Maha Shivaratri or Maha Sivaratri or Shivaratri or Sivarathri (Great Night of Shiva or Night of Shiva) is a festival celebrated every year on the 13th night/14th day in the Krishna Paksha (waning moon) of the month of Maagha (as per Shalivahana or Gujarati Vikrama) or Phalguna (as per Vikrama) in the Hindu Calendar (that is, the night before and day of the new moon). The festival is principally celebrated by offerings of Bael (Bilva) leaves to the Lord Shiva, all day fasting and an all night long vigil. Cannabis is traditionally used as an offering for Lord Shiva and his followers. Per scriptural and discipleship traditions, the penances are performed in order to gain boons in the practice of Yoga and meditation, in order to reach the goal more swiftly and avoid rebirth.

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Significance of the day

Per Hindu mythology, the day was determined as follows: after creation was complete, Parvati asked Lord Shiva which rituals pleased him the most. The Lord replied that the 13th night of the new moon, during the month of Maagha, is his most favorite day. Parvati repeated these words to her friends, from whom the word spread over all creation.

Rituals of Maha Shivratri

Tripundra refers to the three horizontal stripes of holy ash applied to the forehead by worshippers of Lord Shiva. These stripes symbolise spiritual knowledge, purity and penance (spiritual practice of Yoga), so also they represent the three eyes of Lord Shiva.
Wearing a rosary made from the rudraksha seed of the rudraksha tree (said to have sprung from the tears of Lord Shiva) when worshipping Lord Shiva is ideal. A rudraksha seed is a mahogany-like color, sometimes black, and sometimes may have traces of sacred sandalwood powder, turmeric, kumkum, or holy ash if the rosary was used in worship ceremonies or anointed.

On Shivaratri, only cold water and bael leaves are offered to the Lingam. Other traditional offerings, such as bathing Him in milk and Panchamruta (milk, curd, ghee, sugar and honey (symbols of sustenance) one after the other respectively, or anointing it with vermilion (kumkum) or white consecrated rice (Akshata) (symbols of fertility, or creation), are done on this day, when Lord Shiva is worshipped as the deity of dissolution. [1].

Chanting the Rudram is considered very auspicious.

**Other Traditional Worship of Lord Shiva**

*Main article: Jyotirlinga*

The twelve Jyotirlingas (lingams of light) are sacred shrines of Lord Shiva, and centres for his worship. They are known as Swayambhus, meaning the lingams sprung up by themselves at these places and temples were built there afterwards.

Temples are listed in the India tourist guides.

**Mahashivaratri in Southern India**

Mahashivaratri is celebrated widely in the temples all over Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Shiva is considered the Adi (first) Guru from whom the yogic tradition originates. According to tradition, the planetary positions on this night are such that there is a powerful natural upsurge of energy in the human system. It is said to be beneficial for one's physical and spiritual wellbeing to stay awake and aware throughout the night.[2] On this day, artists from various fields such as music and dance perform the whole night.

Thrikkuratti Mahadeva Temple[3] is one among 108 sivalayas built by Lord Parasurama, situated in Mannar, also known as The Bell Metal Town, a major business town mid way between Mavelikara and Thruvalla, in Alappuzha District of Kerala state, India, on State Highway 6 (Kayamkulam – Thruvalla Road). It is believed that the mammoth Thrikkuratti Mahadeva temple compound wall was built by Bhootangal of Lord Paramasiva in one night. The unique festivities of Thrikkuratti temple (Sahasra Kalasam, Maikatti Puja and Sivarathri Nritham) attracts lots of pilgrims. The antique wooden carving of Thrikkuratti Mahadeva temple's Sricovil came to lime light recently through visual media, attracting lots of art lovers including foreigners. At a special Nada (gate) on the east side of the Thrikkuratti temple compound wall, other religious members, in particular, Muslims, present offerings on a daily basis. This practice is believed to be centuries old and this is considered to be a true embodiment of religious harmony. The Thrikkuratti Mahasivarathri Festival, only next to Aluva Sivarathri in terms of mass congregation, attracts thousands of devotees. The West Nada (Parvathi) will be open for ten minutes during Sivarathri Nritham on Sivarathri day only. All other days during the year it remains closed. The Srikovil of Thrikkuratti Mahavishnu temple is built based on North Indian architecture.

The Mahasivarathri festival at Thrikkuratti Mahadeva temple is different from other temples due to its unique festivities. Though the spectacular and colourful cultural programs are performed by renowned
artists during these eleven days, the main emphasis is for Sahasrakalasabishekam, Sivarathri Nrutham, and Mahasivarathri Procession.

