



Onam Festival

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Why in News

Recently, the **festival Onam** was celebrated across Kerala.

Key Points

- **The Festival:** Onam is a **major harvest festival in Kerala** and is celebrated to **honour the home-coming of Asura king Mahabali** who brought about peace and prosperity in Kerala.
- **Time:** It is one of the **three major festivals of Kerala**, celebrated during the month of **Chingam**, the first month in the **Malayalam calendar, Kollavarsham**.
 - The other two major festivals of the state are **Vishu** and **Thiruvathira**.
 - The **10-day harvest festival** begins on **Atham (first day of Onam)** and concludes on **Thiruvonam (last day)**.
- **Celebration:** Onam is celebrated by making **Pookkalam** (the flower rangolis). Other rituals are also performed which includes-**Vallam Kali** (the boat races), **Pulikali** (the tiger dances), **Kummattikali** (mask dances), **Onathallu** (martial arts), among others.

The main attraction is the traditional **Onam sadhya** (grand feast).

- **God vs Demon Story:**

- Battles between demons and gods are familiar to people everywhere. Gods emerging victorious over evil is an inseparable part of these battles.
- In India, too, these victories are celebrated in different parts of the country over the years. E.g. **Rama is good, Ravana is evil. Durga is good, Mahishasur is evil.**
- However, an exception to this has been the battle **between Mahabali (Asura or demon) and Vamana (avatar of Vishnu)**, where Mahabali is revered as the **unchallenged King of Malayalis**.
 - There are a few isolated places in India where demons are worshiped. E.g. There are some areas in Bihar and Bengal where **Mahishasur is king of Asur tribes.**
- Historians see these fights between god and demon in the context of fights between brahmins and non-brahmins and tribals in the past.

Asur Tribe

- Asur is among the 9 **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups** found in **Jharkhand** and are **Austro-Asiatic in origin**.
 - Besides Jharkhand, members of the tribe live in pockets of **Bihar, West Bengal** and a few other states.
 - The 2011 Census put the **number of Asur** at 22,459 in Jharkhand and 4,129 in Bihar.
- The Asurs **claim to be descendants of Mahishasur**, the buffalo-demon **whom Goddess Durga** kills after a spirited fight lasting nine nights.
 - It's this mythology in mainstream Hinduism that's celebrated in the form of the nine-day-long **Durga Puja**, but observed as '**Mahishasur Dasain**' among the Asurs, who hold a period of mourning during which they largely stay indoors.
- They celebrate festivals like **Sarhul, Karma, Dhanbuni, Kadelta, Rajj karma, Dasahara Karam.**

Source: PIB