

MY MARATHI CULTURAL TOUR

An excerpt from the My Marathi© – Marathi learning CDs

This cultural tour will cover...*

- Marathi language
- The Hindu Religion, Hindu Calendar, Hindu Holidays
- Hindu Mythology
 - a. Ramayan
 - b. Mahabharat, Bhagavad Gita
 - c. The 10 incarnations of Vishnu
 - d. The story of Ganesh
 - e. The sanskars or major milestones of one's life
- Miscellaneous Cultural Traditions
- Maharashtra History, Indian independence

*** DISCLAIMER**

Note that all of the descriptions of cultural traditions given in this document are brief and meant only to give a very general understanding of each cultural topic. If you would like to explore any of these topics in greater detail, search the web or visit your local library.

The material presented in the cultural section of My Marathi may seem heavy on Hindu cultural items; but since the vast majority of Maharashtrians are Hindu, Hindu culture was given more focus than other religious traditions in My Marathi's Culture Module.

THE MARATHI LANGUAGE

Marathi, as well as many other languages, originated from Sanskrit. Marathi is spoken mainly in the state of Maharashtra and also in other central regions of India. Marathi is the official language of the state of Maharashtra. In different regions and due to different influences from British rule, the nature of the language differs from place to place. Dialects bordering other major language areas share many features with those languages. Konkani, Goanese, Deccan, Varhadi, Nagpuri, Ikrani, Gowlan are various dialects of Marathi.

HINDU RELIGION, CALENDAR, HOLIDAYS

The Hindu Religion

The various people of Maharashtra practice most of the world's major religions. They include Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Muslims, Jains, Buddhists, and many more. Eighty percent of Maharashtrians are Hindus. Hinduism is both a religion and a way of life. The Hindu Religion is based on dharma, or rules for good living.

Hinduism believes not only in One God, but also in His Infinite manifestations around us and within us perpetually. Realizing that it is impossible for mankind to visualize the Infinite, Hinduism presents us with His forms to help us visualize him. This belief of Hinduism is often confused with polytheism.

Hinduism believes in transmigration of the soul. Such transmigration is what results in reincarnation. This, in short, is the popular theory of Karma. Karma and rebirth are interrelated concepts in Indian philosophy. According to the theory of Karma, we are all part of a cycle of births and rebirths. This cycle has no beginning nor end. We are simply experiencing the results of our own actions in our journey through this cycle. Each spoke in the cycle is a predecessor to the next spoke.

The classical theory of the origins of Hinduism traces the religion's roots to the Indus valley civilization circa 4000 to 2200 BC. Among the most important of all Hindu sacred texts are the Vedas. Virtually all Hindus practice rituals of daily worship, or puja. The puja that takes place at home lays the foundation of all family actions and decisions. Hinduism embraces diversity and encourages daily spiritual, emotional and artistic acts of devotion. It embraces and accepts anyone who wants to be a part of it with open arms without trying to forcibly convert anyone to it.

(some excerpts were taken from <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/9410/hindu1.html> and from BMM MAIYTRA L.A. 2004's website)

Hindu Calendar

The Hindu calendar is based on the lunar cycle. It too has twelve months and to compensate for the difference in the number of days to the solar calendar, every three years an extra month is added called the adhik mahinA. (corresponds with the blue moon month.) Each month starts the day after a new moon and ends on the next new moon.

The 12 marathi months are:

चैत्र	chaitra	usually around April-May (Hindu Calendar)
वैशाख	waishAkh	May-June (Hindu Calendar)
ज्येष्ठ	jyeshhTha	June-July (Hindu Calendar)
आषाढ	AshhADh	July-August (Hindu Calendar)
श्रावण	shrAwaN	August-September (Hindu Calendar)
भाद्रपद	bhAdrapad	September-October (Hindu Calendar)
अश्विन	ashwin	October-November (Hindu Calendar)
कार्तिक	kArtik	November-December (Hindu Calendar)
मार्गशीर्ष	mArgasheerssha	December-January (Hindu Calendar)
पौष	paushh	January-February (Hindu Calendar)
माघ	mAgh	February-March (Hindu Calendar)
फाल्गुन	phAlgun	March-April (Hindu Calendar)

