools, books, and weapons are worshiped to honor the goddess and invoke blessings for prosperity and success. In Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh, people also worship the Shami tree, believed to be a symbol of protection and prosperity. This ritual links back to the Pandavas in the Mahabharata, who hid their weapons in a Shami tree during their exile.

Modern-Day Celebrations and Relevance: In modern times, Navratri and Dussehra are celebrated with immense enthusiasm, drawing devotees from all walks of life. Urban centers and rural towns alike resonate with prayers, dances, and cultural performances, bringing communities together in celebration. In Gujarat and Maharashtra, Garba and Dandiya Raas dances take centre stage, while Kolkata lights up with elaborate Durga Puja pandals, where each pandal represents a different theme and is often visited by thousands of devotees daily. With time, these festivals have also come to symbolize resilience and the need to overcome personal challenges. The stories of Durga's and Rama's

battles remind people that inner strength, faith, and moral integrity are essential to face life's trials.

The relationship between Navratri and Dussehra is deeply symbolic and spiritual, portraying the dual aspects of divinity: the nurturing, protective force of the goddess and the righteous, courageous nature of Lord Rama. While Navratri focuses on self-reflection and devotion, Dussehra brings a call to action, a celebration of victories that are both mythological and personal. Together, they remind us that in the journey of life, inner strength and righteousness are essential to overcome the darkness within and around us.

Garba and Dandiya are traditional folk dances from Gujarat, India, performed widely during the Navratri festival. While often played together and associated with similar festive energy, they have distinct origins, styles, and symbolic meanings. Garba and Dandiya are traditional folk dances from Gujarat that are widely performed during the nine nights of Navratri, which lead directly into Dussehra (Vijaydashami).

In Bengal, the idols of Goddess Durga are made from the mud of sex workers' homes. There are explanations behind this sacred practice. By taking the soil from a sex worker's home, the ritual includes those individuals who have been marginalised in society. The potters in Kolkata's *Kumartuli* visit the homes of sex workers in *Sonagachi* and request their soil from their homes by bowing their heads. This act of bowing before prostitutes symbolises the recognition of women's dignity and equality, reflecting the broader respect for feminine power in society. This soil is then mixed with the clay used for making the idol of Goddess Durga. This soil is considered *Punya Maati* or Sacred Soil in Bengal's tradition of Durga Puja. In Bengali, *punya* refers to virtue or spiritual merit, while *maati* means soil. The soil from the sex workers' land is called *punya* because, according to one interpretation, men who visit a sex worker leave their virtue or purity at her doorstep. The soil outside the home is therefore believed to accumulate this virtue, making it *punya* or holy. Another interpretation states that you can't separate the divine from society's backward thinking. Something that society considers impure is used to make the idol of the Goddess, which is considered sacred. According to mythology, a group of prostitutes once went to bathe in the Ganga River, where they saw a leper sitting on the riverbank who wanted to take the holy dip but required assistance. Nobody helped him and refused to acknowledge his presence.

oil from a brothel (*punya maati* or sacred soil) is a traditional and essential ingredient used to make the clay idols of Goddess Durga during Durga Puja in Bengal.

Key Reasons behind the Tradition

- **Purity through Paradox:** A popular belief holds that when men visit a brothel, they leave their accumulated virtues, piety, and moral righteousness

at the doorstep before entering. Consequently, the soil outside the brothel absorbs these left-behind virtues, making it pure (punya).

- **Reverence for the Navkanyas:** Ancient Vedic texts mandate the worship of the Navkanyas (nine types of women), which traditionally include a dancer, a sex worker (vaishya), a washerwoman, and a milkmaid. Including soil from a sex worker's home symbolically honours and recognizes them as part of the divine feminine (Shakti).
- **Inclusivity of the Marginalized:** The ritual acts as a symbolic gesture to integrate outcasts and marginalized women—who are frequently shunned

by mainstream society—into the core of the community's greatest festival.

- **A Complete Idol:** According to traditional artisan rules, the idol is considered incomplete without a mixture of four sacred components: mud from the banks of the Ganges, cow dung, cow urine, and the soil from a *nishiddho* palli (forbidden territory or red-light area like Sonagachi in Kolkata).
How the Soil is collected: Traditionally, a priest or the idol maker must personally visit the doorstep of a brothel and formally beg for a handful of soil from a sex worker as a gift or blessing. As the soil is handed over, specific Vedic mantras are often recited.

