
Impressum

Ashutosh Vardhana:

Raksha Bandan, the Hindu festival of brothers and sisters

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION:

On a full moon day in July/August (22 August 2002) Hindus celebrate the festival of Raksha Bandan which celebrates the love and loyalty which brothers owe to their sisters. Ashutosh Vardhana describes the customs of the festival and the philosophy underlying it.

Ashutosh Vardhana:

Raksha Bandan, the Hindu Festival of Brothers and Sisters (22 August 2002)

A festival which serves to cement family relations and to honour women is Raksha Bandan, the festival for brothers and sisters. It is celebrated on the full moon day of the month of Shravana, which was 22 August this year. On this day brothers visit their sisters to bring them presents, which may be of material value or merely symbolic.

	<p>These show that they care for them and that it is their duty to protect them (raksha = protection). In exchange, the sister ties a coloured thread (bandan = band) around the right wrist of her brother while saying a prayer (mantra) which calls God's blessing upon him and thereby is to protect him from misfortunes. The thread also symbolises the tie between brother and sister.</p>
<p>Tying the rakhi</p>	

Nowadays brothers are admonished not to think that women are feeble and helpless. They must not see their duty to help them as a right to control them. Women can make their own decisions, and it is the duty of the men in their lives (e.g. brothers) to help them realise their ambitions.

Most festivals are related to an ancient story. In olden days, Indra, the king of the gods, had been defeated in a battle with the demons. His wife (!) Sachi tied a 'bandan' round Indra's wrist with the appropriate mantra and Indra became so strong that he defeated the demons in the next battle.

If a woman feels in need of a loyal male friend or wants to honour such a friend, she can also go to a man who is not her genetic brother and make him into her rakhi brother by tying the rakhi thread. From then on this man is no longer eligible to marry her and has the same duties as 'real' brothers. This ruse

has been used by women to turn a would-be lover (suitor) into a loyal friend.

NOTE

Non-Hindus should remember that Hindus believe in one GOD, the Absolute, who has no name, cannot be depicted and about whom nothing can be said. This one GOD manifests in many different forms of greater or lesser power and some of these manifestations are the 'gods' which are depicted in temples and homes, and about which so many stories are told.

Sachi was not Indra's sister, but old stories are seldom strictly logical.