तिथी	tithee	day of the month (according to the lunar calendar)
पूर्णिमा	pUrNimA	full moon, full moon day (Lunar month)
अमावास्या	amAwAsyA	no moon, no moon day (Lunar month)

Hindu Holidays celebrated:

- **guDhee pADawA** (गुढी पाडवा)- is 1st day of the new year celebrated on the 1st day of the month of chaitra. Traditionally people well-wish everyone and hang decorations.
- **rAm nawamee** (राम नवमी)- on the 9th day of chaitra
- **hanuAn jayantee** (हनुमान जयंती)- full moon in chaitra month
- **akshay trRuteeyA** (अक्षय तृतीया)- one of the 3 ½ days of the year that the stars are aligned in a way that you don't have to look for a muhurata- any time is good
- **buddha pUrnimA** (बुद्ध पूर्णिमा)- day *Buddha* was born, full moon of waishAkh month
- **waTa pUrnimA** (वट पूर्णिमा)- day that women pray for their husband's long life and to have the same husband in their next life, full moon of the jyeshhTha month
- **AshhADhee ekAdashee** (आषाढी एकादशी)- 11th day of the AshhADh month
- **guru pUrnimA** (गुरु पूर्णिमा)- full moon of AshhADh- where you are supposed to honor your teachers shrAwaN is often considered the most auspicious month
- **nAgapanchamee** (नागपंचमी)- 5th day of shrAwaN month, worship cobras, perform pUjA, get mendee done
- **naraLee pUrnimA** (नारळी पूर्णिमा)- full moon day in shrAwaN, the day people in coastal regions would send coconuts into the ocean to appease the got of the ocean.
- **rakshA bandhan** (रक्षा बंधन)- full moon day in shrAwaN. That day women will tie a thread around a man's wrist and ask them to vow to protect them. Though popularly considered a brother/sister holiday, tradition has also shown that even a wife can tie a rAkhee on her husband for protection. The thread being considered a talisman of protection for both the wearer and the tie-er.
- **gokuLAshhTamee** (गोकुळाष्टमी)- on the 8th day of shrAwaN (which is 8th day after the full moon). It is the birth anniversary of Shrikrishna. Because Shrikrishna is associated with a young boy stealing butter, this festival is celebrated with earthen pots filled with curds hung high on the roads. Young people come in groups and try to break the dahee hanDee. "gowindA AIA re AIA" is the famous song sung on that day.
- **haritAriKA** (हरितारिका)- the 3rd day of the bhadrapad where ladies do haritAriKA pUjA- to obtain a good husband and to pray for long lives for their husbands
- **gaNesh chaturthee** (गणेश चतुर्थी)- The fourth day of bhAdrapad month is regarded as gaNesh chaturthee. Aratee is performed in the morning as well as in the evening. prasAd is distributed. gaNesh (also known as gaNapatee) likes the sweet dish modak. Lokmanya Tilak started this festival as a social function. A ten days utsaw is celebrated in each and every lane of towns and cities. The atmosphere is filled with people saying 'gaNapatee bAppa moriyA.' The festival continues for different periods – 1 ½ , 5, 7, or 10 days. The tenth day is called anant chaturdashee. For gaNesh chaturthee different idols are made from clay. On anant chaturdashee the idols are submerged into the sea or a river with a grand procession.
- **nawarAtree** (नवरात्री)- the first 9 days of ashhwin are the nawarAtree festival symbolizing the first nine days Lord Rama battled with the demon Rawan
- **dasarA/wijayAdashamee** (दसरा/विजयादशमी) The tenth day of the month of ashwin is called dasarA. dasarA is regarded as the victory day as in Hindu mythology God *Rama* killed *Ravana*. At that time the monsoons are over and the harvests are about to begin. That is why that day people give each other leaves of the shami tree as representation of gold coins to share prosperity. People worship weapons and vehicles also.

