

## Festival of the month: Raksha Bandhan

by Ami Bhat (Lonely Planet Author) Aug 2016



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Celebrated all across India, and even Nepal, Raksha Bandhan is a festival that honours the unique relationship between a brother and sister. 'Raksha' literally means protection while 'bandhan' means a bond. It is on this day that a sister ties her prayers for the well-being and prosperity of her brother with a rakhi on his wrist. In return, the brother pledges to protect her honour.

### HISTORY

The roots of this festival go back to the Indian Mythological stories around Lord Indra and Lord Vishnu. One story has it that Sachi Devi, wife of Indra was advised by Brihaspati to tie a thread around his wrist before he went to a war against a demon. This was deemed to be the beginning of the tradition of Rakhi.

Another story says that when Lord Vishnu was retained by Lord Bali to help protect his empire, his wife Goddess Lakshmi missed him so much that she disguised herself as a Brahmin woman and tied a Rakhi to King Bali. In return, she asked him to set her husband free so that he could return back home with her.

The festival gained quite significance in the Indian history, with it setting off landmark events. It was during the assassination of Shishupal that Draupadi had tied a rakhi around Lord Krishna's bleeding wound. It was this bond that Lord Krishna honoured when he protected Draupadi from being disgraced by the Kauravas during the infamous 'vastraharan'.

Eons later, a Rakhi sent by Queen Karnavati of Chittorgarh to Emperor Humayun compelled him to rush to her rescue when her kingdom was being attacked by Bahadur Shah. Unfortunately, by the time he reached her, she had already committed Jauhar (self-immolation).

### RITUALS PRACTICED DURING RAKSHA BANDHAN

Raksha Bandhan is celebrated on Poonima (full moon day) of Shravan month of the Hindu calendar. However, the fervour of this festival starts a few days before the actual day with shopping. While the sisters sift through the elaborate, beautiful and thematic rakhis, the brothers shop for an appropriate gift for their sisters. On the day of Raksha Bandhan, the entire family gathers around in their traditional wear to celebrate the moment. After a small prayer, the sister does an aarti, puts a red vermillion with some rice onto her brother's forehead and then, ties the thread. The brother in return, gives a gift to his sister. The ritual ends with both of them offering each other a sweetmeat.

The basic tradition is the same across India but there are some unique ones that stand out:

#### AVANI ATTAM

The Brahmins of South India change their sacred thread or Janauai on this day. This tradition comes from the belief that on this day, Lord Vishnu helped recover the vedas that were stolen. This tradition is also, celebrated among the Brahmins of Orissa and Uttarakhand.

#### PAVITROPANA

Celebrated in Gujarat where the locals worship Lord Shiva with the belief that all negativity will be demolished by him and earth will have peace and prosperity. The rituals here involve an elaborate pooja of Lord Shiva, which is accompanied with offerings of special food.

#### JHULAN POORNIMA

People in West Bengal worship Lord Ram and Sita before the regular ritual of Rakhi.

#### NAARALI POORNIMA

This is celebrated along the coast of Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka and involves throwing coconuts into the sea. Predominantly followed by fishermen, this is a form of sea worship. Raksha Bandhan is celebrated later by cooking coconut based sweets and dishes.

#### KITE FESTIVAL

A month long Kite Flying festival takes place in Jammu, with locals flying kites of all sizes, shapes and colors.

No matter where you are in India, you are bound to experience something unique and yet something similar during Raksha Bandhan. It is a perfect way of spending time with your siblings – with some history, shopping, gifting and a little bit of teasing.

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Ami Bhat is senior marketing professional, currently on a break to pursue full-time travel blogging. A travel enthusiast, who loves sports, photography and dancing with equal passion, Ami believes in planning a short escape for every long weekend that can come up through the year. And when she cannot travel physically, she travels virtually through words on her travel blog. More on: <http://www.thrillingtravel.in/>



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