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Shivratri celebrated with great joy in Krishna's land

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Vrindavan, February 18th 2015: Mahashivratri was observed in Vrindavan on Tuesday. The devotees of Lord Shiva celebrated the religious festival with great enthusiasm. The Shiva temples of Vrindavan were thronged by the devotees to offer prayer. The temples of Gopeshwar, Reteshwar, Gokuleshwar, Govindeshwar, Bankhandeshwar, Taleshwar were crowded by the devotees to worship their adored. The devotees remained on fast and performed spiritual meditation by following rituals to commemorate Mahashivratri and be blessed with grace.

In the early morning, they began visiting the temples to offer water, milk and bel leaves on the Lingam. Thousands of devotees visited the most famous Gopeshwar Temple of Vrindavan. The temple of Bankhandi Mahadev also attracted a big number of crowds. Holy mantras were also recited and special puja ceremonies were held throughout the night to celebrate the Shivratri. For women, Mahashivratri is an auspicious festival. They observed fast and offered prayers both to Lord Shiva and Parvati to shower their grace with a peaceful and blissful married life.

During the day, Gopeshwar Mahadev appeared as a large Shiva lingam, and in the evening He was dressed as a gopi, with colorful sari and ornaments. On Maha Shivratri many thousands gathered to bath Gopeshwar Mahadve with milk and water, and make offering of bael leaves and flowers. The Shiva temples of Vrindavan were decorated with the colorful lights and flowers.

Numerous interesting and intriguing mythological stories are believed pertaining to the celebration to Mahashivratri. In a version, devotees believe that Shivratri is auspicious because it marks the marriage ceremony of Lord Shiva and Parvati. However, many believe that Mahashivratri signifies the auspicious night when Lord Shiva performed the dance 'Tandava' that led to the creation, conservation and devastation of the universe.

The Gopeshwar Mahadev has special significance with the pastime of Shri Krishna. It is said that, desiring to witness Krishna's dance with the gopis (the Rasa –Lila), Lord Shiva approached Vrindavan, but was barred entrance by the gopi Vrinda Devi. She explained that Krishna was the only male allowed to enter the arena of the dance. But, seeing Shiva's intensely heartfelt desire, he was instructed to bath in the Yamuna. He emerged from the Yamuna in a female form, that of a gopi, and was given the service of guardian of the dance. Since then, Gopeshwar Mahadvev has been seen as the gatekeeper of Vrindavan. Those who seek to enter Vrindavan, not merely physically, but in spirit, approach him for blessings. In this mood, the Vaishnava saint Vishvanath Chakravarty Thakur prayed in his book Sankalpa Kalpadruma:

Vrindavanvani-pate jaya soma soma
maule sanandana-sanatana-naradeya
gopishvara vraja-vilasi-yuganghri-padme
prema prayaccha nirupadhi namo namas te
"O Shiva, O gatekeeper of Vrindavan! O you who are accompanied by Uma (Parvati)! O you who carry the moon in your hair! O lord worshiped by Sananda-kumar, Sanat-Kumar and Narada Muni! O Gopishwara, the worshipable deity of the gopis! Desiring that you bestow upon me love for the divine couple, Sri Sri Radha Madhava, (Radha and Krishna) who perform joyous pastimes in Vraja, I offer my obeisances unto you again and again."

It is said that Shrila Sanatan Goswami used to visit Gopeshwar Temple every day. When he was old, it was difficult to walk that far. So Gopeshwar Mahadev came to the mid way to give him darshan. Gopeshwar Mahadev was renamed as Bankhadeshwar Mahadev. This temple is mostly visited by the local Brajwasis.

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1.49 No glimpse of the rasa in even the topmost Upanishads

1.39 "May Vrindavan transform and protect me."

1.74 Serve those who live in Vrindavan, absorbed in Krishna rasa

1.43: Those who die in Vrindavan are the greatest Vaishnavas