- **kojAgiree** (कोजागिरी)- full moon day in ashwin people stay up to watch the full moon while drinking sweetened warm milk with saffron and almonds. It is believed that the *Goddess Laxmi* (goddess of wealth) is wandering on that day to bless those who are awake.
- **diwALee** (दिवाळी)- is a group of festivals. The last two days of the ashwin month and the first two days of the kArtik month together are celebrated. The festival lasts for four days. People wear new clothes, decorate their homes with lights, and prepare pharAL foods (incl. IADU, karanjee, chiwaDA, tsakalee, anArase, etc.)
 1. **narakachaturdashee** (नरकचतुर्दशी)- This is the day that the *Goddess Laxmi* slaid the filthy demon narakAsur. On this day people get up early and clean the house and then have AbhyahsnAn- massaging the body with different oils and lotions before having a bath with scented soap. Then people go to the temple for darshan and come home to have pharAL.
 2. **lakshmee pUjan** (लक्ष्मी पूजन)- Inspite of it being a no moon night (amAwasyA), this day is regarded as an auspicious day. *Laxmi*, the goddess of wealth is worshipped. People decorate their houses with lamps as a sign to welcome the *Laxmi* into their house.
 3. **balipratipadA** (बलिप्रतिपदा)- is the first day of the month of kArtik on which the wife performs "owALaNee" (waving a tray of lamps clockwise) in front of the husband. A newly married couple is invited by the girl's father to celebrate diwALee. People visit each other and exchange good wishes and generosity with family and friends.
 4. **bhAUbeedz** (भाऊबीज)- on this day the sisters invite their brother to their house. Sisters perform Aratee for their brother and give them sweets. Brothers give presents to their sisters.
- **datta jayantee** (birth) (दत्त जयंती)- full moon day in mArgasheersha is called birth of the God shreedatta
- **makar sankrAnt** (मकर संक्रांत)- January 14th of every year- traditionally married women get black saris from their parents.
- **mahAshiwarAtree** (महाशिवरात्री)- 2nd to last day of mAgh month is people worship Lord *Shiva*.
- **hoLee** (होळी)- full moon day in phAlgun month. During the day people paint each other with color, throw colored water balloons and at night big bonfires are lit and burn puppets representing the demon *Holika*. puraN poLee is specially prepared on this day.

HINDU SANSKARS

The **sanskars** (sanskAr संस्कार) are the major Hindu cultural milestones or sacraments of a person's life. There are actually 16, but the major ones are:

- (Conception)
- DohAL jewaN (डोहाळ जेवण) – celebrated during pregnancy
- janma (जन्म) - birth
- bArasa (बारस)- naming ceremony for a baby
- munja (मुंज)- marks the beginning of schooling
- soD-munja (सोडमुंज)- marks the beginning of life after education is complete
- lagna (लग्न)- marriage
- antya sanskAr (अंत्य संस्कार) - last rites

lagna

The sacrament of marriage impresses upon a couple that Earthly life is not to be despised; rather it should be consciously accepted and elevated to the level of a spiritual existence. Marriage is a union of two souls for their own betterment, for the betterment of their progeny and relations. The Hindu wedding is not a contract; it is based upon mutual love and realization of responsibilities which must be upheld for the proper maintenance and perpetuation of the society.

The basic steps of the Hindu wedding ceremony:

