



Akshaya Tritya

Sanatana Dharma (literally meaning "eternal way of life") is a tapestry of festivals, fasts and feasts. No other cultural or religious system on this planet has ever developed a system as rich as this. The ancient Rishis of our Dharma not only were the recipient of divine instruction in the form of Vedas directly from the Parameshavar Himself, but they also possessed sharp intellect and a Trikal Darshi vision that could foresee the unfolding of time and human race over millenniums to come. So, using Vedas as their foundation, they developed this tapestry that we enjoy now as Sanatana Dharma.

Akshaya Tritya is one such day of festivals. It falls on the third lunar day of Shukla Paksha of Vaisaksh month, or on the third day of moon's waxing cycle in the Vedic month of Vaisaksh, roughly in May. The Sanskrit word Akshaya means one that has no decay- remaining as it is- in contrast to everything else in the universe that has Shaya property. Shaya subjects everything to decay over time; perhaps the best example that comes close to us all is our own body. As I write this, I am vividly reminded of Shaya's effects on my own body, and of many that I have seen in better shapes and sizes years ago! Tritya simply is the 3rd number in Sanskrit numerals. So it is a festival that celebrates One that has no Shaya, that is the Supreme Ishwar or Bhagvan, whose very nature is without any Vikar or change! Devotees call Him Narayana, Vishnu, Shiva or Nirguna Brahaman, realizing the mortal nature of their physical bodies!

Of the eighteen Maha Puranas or major Puranas of Sanatana Dharma, Matsya Purana narrates the method of undertaking this fast and its significance (falam).

अथान्यामपि वक्ष्यामि तृतीयां सर्वकामदाम् ।
 यस्यां दत्तं हुतं जप्तं सर्वं भवति चाक्षयम् ।१
 वैशाखशुक्लपक्षे तु तृतीया ये रूपोषिता ।
 अक्षयं फलमाप्नोति सर्वस्य सुकृतस्य च ।२
 सा तथा कृत्तिकोपेता विशेषेण सुपूजिता ।
 तत्र दत्तं हुतं जप्तं सर्वमक्षयमुच्यते ।३
 अक्षयासन्ततिस्तस्यास्तस्यांसुकृतमक्षयम् ।
 अक्षतैस्तुनराः स्नाताविष्णोर्दत्त्वा तथाक्षतान् ।४
 विप्रेषु दत्त्वा तानेव तथा सक्तून् सुसंस्कृतान् ।
 यथान्नभुक् महाभागः फलमक्षयमश्नुते ।५
 एकामप्युक्तवत् कृत्वा तृतीयां विधिवन्नरः ।
 एतासामपि सर्वाणां तृतीयानां फलं भवेत् ।६
 तृतीयायां समभ्यर्च्य सोपवासो जनार्दनम् ।
 राजसूयफलं प्राप्य गतिमग्रचाञ्च विन्दति ।७

(Matsya Purana, Chapter 65).

On this day, one should rise early in the morning and take bath with water in which some raw rice and couple of pinches of turmeric powder are mixed. A mixture in the proportion of a cup of raw rice and couple of pinches of turmeric powder is called Akshat. One should bath by mixing Akshat in water. One should worship Bhagvan Vishnu with Akshat on this day and then fast throughout the day. One should donate Akshat to a Brahman on this day. One should perform Homa and chant Vishnu's name such as Vishnu Sahastranama or simply Om Namō Narayana or Hare Ram Hare Krishna mantra according to one's ability.

Matsya Purana declares that all these spiritual activities conducted on the day of Akshaya Tritya give everlasting punya. Worship of Bhagvan Vishnu, appropriate Charity, Homa, and Japa performed on this day become Akshaya. These Punyas or positive merits do not deteriorate unlike that of other Punyas! They become infinite!

Akshaya Tritya has several historical events associated with it. This is the day when Bhagvan Vishnu took avatar as Bhagvan Parshuram under the Punarvaso nakshatra on this planet. Just like today, many evil kings had become powerful and one of them even killed Bhagvan Parshuram's own father Jamdagni.

To punish these evil kings, Bhagvan Parshuram annihilated these evil kings twenty one times from the face of the earth. The word parashu means an axe and is prefixed to this Rama because He wields a merciless axe and also to distinguish Him from Bhagvan Ram, His contemporary in the Treta Yuga. Bhavishya Maha Purana states Treta Yug started on the day of Akshaya Tritya. In more recent history, our Bharat's most powerful saint, philosopher, and social reformer, Srila Shankaracharya was born. So powerful was Bhagvatpada Shankaracharya that he single-handedly annihilated the dangers being posed to Sanatana Dharma by Buddhism and Jainism- perhaps not so different from the acts of Bhagvan Parshuram in salvaging this planet from wicked kings of His time .

In our Bharata Bhumi, this is the day perhaps best known for the opening of the gates of Badri Narayan Mandir located over 10,000 feet above the sea level in the Uttarakhand state. Because of extremely cold weather, the Mandir remains closed during winter and its gates are opened by its Head Priest or Rawal, a Nambudari Brahman from Kerala assisted by Dimiri Brahman of Garhwal on the morning of Akshaya Tritya. Large crowds of devotees travel on this day from far and near to have darshan of Vishnu as Lord Badri Narayan, one of eight *swayam vyakta kshetras*, or self-manifested deities of Bhagvan Vishnu. Far away in Bharat's eastern part in the state of Orissa. Chandan Yatra- literally, Sandalwood paste festival- indicates the application of the Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra deities with sandal mixed water. This auspicious day also marks the beginning of the construction of the Rathas, chariots for the ceremonial procession of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra to the Gundicha Temple on the day of Ratha Yatra festival. Starting businesses and buying gold are also done on this day.

So, come, let us celebrate Akshaya Tritya, let us celebrate Sanatana Dharma!!!