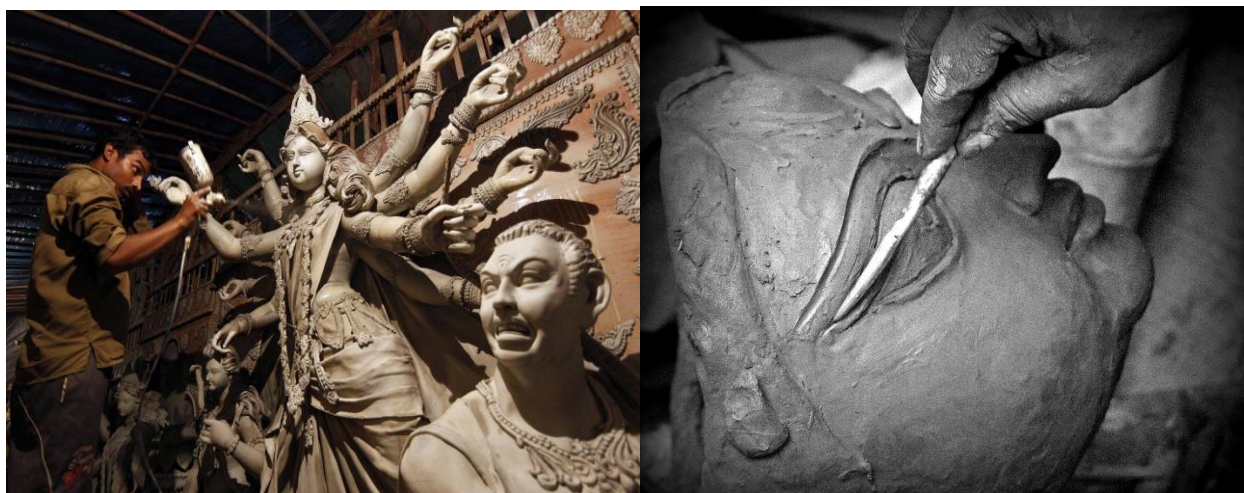


Figure 5: Durga Idol preparation from mud [punya maati] collected from brothel.

Punya Mati (or Punya Mitti) is the sacred soil traditionally collected from the doorstep of a sex worker's home (often in red-light areas like Sonagachi in Kolkata) and mixed into the clay used to sculpt the idol of Goddess Durga.

Meaning and Symbolism

- **The Ritual:** Artisans or priests traditionally collect a small amount of earth from the threshold of a sex worker's house during the preparation of Durga idols.
- **The Belief:** Custom holds that when men enter a brothel, they leave their purity and virtue outside at the doorstep. Consequently, the soil outside the door absorbs those discarded virtues and becomes punya (holy or blessed).
- **Social Inclusion:** The practice symbolizes that the Goddess resides within all women—including those marginalized, stigmatized, or cast out by mainstream society. It teaches that no person is "impure" in the eyes of the divine.

Part of the Ten Sacred Soils

- *Punya maati* is traditionally considered one of **ten** essential or auspicious soils used in crafting clay idols.

- The other sacred soils include earth from the banks of the Ganga River, a crossroad, a termite mound, a bull's horn, and an elephant's tusk. The *Punya Maati* (blessed soil) is the soil from the house of the prostitutes. As per the tradition, the priests were supposed to go to the brothels and beg for the '*Punya Maati*' from the prostitutes. Then, the priest must recite a particular mantra after the soil is collected.

Traditional Durga idol-making requires a specific mix of clay and four essential sacred and binding ingredients

- **River Bank Mud:** Alluvial clay or mud collected from the banks of a river—most traditionally the Ganges (Ganga), especially sourced by artisans in Kumortuli, Kolkata. Sculptors may blend up to seven different types of local clay for proper binding and texture.
- **Punya Mati (Sacred Soil):** A handful of soil taken from the doorstep or courtyard of a sex worker's home in a red-light district (such as Sonagachi or Nishiddho Pallis). Known as Punya Mati or sacred soil, it must be respectfully requested or begged by the priest or artisan, symbolizing social inclusion, respect for marginalized women, and the belief that visitors leave their virtues behind at these thresholds.