- **madhuparka** (मधुपर्क) - welcoming the Bridegroom. The groom arrives for the ceremony with his family. The bride's parents welcome the groom and escort him to the mandap (altar). The ceremony begins with the following invocation by the priest:
"May pleasant winds enrich all the seasons, may the rivers be always filled with clean water, may the medicinal herbs be plentiful in the vegetation, may there be appropriate rainfall round the year. May this sky always keep us well provided through the sun, the plants and animal life."
- **Arrival of the Bride**- The bride is escorted to the altar by her maternal uncle (mAmA मामा)and family. The bride and groom stand facing each other ready to receive blessings from the congregation. A curtain called an antarapAT (अंतरपाट) is held between the couple to signify their separate identities, which will soon be merged.
- **mangalAshhTaka** (मंगलाष्टक) - blessings to the bride and groom. Auspicious and benedictory verses are recited by close relatives. At the end of each verse, the congregation joins in the blessings by throwing rice on the couple. Finally, the curtain is removed at an auspicious moment called muhUrta (मुहूर्त) and the couple exchanges garlands.
- **kanyAdAn** (कन्यादान) - giving away the bride. The Bride's mother pours water which flows from her husband's hands through the daughter's hands to the groom's hands before returning to the ground, symbolizing the life cycle. The bride and groom take vows.
- **akshatAropaNam** (अक्षतारोपणम) - expression of aspirations. The Bride and Groom in turn express their aspirations and express their agreement by sprinkling rice.
- Tying the auspicious necklace- **mangalasUtra** (मंगलसूत्र). The bridegroom places a sacred necklace around the bride's neck as a symbol of the sanctity of marriage. The bride and groom also exchange rings.
- **wiwAha hom** (विवाह होम) - prayers before the sacred fire. Offerings are made and the pledges are sanctified in front of the fire god Agni, who destroys ignorance and temptations and illuminates the path to truth and knowledge. The bride and groom walk around the sacred fire.

- Bride's brother steps forward and admonishes the groom to take good care of his sister by twisting his ear!
- **saptapadee** (सप्तपदी) - seven steps. The bride and groom take the seven symbolic steps together to symbolize their journey through life towards tranquility:

"When you take the first step, you become my provider; walk the second step for us to have strength and courage; this third step is for prosperity; please take the fourth step for happiness; let us walk this fifth step for progeny; walk this sixth step for many happy seasons together; with this seventh step, our everlasting friendship is confirmed."

- Conclusion of the Rites:
"I pray, may this sacred fire consider this ceremony to be complete. Everything here belongs to God; it is not mine. O God, you are complete; may our lives also be complete. Just as you pervade everything, may our lives be fulfilling. You are one and all; so be everything for us. You are without end; so make us like you. May there be Peace, eternal Peace."
- Invocations and Blessings: **AshirwAd** (आशिर्वाद)
"When you are absorbed in the contemplation of God, that's the true union, the auspicious time, support of the constellations, the knowledge and fortune. Let only noble thoughts come to us from the cosmos."
The priest leads the congregation in reciting the following verses:
"Come together, speak in harmony and may your minds stay in unison. May your union be enhanced through the union of your hearts, thoughts and minds. This God is complete, homogenous and infinite. From this unmanifest God, the manifest yet complete cosmos has emerged. May there be Peace forever."

Hindu Mythology

The two major epics of Hindu Mythology are the **Ramayan** and the **Mahabharat**. Each is made up of many stories teaching many different morals. In a nutshell...

The **Ramayan** is said to have been written by the Sage Valmiki. It is the story of Lord **Rama** from his birth until his defeat of the demon King **Ravan** and his final return to Ayodhya. According to Hindu mythology, Ram is one of the 10 incarnations of Vishnu which he specifically took to rid the world of Rawan. Rawan was the king of Shri Lanka- and he had abducted Ram's wife Sita (reincarnation of Laxmi – Vishnu's consort). Ram went to war with Ravan to save his wife and to defeat this treacherous demon. Two other important characters on this epic are Laxman and Hanuman. Laxman was Ram's faithful brother (incarnation of Sheshanag, Vishnu's 100 headed snake) who helps Ram in the war. Hanuman was a devotee of Ram and helps Ram in his quest to find Sita and defeat Ravan.

The overall moral of the story is the winning of good over evil, and loyalty to one's wife and between brothers. Each individual story that makes up the full epic has more lessons to be learned. Some Hindu holidays that originate from this epic are Navaratra (the nine days of the battle between Ram and Ravan), Dasara (the tenth day when Ram kills Rawan), and Diwali (celebrated on the day that Ram returns to Ayodhya).

