

LORD GANESHA STORY

SPIRITUAL ASPECT OF GANESHA, HIS FORM AND INNER MEANING



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LORD GANESHA STORY - IT'S INNER MEANING

GANESH CHAVITI FESTIVAL - IT'S INNER MEANING

We celebrate *Bhādrapada śud'dha chaviti* in the name of "*Gaṇēśa chaviti*" or "*Vināyaka chaviti*" festival.

The festival is usually celebrated at home wearing new clothes, preparing special food items, *pūjas* etc. and collectively with the installation of *Gaṇēśa* idols in colorfully decorated *maṅṭaps*, devotees in colorful costumes, streets full of processions and performers, with much pomp, but do perform many inappropriate activities too.

Yet, does this festival really mean just wearing new clothes, enjoying the feast and spending lavishly? Have we ever thought what is the actual significance of this festival?

Our ancestors and *mahātmās* introduced such festivals with good intentions. If we don't analyze

their intentions and possible benefits for us, their hard work becomes futile. They thought so much in formulating this type of festivals keeping our well being in their minds and hearts. Let us discuss in detail the good reason behind the celebration of this festival.

First question, why do we celebrate this festival, particularly only on the day of *Bhādrapada śud'dha chaviti* (the fourth day after the new moon in the lunar month of *Bhādrapada*)?

There is a scientific reason behind celebrating the festival on the day of *Bhādrapada śud'dha chaviti*. On this particular day before the sunrise, if we look at the eastern sky - there appears one constellation like an elephant trunk and below it some stars are visible in the form of a mouse. Considering this aspect, our ancestors creatively built a story for this festival based on these shapes.

LET US TAKE A DEEP DIVE INTO THIS:

Vināyakuḍu (Gaṇēśa) – His name is special, his form is further more special and his vehicle is equally more special.

Moreover, he is exceptionally special among all the *dēvatas* (Gods/Goddesses) because he is worshipped by both *dēvatas* and demons and also by humans. He is the controller and remover of all obstacles. Besides this, he is a fast writer. He scholarly wrote the epic *Mahābhārata*, which consists of sixty lakh verses while Sage *Vēda Vyāsa* was dictating, 18 epics and many more scriptures. *Mahābhārata* was the longest dictation ever known. This shows his power of intelligence and scholarship.

There are so many spiritual aspects behind the physical form of Lord *Gaṇēśa*. He is portrayed as a dwarf child with an elephant head, long trunk, one tusk, a big stomach, a snake as sacred thread, a

crescent moon on the head, large ears, an axe in one hand, a noose in another hand and mouse as his vehicle. Why he got such a displeasing appearance? The sages created a mythical story that expounds on the spiritual significance behind his physical appearance. We will know many mystic truths by understanding their motives behind the story.

LET US GO THROUGH THE STORY IN DETAIL AND ANALYZE

One day Goddess *Pārvati* was at home on Mount Kailash preparing for a bath. She took some turmeric paste, which she used before bathing, from her body and created a child's form out of it and gave life to the beautiful doll and declared him to be her son.

As she wished to take bath, she posted her son on guard duty at the door, instructing him not to

allow anyone inside. After a while, Lord Shiva returned home and was surprised to see the boy at the entrance. The boy didn't allow Lord Shiva to enter his house. Shiva tried to explain him and warned him, but the boy did not listen. With no choice left, in his divine fury Lord Shiva severed the boy's head with his trident and entered the house. When Goddess *Pārvati* heard of this incident, she was overwhelmed with sorrow and ran to the front door. The body of the boy was there but the head was missing. She wailed and pleaded with Lord Shiva to bring her son back to life.

Lord Shiva cooled down by this time and agreed to *Pārvati's* appeal. He sent his most trusted subordinates out with orders to bring back the head of the first creature they came across that was lying with its head facing North. They soon returned with the head of an elephant, which Lord

Shiva placed onto boy's body. Then, he gave life to him and named him *Gaṇēśa*. Lord Shiva declared him to be his son and gave him the status of being foremost among the gods and leader of all the *Gaṇas* (a class of soldiers), as *Gaṇapati*. Goddess *Pārvati* felt very happy.