- **Cow Dung and Cow Urine:** Used traditionally as purifying and binding agents mixed into the clay paste.
- **Structural Fillers:** Rice husks, straw (khar), and a bamboo-and-hay skeletal frame are layered inside the clay to give the multi-figure idols volume and manage their weight.

Differences between Garba and Dandiya

- **Garba:** A circular, devotional dance performed around an earthen pot (garbo) with a central lamp or an idol of Goddess Durga. It is done in honor of the divine feminine (Shakti) and often begins before the evening aarti with slower, graceful steps.
- **Dandiya Raas:** A high-energy partner dance played with colorful wooden sticks (dandiyas) that symbolize the swords of Goddess Durga in her battle against the demon Mahishasura. It typically takes place later in the evening after the aarti.

1. Garba

- **Origin & Meaning:** Derived from the Sanskrit word Garbha (womb), Garba honors the divine feminine (Shakti) and the nine forms of Goddess Durga.

- **Dance Style:** A circular, devotional dance performed around a central lamp, clay pot (garbo), or image representing life and the goddess.
- **Movements:** Features graceful clapping, sweeping hand gestures, and rhythmic footwork moving in a counter-clockwise circle.
- **Participants:** Traditionally led by women in a circle, though men and mixed groups also participate widely today.

2. Dandiya Raas

- **Origin & Meaning:** Originating as a high-energy socio-religious dance from Gujarat, Dandiya symbolizes the mock battle between Goddess Durga and the demon Mahishasura (or the playful Raas Leela of Lord Krishna).
- **Dance Style:** A fast-paced, partner-based stick dance.
- **Movements:** Dancers hold a pair of decorated wooden sticks (dandiyas) representing the swords of Durga and strike them together in rhythm with their partners.
- **Music & Costumes:** Set to rapid beats of the dholak and tabla, with participants wearing bright, multi-colored traditional attire like kediyas and chaniya cholis.

Table 1: Garba & Dandiya Difference.

Feature	Garba	Dandiya Raas
Primary Symbol	Sacred lamp or clay pot (garbo)	Wooden sticks (dandiyas) as swords
Formation	Circular movement around a centre point	Partner-based or group formation moving in rows/circles
Pace & Mood	Devotional, graceful, and rhythmic	Energetic, fast, and combat-mimicking
Significance	Celebrating womanhood and fertility	Re-enacting the battle of Durga or Krishna's Raas

Connection to Dussehra

- **Transition of Festivities:** *Navratri* spans nine nights of worship and dance, culminating on the tenth day in Dussehra (Vijaya Dashami), which celebrates the triumph of good over evil.
- **Symbolism:** In many communities, the energy, rhythm, and communal spirit of Garba and Dandiya bleed into Dussehra celebrations, combining the spiritual devotion of the festival with social festivities, music, and the burning of Ravana effigies.
- **Regional Variations:** While West Bengal focuses on Durga Puja and Sindoor Khela on Dussehra, and North India focuses on Ramlila and Ravan Dahan, western states like Gujarat and community events across India blend Garba and Dandiya right up to the final day of the season.

Sindur Khela: is 'vermillion game', is a Bengali Hindu tradition where women smear each other with sindur on Vijayadashami, the last day of the Durga Puja. On the day of the Vijayadashami after the conclusion of the ritual worship, married Bengali Hindu women apply sindur on the forehead and feet of the goddess and offer

sweets to her. Then they put sindur on each other's faces and offer sweets to each other.

CONCLUSION

Dussehra is much more than an annual festival, a dramatic Ravan Dahan, or a celebration of ancient victories. It is a reminder that the struggle between good and evil also takes place within the human mind. The story of Lord Rama inspires us to uphold truth and fulfil our responsibilities. The victory of Goddess Durga reminds us of the power required to overcome destructive forces. The Bhagavad Gita further encourages us to follow dharma, practise self-discipline, and act with wisdom. This Dussehra, instead of focusing only on the Ravana we see in the flames, let us recognise the pride, anger, greed, and dishonesty we can work to overcome in our own lives.

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