The **Mahabharat** is an epic written by the Rushi Vyas about the story of the complex events leading up to and including the war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. This is another story of the struggle between good and evil fought between the good Pandava brothers and their unjust cousins the Kauravas over the kingdom of Hastinapur. Here Lord Vishnu comes to earth as Krishna siding with the Pandavas during this war. The Pandavas had tried all other peaceful alternatives to war, but war could not be avoided. Arjun, one of the Pandava brothers, struggled with the concept of killing his own kin. One pivotal part of the story led to the reciting of the holiest of Hindu scripture- the **Bhagavad Gita**. The Bhagavad Gita is the compilation of Krishna's counseling of Arjun to do the right thing towards his duty to the kingdom. Arjun and his brothers with the help of Krishna do go on to win the war, and prove to be just rulers of the kingdom of Hastinapur.

The story of Ganesh

Parvati (पार्वती) having been interrupted by Shankar (aka Shiva) a number of times while taking a bath decided that she would create her own sentry. So she molded the body of a little boy and breathes life into him and has him stand guard at her door. When Shankar returns, the boy does not let him in. Shankar in a fit of anger cuts the boy's head off. Parvati upon finding the lifeless body of her "son" is very upset. Shankar promises to bring the boy back to life, but the head is missing. Shankar sends his people to find another head to put on the boy. There are different versions of this story, but the servants bring back the head of a baby elephant. Shankar attaches the baby elephant head onto the lifeless body, and breathes life back into the boy. And to further appease Parvati, Shankar declares that before any undertaking is started, people should pray to her child Ganapati (aka Ganesh). Ganapati is known as the remover of obstacles. Ganesh's vehicle is a rat and in idols of Ganesh you will see His rat at His feet.

The 10 Incarnations of Lord Vishnu

The trinity of Hindu mythology:

- **Brahma** (ब्रह्मा brahma) – the creator
- **Vishnu** (विष्णु wishhNU) – the preserver
- **Mahesh** (महेश mahesh, aka Shankar or Shiva) – the destroyer

Though the lines between these three roles are not clearly drawn.

According to Hindu mythology there were times that on earth there were evils too powerful where Vishnu had to take form on earth to take action. There are 10 such incarnations or avatars of Vishnu.

1. **Matsya** avatar (मत्स्य अवतार matsya awatAr) – Vishnu comes to earth in the form of a giant fish who saves the first man on earth, manu, from a massive flood. He also kills the demon that stole the vedas from Brahma while he was sleeping.
2. **Kurma** avatar (कूर्म अवतार kUrma awatAr) – The elixer of immortality (amRut) that the Gods drink was lost in the ocean of milk. The Gods decide to use an inverted mountain to churn the ocean in order to get the amRut back. The mountain would not stay afloat, so Vishnu takes the form of a tortoise whose shell is used at the pivot on which the mountain is balanced.
3. **Varaha** avatar (वराह अवतार warAha awatAr) – The demon Hiranyaksha was granted a boon through his pennance to the Gods and asked that he may not be killed by any man or animal. But after obtaining this power he abuses it and tries to drown the entire planet earth. Vishnu takes the form of a giant boar, the only animal that the demon forgot to ask for power against. Varaha is then able to slay the demon and then uses his mighty tusk to rescue the earth.
4. **Narasimha** avatar (नरसिंह अवतार awatAr) – the demon Hiranyakashyapu was granted a boon through his pennance to the Gods and asked that he could be killed at neither day nor night, inside nor outside, by man nor beast, neither on the ground nor in the air, nor by any weapon. Hiranyakashyapu also abuses his power. His son Pralhad, a devotee of Vishnu, warns father to give up his evil ways and to believe in Vishnu who is everywhere. Hiranyakashyapu gets angry and asks if Vishnu is inside a stone pillar and kicks the pillar open to prove that He is not. Vishnu emerges out of the pillar in the form of Narasimha who is half man half lion. Narasimha takes Hiranyakashyapu and sits in the threshold of the doorway (neither inside nor outside), at twilight (neither day nor night), puts him over His lap (neither on the ground nor in the air) and kills Hiranyakashyapu with His sharp claws (with no weapon).
5. **Vamana** avatar (वामन अवतार wAmana awatAr) - King Bali was a generous king and became so powerful that he attained control of both heaven and earth. The Gods wanted to regain the control of heaven so Vishnu disguised himself in the form of a Brahmin dwarf, Vamana. He begs Bali to give Him three paces of land on which to meditate. Bali said sure. Then Vamana grew huge in size, put one foot on earth, one foot on heaven, so he won earth and heaven back. Then he asked Bali where should place his third step, and Bali generously offered his head. Bali was pushed down into the underworld and was allowed to rule the underworld. Bali is remembered for his generosity on the holiday balipratibadhA.
6. **Parshuram** avatar (परशुराम अवतार parashurAm awatAr) - Vishnu takes the form of Parshuram, the brahmin axe warrior, to rid the earth of vain and oppressive kings.
7. **Ram** avatar (राम अवतार rAm awatAr) – This incarnation of Vishnu is the hero of the epic Ramayan. (See story above.)
8. **Krishna** avatar (कृष्ण अवतार kRushhNa awatAr) – Krishna helps the Pandavas in the story of the Mahabharat (see story above) and also slays Kansa who had become a tyrant king. The stories of Krishna are vast and varied and are numerable to detail here.
9. **Buddha** avatar (बुद्ध अवतार budhha awatAr) – Buddha is the founder of the buddhist religion. His role on earth was to teach people how to attain nirvana through enlightenment.
10. **Kalki** avatar (कल्की अवतार kalkee awatAr) – Kalki is the incarnation of Vishnu that is yet to come. It is said that He will arrive during the apocalypse with a sword to save the good souls from annihilation.