Is this the story which people can really believe? We might believe because of devotion and fear of God. But in true sense it is surreal for the common people. Why did our sages create this story? What is the intent behind this story?

Goddess *Pārvati* and Lord Shiva represent *prakṛti* (Nature or Matter) and *Puruṣa* (Supreme being or *Paramātmā*) respectively. *Prakṛti* is the female and *Puruṣa* is the male. The creation of *Jīvas* (individuals) happens in this world with the union of male and female energies. Yet, in this story, *Pārvati* alone gave life to the boy (individual). This means Nature created life (the boy) without

the involvement of *Paramātmā*. Nature is inert, but it comes into action in the presence of *Puruṣa* and thus this creation happened.

The worldly view (*laukika dṛṣṭi*) is the characteristic of common people, whereas the divine view (*pāramātmika dṛṣṭi*) is the characteristic of the *paramātmā*. The *Jīva* (individual) who views the worldly view tends to block the divine view? This is our day-to-day experience. We run after worldly objects in fulfilling our desires and ignore the spiritual path. The same thing happened here! The boy who is with *laukika dṛṣṭi* obstructed the divine. Such individuals do not care for divine life and will not listen to spiritual instructions from *Mahātmās*. This worldly vision has to be reformed by God. Thus, this is the innermost meaning of beheading the boy's head.

Now, Nature realized her mistake and pleaded for help to give life to the boy. In order to fulfil her wish Lord Shiva asked to bring the head of a sleeping creature lying with its head facing North.

North direction is very auspicious for the spiritual seekers as per sacred scriptures. North is known as "*uttara*", which means *ut+tara* = liberation (i.e. lift, liberate and reach the higher).

Lord Shiva's instruction to bring the head of a creature lying with its head towards north implies - the head has a desire for *uttara* (liberation). Individuals should use their precious life to become one with God and not to waste it by wandering in this ephemeral world.

As per orders, the subordinates brought an elephant head. What does it reveal?

An Elephant's head is huge. In this context, the big head represents high intellect. Besides this, Lord Shiva declared him to be his son and gave him

the status of being foremost among the gods and leader of all the *Gaṇas* (a class of soldiers). This reveals that the one who performs every action with discernment and acute knowledge will certainly have no obstacles and get God's blessings and success.

This is the inner spiritual meaning behind the *Gaṇēśa chaviti* festival.

What is the benefit of worshipping Lord *Gaṇēśa*?

His Physical Form answers this question as well.

1. Plate full of dumplings – represents world is stocked with prosperity.
2. Dumplings in his hand – indicates you will receive all the prosperity and joy.
3. Big stomach – indicates you can enjoy all the prosperity and richness.

While we are enjoying prosperity in the world, we have to keep spiritual wisdom, and this is depicted in creating a mouse as a vehicle for Lord *Gaṇēśa*. What is the significance of the mouse as vehicle for Lord *Gaṇēśa*?

The mouse holds one dumpling. A mouse consumes very little food. But if nothing is available to eat, it will damage household goods and make a mess out of the edible items. This illustrates that we humans should not be greedy with uncontrolled longing for material possessions but be happy and contented with what we have in our life. Hence, do charity, don't be greedy and share your wealth with others without any expectations. This is real happiness.

This is the spiritual aspect of Lord *Gaṇēśa* story.



