

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SMT DROUPADI MURMU  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE MAHASHIVRATRI  
CELEBRATIONS AT ISHA YOGA CENTER**

**Coimbatore, February 18, 2023**

Om Namah Shivay! I bow to all that is 'shiva', which means 'shubha', all that is auspicious, gracious, benevolent in this universe.

I feel specially blessed today. Earlier in the day, I had the good fortune of having Darshan of Meenakshi Amman. I prayed before the Mother Goddess for the well-being of all.

I feel blessed to be here on the holy occasion of Mahashivaratri in the presence of Adiyogi. I am sure you too, like me, are feeling the special vibrations of this ambience. We are sensing a form of energy flowing through us that makes the whole cosmos alive. It was only last week that I was in Varanasi, the first of all the abodes of Shiva, and I had a darshan of various manifestations of the lord, in the Kashi Vishwanath temple and in the Kal Bhairav temple. In the end of December, I had the good fortune of praying before Mallikarjuna Swami at Srisailam. And now I am here, in the foothills of Velliangiri Hills, which is the Dakshin Kailash, another abode of Swayambhu Lord Shiva.

We refer to Lord Shiva as father, as 'Shiv Baba'. Yet, he also appears in the form of ardh-narishwar, half male and half female. It points to the masculine and feminine sides of every human being and is an expression of the ideal of balancing the two. What we call gender balance today comes alive so beautifully in that image!

Sometimes I wonder if Shiva is the sum total of all our religious feeling and spiritual thinking. Consider the various paths to the ultimate realisation and liberation, which can also be called mukti,

moksha or nirvana. Various traditions around the world speak of the path of devotion or bhakti, the path of wisdom of jnana, the path of yoga and so on. And Lord Shiva is the only one who is perceived to be the guiding light on any of these paths. Whether a seeker is a devotee of a personal god or a jnani seeking the Absolute or a yogi striving for the spiritual union, taking refuge in Lord Shiva is sure to lead to the objective.

In the same way, Lord Shiva is a deity for all, as he appears in his various manifestations matching each of us. He is a householder, a family man, like most of us. But he is also a sanyasi who has renounced everything and dwells in cremation grounds or atop mountains. He is the first yogi, the Adiyogi, and he also the first jnani who, for example, is said to have inspired Panini's grammar system, one of the tallest intellectual achievements of humankind.

Lord Shiva, as the name implies, is a benevolent deity, and yet in countless myths he is also depicted the ultimate fearsome deity, as revealed in another name for him, 'Rudra'. This might be why both Lord Rama and Ravana worshiped him. This way, he is the symbol of both kinds of energies, creative and destructive. He, indeed, transcends such pairs of opposites, because his destructive drive is also creative, leading to the regeneration and rejuvenation of the cosmos. It is this aspect of Shiva's personality that comes alive in the Tandav dance, which he also performed on the hill not far from here.

What can we mortals do before a God like this, but to be in awe, and bow down in worship? That is what I meant, when I began this address with the mantra 'Om Namah Shivay'. Adi Shankaracharya wanted us to know and realise the Eternal Shiva within all of us. He says, in his melodious Nirvan Shatakam:

न मे मृत्युशंका न मे जातिभेदः,  
पता नैव मे नैव माता न जन्मः।  
न बन्धुर्न मत्रम् गुरुर्नैव शष्यः,

चदानन्दरूपः शवोऽहम् शवोऽहम्॥

It means:

I have no fear of death, no caste or creed,  
I have no father, no mother, for I was never born,  
I am not a relative, nor a friend, nor a teacher nor a student,  
I am the form of consciousness and bliss,  
I am the eternal Shiva...

To the non-believer, all of this may sound like a matter of belief and myth. However, it is astounding that modern science has also begun to unravel some of the secrets of Shiva. In the early 20th century, as physics broke new ground and scientists made images of the movement of sub-atomic particles, they found tracing lines very similar to the movement of a dancing Shiva or Nataraja as depicted in traditional sculptures. What I am stating is, of course, a well-known theory. It shows that the ancient seers in their deep meditation perceived the true reality of the universe and expressed it their own language and symbols. Lord Shiva symbolises nothing but that Absolute.

That is why many learned non-believers too remain astonished by Lord Shiva. Ram Manohar Lohia, a staunch socialist, was an agnostic too, but he understood this supreme phenomenon called Lord Shiva very well. In an essay titled 'Ram and Krishna and Shiva', he wrote in 1956 [and I quote:]

“While Ram and Krishna led human lives, Shiva was without birth and is without end. Like God he is infinite, but, unlike God, his life consists of events in time and many landmarks and he is, therefore, more non-dimensional than God. He is perhaps the only non-dimensional myth or concept known to man. There is certainly none other that can reach him in this respect.” [Unquote]

Fellow seekers,

Today is Mahashivaratri, which in most parts of India marks the end of winter and beginning of sunny days. Mahashivaratri thus also marks the end of darkness – the darkness of ignorance, and opens the path to enlightenment. For those in search of higher ideals of life, today is an especially significant occasion. We also happen to be in the presence of a renowned rishi of modern times, Sadhguru-ji, who has done more than most to propagate the teachings of our past masters in all corners of the world. Countless people, especially young, from India and abroad have found in him the inspiration to make spiritual progress. Moreover, Sadhguru-ji has been teaching us about our social responsibility too, through his words as well as action.

Today, the world remains as torn in strife as ever, but it is also facing an unprecedented ecological crisis. The need for a balanced and compassionate life, in harmony with Mother Nature and all its children, was never felt so pressing as it does today. May this Mahashivaratri dispel darkness inside us and lead us all to a more fulfilling and flourishing life. I wish you a happy journey on this path, as the saying goes:

शवास्ते पन्थानः सन्तु।

May the spiritual light of Mahashivaratri brighten our paths every single day in our lives.

Thank you,  
Namaste!  
Jai Hind!