Note that much of Hindu mythology tell stories involving Gods granting boons if one worshipped them faithfully. The Gods got into trouble when demons who once were loyal devotees, started to abuse their power. Since absolute power corrupts absolutely thus corrupting those demons, the Gods would have to step in, come to earth and straighten things out. A demon in marathi is called rAkshas (राक्षस).

The morals here are generally that just praying isn't enough; you have to also perform good actions with the means you have. In many of these stories, even demons were granted powers through devotion, but since they didn't use their powers for good actions, they end up getting hunted down.

Note that there is also some controversy as to if Buddha was added later as an incarnation, and if Balram was actually the ninth incarnation of Vishnu.

MISC. CULTURAL TRADITIONS:

These are just a few of the many traditions typical to Maharashtrian culture. A lot of traditions have become westernized, but most you will see performed all around you when you visit India. This certainly is not an all-inclusive list, but this should give you a taste...

- Marathis eat meals with their right hand only so that the left hand is free to serve, pass things or for whatever reason. If one is eating while sitting on the floor, one is usually sitting cross-legged (mANDee ghAIUn मांडी घालून) and sitting up straight.
- Performing namaskAr (नमस्कार) is one way of showing respect to an elder. There different forms of namaskAr for different degrees of respect. This act varies from just joining your hands together when saying namaskAr (also used when meeting someone new), to joining your hands together and bending over to touch the feet of the person you are showing respect to (wAkUn namaskAr वाकून नमस्कार), to the most respectful namaskAr called sAshhTAng namaskAr (साष्टांग नमस्कार) usually reserved for God. namaskAr should be performed without shoes on and should never be performed in doorways.
- Hindu culture puts great importance on respect for the elderly. There are many many occasions where it would be appropriate to perform namaskar. We will note just a few of these. wAkUn namaskAr is often performed at the feet of elders before leaving on a journey to obtain their blessing for a safe journey. You would also perform namaskAr (with joining hands or wAkUn) if someone elder gives you a gift. You would also perform wAkUn namaskAr to ask their blessings before an endeavor or occasion.
- In Hindu culture, the joint family usually lives under one roof. Older parents usually stay in the home with their sons, since daughters traditionally join husband's family. Woman traditionally take on their husband's last name and also traditionally make his first name her new middle name. In Maharashtrian Hindu wedding ceremonies the groom traditionally also has a chance to change the bride's first name, but grooms these days know better than to make a big change without consulting their wife to be.
- When serving food for a meal, there are some rules to food placement in plate. The vegetable, or bhAjee (भाजी) is placed on the right side of the plate (tAT ताट), condiments on the upper left (such as chutneys, loNatsa, koshimbir). At the top center a pinch of salt is sometimes placed, which signifies binding the person you are feeding to be loyal to you. (Note that you do not put salt on a puja plate offered to God, since you would not try to bind God as God's grace should come by God's will). puree, chapatti or other breads go in the lower center of the plate, and rice goes in the lowest center area.