LORD GANESHA'S FORM – INNER MEANING

[MYSTIC FACTS FOR SPIRITUAL PROGRESS]

The magnificent form of Lord *Gaṇēśa* teaches so many spiritual aspects to humankind. The secret knowledge of attributes of Lord *Gaṇēśa* helps individuals to understand the true purpose of life and move forward in their spiritual journey. Let us discuss in detail:

1. Lord *Gaṇēśa* has an elephant head
2. He has two large ears
3. He has a curved trunk
4. He has a single tusk
5. He has a sacred thread which is a snake. It is called “nāga yajñōpavītaṁ”
6. He has a crescent moon on his head
7. He has a stocky dwarf body
8. He holds a noose in one hand and axe in another hand
9. He has a very big belly

10. Lord *Gaṇēśa*'s vehicle is the mouse.

WHAT DO ALL THE ABOVE BODY PARTS SIGNIFY?

1. **FACE:** Lord *Gaṇēśa* has the face of an elephant. Sanskrit's name for the elephant is "*Hasti*". The word *Hasthi* represents the "*Hastā nakṣatram*". This *Hastā nakṣatra* belongs to *Budha Graham*. *Budha* means Pundit, an intelligent and knowledgeable person. The true intellect is the knowledge of SELF. Hence, the elephant face represents that as human beings, we should have *ātma jñānam* (SELF-knowledge). This knowledge of Self is given in the holy scriptures like *Upaniṣads*, *Brahmasūtras* and *Śrīmad bhagavadgīta*. All these three combined are called "*Prasthānatrayam*". The true purpose of the individual life is to become one with God. A *sādhaka* (Seeker) should reach out to a *Sathguru* to listen, study and understand these holy triple *śāstrās* for *mōkṣa* (Liberation) as one

cannot learn the intricacies by self-study. Lord *Gaṇēśa's* head is very big, implying that he is the head or elder person who can impact spiritual and intellectual knowledge to everyone. The large head also implies that he is capable of preaching spiritual scriptures with authority. So the secret is, every spiritual seeker should have positive discrimination, intelligence and practical knowledge.

2. EARS: Lord *Gaṇēśa's* ears are very big and look like “*cāṭa*” (grain winnowing equipment). Why do they look like winnowing equipment? The winnowing equipment is used to toss the grains into the air, where the wind sweeps away the chaff. Likewise, there are good and bad thoughts, feelings and emotions in our minds. We should use our intellect to retain the good emotional tendencies and get rid of the bad ones. This has to

be remembered as soon as we see the ears of Lord *Gaṇēśa*.

Now the question arises, why is only the winnowing equipment example used to separate good from the bad? Why not a sieve?

The winnowing equipment keeps the grain, which represents good and removes the chaff, which represents the bad. Whereas the sieve strains and separates the good from the bad and keeps the bad. Hence, the takeaway is to use our intellect as the winnowing equipment and not like a sieve in our daily life activities. That means, taking the good and driving away the bad thoughts and tendencies.

3. TRUNK: The elephant trunk, though very big, has the exceptional ability to pick up very tiny objects like a single needle or a single blade of grass. Likewise, we should use our intellect, *sūkṣmabud'dhi* (Intellect), to understand the

spiritual knowledge and secrets of the holy scriptures.

To realize the full potential of human life - we have to learn with subtle intellect what has been expounded in the *Upaniṣads* and *Śrīmad bhagavadgīta*, which is the essence of *Upaniṣads* and attain liberation. Liberation means release from the world of miseries and being an embodiment of bliss. A lot of effort and sharp mental acumen to grasp spiritual knowledge is required for liberation. The trunk indicates these aspects.

4. TUSK: An elephant generally has two tusks. Whereas Lord *Gaṇēśa* has only one tusk. Why only one tusk? What is the significance of single tusk? This represents God alone "IS" and nothing else exists. (There is only God as ONE and NOT TWO). The *Upaniṣads* such as *chāndōgya* and *brhadāranyaka* expounds this as *mahāvākya* (an

important statement), “*ēkamēvādvayaṁ brahma nēha nānāsti kiñcana*”.

