

# Raksha Bandhan(Gamha Purnima)

Raksha Bandhan, (*the bond of protection*) or Rakhi is a Vedic festival primarily observed in India, Mauritius and Nepal, which celebrates the relationship between brothers, cousins and sisters. It is also called Rakhi Purnima in most of India. It is also celebrated in some parts of Pakistan. The festival is observed by Hindus, and some Sikhs and Muslims. The central ceremony involves the tying of a *rakhi* (sacred thread) by a sister on her brother's wrist. This symbolizes the sister's love and prayers for her brother's well-being, and the brother's lifelong vow to protect her. The festival falls on the full moon day (Shravan Poornima) of the Shravan month of the Hindu lunisolar calendar. One Islamic Scholar believes that Raksha Bandhan grew in popularity after Rani Karnavati, the widowed queen of Chittor, sent a rakhi to the Mughalempereor Humayun when she required his help.



Examples of Rakhi.

## Observance

The festival is marked by the tying of a rakhi, or holy thread, which comes in many colors and designs, by the sister on the wrist of her brother. The brother in return offers a gift to his sister and vows to look after her as she presents sweets to him. The brother usually presents his sister with an envelope filled with money, though other presents such as saris and clothing can be given. The brother and sister traditionally feed one another sweets. These sweets include anything from Jalebi, Kaju Katli, and Burfi. Since Indian kinship practices give cousins a status similar to siblings, girls and women often tie the rakhi to their male cousins as well (referred to as "cousin-brothers" in regional parlance) in several

communities. Unrelated boys and men who are considered to be brothers (*munh-bola bhai* or *adopted brothers*) can be tied rakhis, provided they commit to a lifelong obligation to provide protection to the woman or girl.

## Historical occurrences and mentions

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### **Santoshi Ma**

Ganesh had two sons, Shubh and Labh. On Raksha Bandhan, Ganesh's sister visited and tied a rakhi on Ganesh's wrist. Feeling and his two wives, Riddhi and Siddhi, for a sister. Finally, Ganesh conceded the demand, and Santoshi Ma (literally *the Mother Goddess of Satisfaction*) was created by divine flames that emerged from Riddhi and Siddhi.

### **Krishna and Draupadi**

Another incident from the epic *Mahabharat* concerns Krishna and Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas. She had once torn a strip of silk off her sari and tied it around Krishna's wrist to stanch the bleeding from a battlefield wound. Krishna was touched by her action and declared her to be his sister, even though they were unrelated. He promised to repay the debt and then spent the next 25 years doing just that. Draupadi, in spite of being married to five great warriors and being a daughter of a powerful monarch, trusted and depended wholly on Krishna. Krishna repaid the debt of love during the "*Cheer-Harai*" (literally "clothing-removing") of Draupadi, which occurred in the assembly of King Dhritarashtra when Yudhishthira lost her to the Kauravas in gambling. At that time, Krishna indefinitely extended her saree through divine intervention, so it could not be removed, to save her honor. This is how he honored his rakhi vow towards Draupadi.

### **Indra and Indrani**

According to this legend, a battle was being fought between the deities and the demons during the Hindu month of Shravana on a full moon day. It is said that the demons were in a dominating position and this troubled Lord Indra. His wife

Indrani, unable to see his husband saddened over losing the battle, prayed to God and prepared a sacred thread which she tied on the right wrist of her husband. As a result, not only did Lord Indra end up winning the battle but also escaped from it unhurt. The thread colour was red so it made red Raksha Bandhan popular among lovers.

### **King Bali and Goddess Laxmi**

According to a legend the Demon King Bali was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu had taken up the task to guard his kingdom leaving his own abode in Vaikunth. Goddess Lakshmi wished to be with her lord back in her abode. She went to Bali disguised as a woman to seek refuge till her husband came back.

During the Shravan Purnima celebrations, Lakshmi tied the sacred thread to the King. Upon being asked, she revealed who she was and why she was there. The king was touched by her goodwill for his family and her purpose and requested the Lord to accompany her. He sacrificed all he had for the Lord and his devoted wife. This thread was yellow that made yellow Raksha Bandhan popular among brothers and sisters. It is said that since then it has been a tradition to invite sisters in Shravan Purnima for the thread tying ceremony or the Raksha Bandhan.