- Wedding- the actual religious steps of the Hindu wedding are described with the sanskars, but there are also many other cultural aspects surrounding the wedding event. There is usually an engagement ceremony called a sAkhar puDA (साखर पुडा). Traditionally the family members of the bride and groom would hand deliver invitations to their guests. The wedding is scheduled at an auspicious date and time called a muhurta (मुहुर्ता) according to the Hindu lunar calendar. Households close to the bride and groom invite the family over for meals before the actual wedding date to celebrate – this is called a keLawaN (केळवण).
- It is also considered extremely disrespectful to touch anyone with your feet. If you touch someone with your feet accidentally, you will often see someone do a quick form of namaskAr (the motion of one hand down towards the floor then up to the chest) to basically say sorry for the mistake.

- Cleanliness is also very important in Hindu culture. If one has already started eating with their right hand, that hand should not be used to touch anyone else's plate. A hand or object such as a utensil that has already touched someone's mouth is considered ushTa (उष्ट) and should not touch other things unless washed.
- Traditional cultural garb- Ladies traditionally wear saris. The old fashioned was nau-wAree (or 9 yards), now 6 yard saris are more common. It is also common for ladies in Maharashtra to wear salwAr kamees and even western clothes on a daily basis. kuNkU is worn on the middle of the forehead- traditionally the color is red symbolizing the blood of your family. Traditionally widows do not wear kuNkU. Married ladies also wear a necklace with black beads called a mangaLasutra similar to how a wedding band is worn elsewhere in the world. On festive occasions ladies wear ornamental jewelry typical to the region. For example a bride might wear a nose ring called a nath which is worn on the left nostril. Traditionally men would wear a jhabbA (loose flowing shirt) and pAyadzamA (loose pant). A dhotar is a pant traditionally used to be worn every day by men, but nowadays is more for special occasions or religious ceremonies. It is thought auspicious to wear a Topee (टोपी) on auspicious occasions.
- You **owAL** (ओवाळ) someone (move a tray of lamps in front of someone) to ask the blessings of and to show respect to a person or God.

You start with a tray that should always have haLad, kunkU, akshatA (uncooked rice), supAree, usually a gold ring, and most importantly a small lamp with a flame fueled with ghee (usually oil is not used when **owAL**-ing God). The flame signifies the basic element of the fire of the sun that brings life, warmth, and energy. Therefore **owAL**-ing with this flame is a blessing of this energy.

When you owAL you hold the tray with both hands in front of the person or deity you are asking blessings of and move the tray in a clockwise direction around your view of their head. When **owAL-ing God** you apply kunkU and haLad to the middle of their forehead, and place some of the Akshat (uncooked rice) from the tray on top of their head.

Before **owAL-ing a person**- you apply kunkU, take suparee and move it clockwise around your view of the person's head then counter-clockwise, put the suparee back on the tray; take the ring and touch the ring to their forehead, then move it clockwise back to the tray, then counter-clockwise- put the ring down; then you actually owAL with the tray (move the tray around in three clockwise circles).

Traditionally the person/God giving the blessing is sitting and the person asking for the blessings (the person owAL-ing) is standing and is even a little bent forward in respect. owAL-ing is also referred to performing Aratee. BTW- you should never blow out the flame when you are done- it should preferably go out on its own or if necessary you can snuff it out.