5. SACRED THREAD: On *Gaṇēśa chaviti* day a snake-shaped constellation can be seen before sunrise in the “northeast” corner of the sky. The sacred thread of *Gaṇēśa* is in a similar form, indicating the same. Snakes quite often shed their old skin and get new skin. Likewise, as human beings, we should also keep on trying to discard the three *Guṇās* (qualities) one after the other and subsequently transcend them. First, abandon the *tamōguṇa* (i.e., ignorance/laziness), followed by *rajōguṇa* (i.e., aspirations and agitations for worldly gains) and finally, even the *sattvaguṇa* (i.e., calm, pious and equipoise). Thus, this sacred thread, which looks like a snake (*nāga yajñōpavītaṁ*), reminds us to shed the three *guṇās* and transcend them.

Śrīmad bhagavadgīta, Chapter 14, “Guṇatraya vibhāgayōga”, contains all these details.

6. CRESCENT MOON ON HEAD: Crescent moon on *Gaṇēśa's* head is similar to the arc-shaped section of the moon visible in the sky on *Gaṇēśa chaviti* day. It looks neither like a small line nor too full. What does it teach us? It teaches us that the true purpose of human life is Liberation. Listening, understanding, practising and experiencing the spiritual knowledge of *Upaniṣads* (sacred scriptures), are essential to attain liberation. So much effort and focus are required to reach the final stage. Now the question arises, “How to satisfy basic needs if I have to renounce the world?” The crescent moon indicates not to completely withdraw from social living but to remain on a line not too big or small. In other words be equanimous in all situations and circumstances. It means don't waste your precious

life and energy on acquiring wealth and fame in this ephemeral world. Life shouldn't be busy, but it should be easy. Spend time and energy listening and following the teachings of the sacred scriptures alongside making bread for life. Life's formula should be "simple living and high thinking".

Realizing the true purpose of life is more important than worldly (temporal) possessions and enjoying the sensuous pleasures of life. Hence, this crescent moon is teaching us to realize the true purpose of life, which is to pay only the minimum required attention to the affairs of our temporal world.

7. DWARF BODY: Lord *Gaṇēśa* is a dwarf with huge belly. What is the intrinsic meaning behind it? In general, we are all body conscious and in delusion, we think we are the body and become a slave to it. This delusion and attachment toward the body is concealing the truth, "I am *ātma*". So,

it is important to give up the feeling that you are the body. One should not fall into this trap. *Gaṇēśa's* dwarf body gives the message that the physical body is finite, impermanent and prone to disease, decay and death. Hence one should not be attached to and deluded by the physical body. One has to use this body to do spiritual practices to attain *Mōkṣa* (Liberation) and be one with *Paramātma (Brahman)*.

§. A NOOSE IN ONE HAND AND AXE IN ANOTHER HAND: We indulge in desire-prompted activities, called "*Karmas*", in our daily life. There is a consequence for every action performed through the mind and body, which is often called *Karma Phala* ("fruits of actions"). The concept of *karma* (action) and attachment to the *karma phala* (fruits of actions) is believed to be the reason, how individuals get bound in this repeated cycle of births and deaths. One is bound to experience the

fruit of actions either during this life or be born again for the same. This is how we are bound by the cycle of birth and death (*Karma Bandham*). Unless we break this cycle of birth and death, it's not possible to enjoy the freedom and infinite bliss (*ānanda*) by being *ātma*. How does one break the cycle? It is possible only through the axe of *ātma jñānam* (Self-Knowledge). The noose (rope) represents our binding to actions and the axe represents the cutting instrument, Self-Knowledge. One has to sever the binding rope of *Karma Bandham*, which is essentially caused by delusion (*Avidya*), and destroy the ignorance by the axe of Self-Knowledge. This is indicated by the noose and axe in the hands of Lord *Gaṇēśa*.

9. BIG BELLY: The big belly illustrates that the whole universe is in the Supreme *Brahman* (*paramātmā*) and we all are also in Supreme *Brahman*. Hence, we all belong to one family of

paramātmā and he is the family head, our father. Hence, we are all not unrelated and so, we should help others whenever they are in need. The big belly indicates this innermost meaning.