**Sahasrakalasabishekam**

This is a very special and rare puja conducted during 10 days of Mahasivarathri festival. It is well known that Lord Siva is abhishekapriya (lover of ablutions). Lord Parasurama and Kroshta Muni, during their worship of the Lord here, are believed to have bathed the deity with Sahasrakalasam or a thousand pots of holy water according to Vedic rites. Now during Mahasivarathri festival days the Head Priest (Thanthri) and his team perform this puja. It is a ten day function, each day an offering of 101 Kalasam or pots of holy water (100 being made of silver, while one is made of gold), surcharged with mantras recited by learned Brahmins seated on the Mukhamantapam. These are emptied on the deity, the golden pot Brahmakalasam being the last one. A magnificent light is the indication or identity of Lord Shiva and the Shiva Lingam is considered to be the symbol of it. Hence, the formal worship on Mahasivarathri consists of bathing the Shiva Lingam. Lord Shiva is said to be burning with the fire of austerity and so only those items are offered to Him that have a cooling effect. A cool water bath is believed to propitiate Him best. There is a belief among devotees that participation in Sahasrakalam and offering holy worship materials, will lead to blessings with prosperity and peaceful life. Hundreds of devotees thronging the shrine with chants of “Namah Shivaya”, “Hara hara Mahadeva”, and “Sambho Mahadeva”. This year Mahasivarathri is observed on 2nd March 2011 in all of South India's temples.

**Sivarathri Nrutham**

Sivarathri Nrutham at Thrikkuratti temple, according to religious scholars, resembles the cosmic dance of Shiva, called ‘Anandatandava,’ meaning, ‘the Dance of Bliss’ symbolizing the cosmic cycles of creation and destruction, as well as the daily rhythm of birth and death. The dance is a pictorial allegory of the five principle manifestations of eternal energy - creation, destruction, preservation, salvation, and illusion.

The Priest keeps sheeveli vigraha (idol) fixed on decorated frame on his head. He makes seven rounds on Pradakshina Vazhi (holy walkway made of granite around Sanctum Santorum). When the fifth round is reached at the west nada (Parvathi nada), the door opens for just 10 minutes. This is an annual ceremony. Thousands of Pilgims rush to have a glance of this auspicious moment. At this time all the pradakshina vazhi will be lit with camphor and brass temple lamps by thousands of devotees who stay awake through the night while chanting “Nama Sivaya”, “Hara Hara Mahadeva” and “Sambho Mahadeva”. Older devotees sing “Hara sankara siva sankara duritham kala sivane”. In this enlightened serene mood, the Priest performs Nrutham and runs the pradakshina vazhi towards the east nada. During the next two rounds he accepts “Valiya kanikka”. The Sivarathri Nrutham is followed by the well known magnificent display of fireworks.

**Mahasivarathri Procession**

On Sivarathri day evening a grand procession starts from Kadapra Kainikkara Temple. It includes, several decorated floats, Kaavadi Aatam, Mayilattom, Amman Kudom, Thaiyyam, Vela Kali, Kuthiyotta Chuvadu, richly caparisoned elephants and folk art forms etc. attracts thousands of devotees and tourists. When the main procession reaches Market Junction, other mini processions from Kurattikkadu Mutharamman Temple, Kurattissery Kannamkvil Mutharamman Temple, Thrippavoor Mahavishnu Temple, Vishavarsherikkara Subrahmany Swami temple and Alumoodu Sivaparvathy Temple joins and makes the procession quite livening. The marvellous as well as magical effect of the Sinakari melam and Panchavadyam, a combination of five percussion and wind instruments is to be felt.
and enjoyed. Among the varieties of festivals celebrated in Kerala, Thrikkuratti Sivarathri Procession is one of the most thunderous, spectacular and dazzling. It is an expression of popular fascination for sound and colour, and because of the pageantry, it appeals to all people including foreigners. Once the procession reaches the temple, Deeparadhana is followed by colourful display of fireworks.

**Padanilam Parabrahma Temple Sivarathri**

Padanilam is a small town situated about 10 mi (16 km) from Mavelikkara and 9 mi (14 km) from Adoor, in the Alappuzha district of Kerala. The Padanilam Temple[^4] is located in the heart of Padanilam. The distinguishing characteristic of the temple is that it has no compound walls and roof. The presiding deity of the temple is lord Parabrahma. This is one of the few temples in Kerala where a large number of festivals are being conducted. Among its festivals, Sivarathri is celebrated in a spectacular manner. Besides day to day rituals, there is a special kavadiyattam and Kettulsavam. The programs last until midnight of Sivarathri day. The Onattukara region, spread over Kayamkulam and Mavelikara, has come alive with the Sivarathri festival.

Steeped in history, legends and endearing tales of religious harmony, the temple saw thousands flocking to its premises to have a glimpse of the gigantic, colorful temple cars bearing equally huge effigies of bullock. Seventeen huge bullocks were brought to the ‘padanilam’ in energetic processions that were accompanied by thumping music and dancing devotees. Brought from the 13 provinces of Palamel, Edappon, Muthukatukara, Naduvelmuri, Thathamumna, Nedukulanjimuri, Ulavakad, Kidangayam, Pazhanjikonam, Pulimel, Edakunnann, Patoor and Puthupallikunnam, the ritual of the bullocks paying homage to the temple deity is part of what is said to be one of the biggest such festivals in the state.

**References**

1.[^Scientific information of Mahashivratri](http://www.ishafoundation.org)
2.[^http://www.ishafoundation.org](http://www.ishafoundation.org)
3.[^http://www.thrikkurattimahadevatemple.org](http://www.thrikkurattimahadevatemple.org)
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Maha Shivaratri - The 'Great Night of Lord Shiva'

**External links**

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