### **Yama and the Yamuna**

According to another legend, Raksha Bandhan was a ritual followed by Lord Yama (the Lord of Death) and his sister Yamuna, (the river in northern India). Yamuna tied rakhi to Yama and bestowed immortality. Yama was so moved by the serenity of the occasion that he declared that whoever gets a rakhi tied from his sister and promised her protection, will become immortal.

### **Alexander the Great and King Puru**

According to one legendary narrative, when Alexander the Great invaded India in 326 BC, Roxana (or Roshanak, his wife) sent a sacred thread to Porus, asking him not to harm her husband in battle. In accordance with tradition, Porus, a Katoch king, gave full respect to the rakhi. On the battlefield, when Porus was

about to deliver a final blow to Alexander, he saw the rakhi on his own wrist and restrained himself from attacking Alexander personally.

### **Rabindranath Tagore & Rakhi**

Tagore's vision of celebrating Raksha Bandhan was totally different. According to him Rakhi is not only a festival of the siblings but it's a celebration of mankind and of humanity. He promoted the concept of unity and harmony among all members of the society. He believed that it is the responsibility of all the members of the society to help and protect each other and encourage a harmonious social life. For him Rakshabandhan festival is the celebration of fellow feeling and concern. Especially in today's context Tagore's vision is very much applicable as it teaches us to think and care for others. The history behind this festival dates back to the year 1905 when the British empire decided to divide Bengal, a state of British India on the basis of caste and religion. That time Rabindra Nath Tagore arranged a ceremony to celebrate Raksha Bandhan to strengthen the bond of love and togetherness between the Hindus and the Muslims of Bengal and together fight against the British empire. He used the platform of Raksha Bandhan to spread the feeling of brotherhood. It was his vision to spread the nationalist spirit among people from different ethnic groups. His literary works have always transcended race, gender, religion and geographical boundaries. In his works and his beliefs he has always felt that it is important to have freedom of mind irrespective of race, religion and culture.

According to him, if we can think beyond our religion and caste than only we can become true human beings. So to spread this message of love he thought Raksha Bandhan to be the most appropriate day to spread this message. Rabindranath Tagore in Shantiniketan started congregations like Rakhi Mahotsavas. This invoked trust and feeling of peaceful coexistence. The festival for them is a symbol of harmony. The tradition continues as people tie rakhis to the neighbors and close friends. It is a festival denoting National sentiments of harmony. So if we look in to the actual significance of this festival in today's world, which is full of crisis and strife, these kinds of rituals hold the key to peaceful existence. The

auspicious day of Raksha Bandhan can be used as a potent tool for social change, which could ultimately envelop everyone in a permanent bond of love and friendship. Tagore used a white threads for Raksha Bandhan thus made white Raksha Bandhan popular among Friends.

### **Rani Karnavati and Emperor Humayun**

A popular narrative that is centered around Rakhi is that of Rani Karnavati of Chittor and Mughal Emperor Humayun, which dates to 1535 CE. When Rani Karnavati, the widowed queen of the king of Chittor, realised that she could not defend against the invasion by the Sultan of Gujarat, Bahadur Shah, she sent a Rakhi to Emperor Humayun. Touched, the Emperor immediately set off with his troops to defend Chittor. Humayun arrived too late, and Bahadur Shah managed to sack the Rani's fortress. Karnavati, along with a reported 13,000 other women in the fortress, carried out Jauhar on March 8, 1535, killing themselves to avoid dishonor while the men threw the gates open and rode out on a suicidal charge against Bahadur Shah's troops.<sup>[20][21]</sup> When he reached Chittor, Humayun evicted Bahadur Shah from fort and restored the kingdom to Karnavati's son, Vikramjit Singh. Although contemporary commentators and memoirs do not mention the Rakhi episode and some historians have expressed skepticism about it, it is mentioned in one mid-seventeenth century Rajasthani account.

### **Gamha Purnima**

Rakhi is also celebrated as Gamha Purnima in Orissa. On this date, all the domesticated Cows and Bullocks are decorated and worshipped. Various kinds of country-made cakes called Pitha and sweets mitha are made and distributed within families, relatives and friends. In Orissan Jagannath culture, the lord Krishna & Radha enjoy the beautiful rainy season of Shravana starting from Shukla Pakhya Ekadashi (usually 4 days before Purnima) and ending on Rakhi Purnima with a festival called Jhulan Yatra. Idols of Radha-Krishna are beautifully decorated on a swing called Jhulan, hence the name Jhulan Yatra.