10. MOUSE: The mouse nibbles whatever food is available into bits and pieces and leaves the residue. Likewise, we should absorb the essential knowledge given by *Upaniṣads*, *Śrīmad bhagavadgīta* and other spiritual scriptures and leave our ignorance. Thus, the mouse represents acquiring essential knowledge and leaving ignorance. Apart from this, because the mouse is called “*Anindyudu*”, which means we will become *Anindyulam* (blameless persons) as we progress in obtaining Self-knowledge and removes the agitations of the mind. Furthermore, the mouse represents the desires as it is restless in seeking various edible objects. *Gaṇēśa* riding on the mouse means he has full control over the desires, mind

and intellect. Lord *Gaṇēśa* riding on the mouse is giving the message to control the endless cycle of desires and cravings of the mind and live happily.

Thus, we have to comprehend the inner meaning of various parts in Lord *Gaṇēśa's* form and implement them in our daily lives and that is the real "*Pūja*" or worship ritual. The person, who does such *Pūja* and follows such noble instructions, will overcome all the hurdles in his/her endeavors and achieves success. Lord *Gaṇēśa* is assuring of success to such followers by showing his *Abhaya Hastam* (promising hand). Above all, he is assuring that he will bestow all the life requirements, wealth and luxuries to his devotees by holding sweet dumplings in his other hand.

Hence, after gaining the secret knowledge of what *Gaṇēśa* is indicating, let us do the real worship of Lord *Gaṇēśa* in the following manner:

1. Understand the knowledge of True-Self, given by the *Upaniṣad* and Sathguru, with subtle and sharp intelligence.
2. Acquire a good and positive attitude and abandon the bad habits, tendencies and negative thoughts by practising what has been told by the *Sathguru* and sacred scriptures.
3. Become one with the Supreme being by shedding all the three *guṇās* (characteristics) one after the other – first the *tamōguṇa*, followed by *rajōguṇa* and finally *sattvaguṇa* one after the other. The *Guṇas* are the main causes of bondage and human misery and one should transcend them reach *Paramātmā* and become ONE with him.
4. To realize the highest life goal of *Mōkṣa* or liberation, use all your energies to give less importance to worldly needs, leave body attachment and sever the ropes of bondage,

causing the cycle of birth and death, with the **Axe of Self-Knowledge**.

5. Our true nature is the all-pervading, subtler than the subtlest, self-effulgent consciousness, *ātma*. We have to experience that *Brahman*, which is also the essence of *Praṇava*.

6. Whatever wealth is with you, use part of it for others benefit and good deeds and enjoy remaining as a gift from God.

Hence, while celebrating the festival of *Gaṇēśa chaviti*, observe the form of *Gaṇēśa*, remember the inner meanings as above and fulfil our lives with true knowledge.

Following the *pūja* the next day, Lord *Gaṇēśa* is immersed in a body of water. What is the reason behind it?

The almighty God is without form because HE is the subtlest of the subtle, all pervading and pure conscious energy. One should worship,

contemplate and meditate upon the formless, all-pervading *Paramātmā* for liberation or *Mōkṣa*. It is hard to worship the formless almighty in the beginning and hence we are worshipping God with form initially. Though we bring a form to a formless - God initially, we should not become disillusioned with the form, and as we progress spiritually, we should change contemplation and meditation from form to the formless God. This is the true meaning of giving a shape to formless mud into the *Gaṇēśa* idol, which is subsequently immersed in water to dissolve back into formless mud. It is the principle behind “*Nimajjanam*” (Immersion). Moreover, this process states that we should neither get attracted nor attached to the physical form.

Hence, celebrate this auspicious festival of worshipping Lord *Gaṇēśa* by keeping all the above aspects in mind. This helps us to progress

spiritually and attain liberation. Attaining *Mōkṣa* (liberation) is the ONLY purpose of human life.

May you attain the true purpose of life.

My best wishes and blessings...



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