- **daily pujAs at home**- Two idols of Gods are usually given to a girl at her wedding (Gauri [anapurna –providing food for the house] and Balkrishna [baby]- so the wife will perform puja to these deities in her new house. According to tradition the man of the house should do this puja daily. Nowadays it is done by whoever is home, usually the wife. The main steps in performing daily puja are bathing & drying the idols in water, apply chandan (sandalwood paste), kunkU, and hALad to the forehead of the idols. Place AkshatA and fresh flowers around the idols. Light a ghee lamp, agarbattee (incense), place a small portion of food in a bowl as prasad (प्रसाद). prasad is an offering to God that is blessed, and after the prayers are done, everyone in the house should eat this blessed food (some people prefer sweet milk, one fruit, or nuts). Then you recite prayers, which really can be any prayer you prefer. (Some are listed in the Conversations section)
- One always removes their shoes upon entering the house, which originated for hygienic reasons. In olden days you would also wash your feet before entering.
- When putting kunkU (कुंकू) on someone's forehead never use your pointer finger (usually not the pinky finger either). If you are applying both kunkU (red powder) and haLad (yellow), you can use your middle finger for kunkU, and your ring finger to apply haLad.

MAHARASHTRA HISTORY / INDIAN INDEPENDENCE

History of Maharashtra and Indian Independence

Maharashtra literally means Mahan Rashtra (Great Nation). People from the state of Maharashtra are called Maharashtrians or, since Marathi is the official state language, Marathis.

Shivaji is considered the creator of the Maratha nation. In the 1600's he united the Maratha chiefs from Maval, Konkan and Desh regions and carved out a small kingdom by defeating the Mughals. He stabilized the state with effective civil and military administration and adopted a policy of religious tolerance to accommodate all religions and sects in his state. The British took over in 1849 and ended the Maratha domination over the political scene of Indian history.

India gained its independence from British rule on August 15, 1947. Therefore this day is celebrated as Indian Independence Day. Another important national holiday is India Republic Day celebrated January 26th of each year. Some people important to the freedom movement were Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Lokmanya Tilak, Subhashchandra Bose, to name a few. These people are considered national heroes no matter what part region of India they were from.

Indian National Anthem

The song, Jana-gana-mana, composed originally in Bengali by Rabindranath Tagore, was adopted in its Hindi version by the Constituent Assembly as the National Anthem of India on January 24, 1950.

The Indian National Anthem is shown (and demonstrated) on the next screen...

The following is Tagore's English rendering of the anthem: Thou art the ruler of the minds of all people, dispenser of India's destiny. Thy name rouses the hearts of Punjab, Sind, Gujarat and Maratha, of the Dravida and Orissa and Bengal; It echoes in the hills of the Vindhyas and Himalayas, mingles in the music of Jamuna and Ganges and is chanted by the waves of the Indian Sea. They pray for thy blessings and sing thy praise. The saving of all people waits in thy hand, thou dispenser of India's destiny. Victory, victory, victory to thee.

जन गण मन अधिनायक जय हे
भारत भाग्य विधाता

पंजाब सिंधु गुजरात मराठा
द्रवि उत्कल बंग

विंध्य हिमाचल यमुना गंगा
उच्छल जलधि तरंग

तव शुभ नामे जागे
तव शुभ आशिष मागे
गाहे तव जय गाथा

जन गण मंगल दायक जय हे
भारत भाग्य विधाता

जय हे जय हे जय हे
जय जय जय जय हे

The first stanza contains the full version of the National Anthem:
jana-gana-mana-adhinAyaka, jaya he,
bhArata-bhAgya-widhAtA.
panjAb-sindhu-gujarAt-marAthA,
draviDa-utkala-banga,
windhya-himAchala-yamunA-gangA
uchchhala-jaladhi-taranga.
tawa shubha nAme jAge,
tawa shubha Ashishha mAge,
gAhe tawa jaya gAthA,
jana-gana-mangala-dAyaka jaya he
bhArata-bhAgya-widhAtA.
jaya he, jaya he, jaya he
jaya jaya jaya, jaya he!