

Karaka Chaturthi

Karva Chouth is mainly a social and seasonal festival -- albeit, with a lot of mythical tales added later. Karva means clay pot, and Chouth is the fourth. Specifically, Chouth in this case is the fourth night after new or full moon (here chouth is the adjective from 'char' meaning four).

Karva Chouth falls every year (according to Lunar calendar) -- if I am correct - - on the fourth night after the Full Moon following Autumnal Equinox. It therefore does not 'move'.

This time of the year is just past the harvest of summer crops and people are usually in a festive mood. They like to remember and meet their relatives and friends, and exchange gifts with them. Diwali is a similar seasonal festival -- in addition to having religious significance -- to take place in a few weeks time.

The idea behind Karva Chouth is very sweet and noble, and some very intelligent person must have thought of it long ago. Girls (sometimes barely teenagers) used to get married and go and live with their in-laws in other (often very remote) villages. Everyone would be a stranger for a bride in the new village. Moreover, if she had any problems with her husband or in-laws, she would have no one to talk to or seek support. Her own parents and relatives would be quite far and unreachable. There used to be no telephones, buses and trains etc. People had to walk almost a whole day to go from one place to other barely twenty miles apart. Once the girl left her parents' home for in-laws, she might not be back before more than a year's time.

Thus the custom started that, at the time of marriage, when bride would reach her in-laws, she would befriend another woman there who would be her friend or sister for life. It would be like god-friends or god-sisters. Their friendship would be sanctified through a small Hindu ceremony right during

the marriage. Note that the bride's friend will usually be of the same age (or slightly older), married into the same village (so that she does not go away) and not directly related to her in-laws (so there is no conflict of interest later). BTW, as a religious duty, the in-laws would pre-appoint (even before the bride reaches there) a suitable and reliable woman for this job (as the bride's would-be friend).

Once the bride and this woman have become god-friends or god-sisters, they would remain so all their lives and recognize the relation as such.

They would also treat each other like real sisters. During any difficulty later in life, involving even the husband or in-laws, these women would be able to confidently talk or seek help from each other. Moreover, bride's parents would treat her friend just like their own daughter. Emotionally and psychologically, it would be very healthy and comforting for the bride to have her own 'relative' (god-sister in this case) living next door in the strange and new village. What a fantastic idea it was!

Thus Karva Chouth was really a festival to celebrate this friendship (relationship) between the once-brides and their god-friends. Praying and fasting for the sake of husband started later and is secondary. Husband (along with other mythical tales) probably came into the picture to give the festival more importance. Don't forget the husband anyway, because the day of starting this holy friendship between two god-sisters happens to be his marriage-day also. This perhaps makes a good excuse to fast in his name. Rightly so, anyway. If everyone (including the husband) is okay, even through a prayer, all will be happy.

For Karva-Chouth, women would buy new Karvas (clay pots) and paint them on the outside with beautiful designs. Inside, they would put bangles, candy and other sweets, make-up items and even clothes. The women (god-friends or god-sisters) then would visit each other on the day of Karva-Chouth and exchange these Karvas. Season-wise, in terms of harvest, it is a good time to exchange the gifts any way.

So Karva Chauth is basically once a year occasion to renew and celebrate this relationship between god-sisters. It had a tremendous social and cultural significance once when world lacked the ways to communicate or move around easily.

Karva Chauth is also known as Karaka Chaturthi. ...

Karva Chauth Significance - Importance of Karva Chauth Festival
Karva Chauth, also known as Karaka Chaturthi, is one of the biggest North Indian Hindu traditional festivals. Karva Chauth is a great festival indicated to the sacred relationship of husband and wife. Hindu marriage allocates some responsibilities and duties to both wife and husband. This festival reminds them their duties to perform certain rituals or pujas to maintain healthy and long-lasting relationship. As per the Puranas, wife is the protector or life-giver to her husband and as well as to her whole family. Karva Chauth is celebrated on the fourth day in Kartik month. As Kartik month is very auspicious according to Hindu beliefs and this festival has great significance.

On Karva Chauth festival day, women wake up early in the morning and perform ritual bath. They perform puja to Lord Ganesh, Shiva, Gauri (Parvati) and Lord Kartik (Katikeya or Subramanya). Women observe the puja for better health and wealth for their family members. On this day, mother-in-law (Sasu) offers special food 'Sargi' for her daughter-in-law (bahu).

Karva Chauth upvas vrat is most important aspect of this festival. Women observe fast right through the early morning till the moonrise in the night. They observe very strict fast that they even avoid taking water. After Chand Pooja (worship of Moon God), women break their fast and look at their husbands' faces and touch their feet for blessings. Courtesy : Hindupad

Karva Chauth also known as 'Karaka Chaturthi' a Hindu festival, symbolic of unflinching loyalty of a wife towards her spouse. The festival is celebrated nine days before Diwali, or the festival of lights, on the fourth day of the waning moon in the Hindu month of Kartik, around October-November.

On the eve of Karva Chauth, the markets are full of women preparing for it. Henna stalls are set up all over the market. Bindi's, glass bangles and all the various types of cosmetics are sold everywhere. Mother-in-laws, on this day, gift various types of sweets, and dresses to their daughter-in-laws (called 'sargi' in Punjabi). Married women, old and young, begin their fast on the day of Karva Chauth well before sunrise (around 4 a.m.), such fasts are kept for the well-being of her husband, who becomes her protector after she leaves her parents home. Her husband provides her with food, shelter, clothing, respectability, comfort and happiness. This is indeed a very tough fast to observe as it starts before sunrise and ends after worshipping the moon, which usually rises at about 8.45 p.m. No food or water is to be taken after 4 a.m. or after sunrise.

Early in the morning, before sunrise, the married women of a household bathe, get ready and gather to eat an early meal, typically consisting of sweets. They pray to Lord Shiva and Parvati, hoping that their married life would be as successful as theirs. In the afternoon, mothers of newly wed girls give 'Baya' to the parents of their son-in-law. Baya, consists of Snacks, Dry fruits, and some gift items decoratively placed on a plate. In every neighbourhood, the married women gather together in small or large groups to perform a puja and to recite the story of Karva Chauth, this is considered a very important part of the day proceedings. Most women are dressed in beautiful red or pink saris and in traditional Gold and silver Jewellery.

A sari (in the baya) is a must for the first Karva Chauth of a girl. One thing to be taken care of is that the baya reaches the girl's in-laws home, where the girl has gone during the course of the day, before the evening. The baya is given to the mother-in-law after the manasna. The preparation for the puja starts at about 4 or 5 p.m. Someone older, who is willing, or the housewife herself as the situation demands, prepares a suitable place in the puja room, in case it is a big room which can accommodate all the women who have been invited for the baya. The puja place is decorated with kharia matti, which has been soaked in water two to three hours earlier, and takes a semi-liquid form. A chowk like in any other puja - is decorated on the floor. This whole chowk should be placed against a wall on one side, where a similarly decorated patta is kept, on which the Gaur Mata is seated. The Gaur Mata used to be made with cowdung in the shape of a human figure, just about two inches tall.

Nowadays, a picture or an idol of Parvati is placed on the patta just about an hour or so before moonrise, those who have observed the vrat, dress up again in their chunris or in red or pink clothes with chonp and bindi on their foreheads. Everyone now gathers around the place where a carpet or durrie is spread over the leaving space for the puja items.

The baya of individual is kept on a thaali, over the karva, with a little water and seven pieces of pua in it (seven broken from one bigpua). The karva itself is dee with kharia, aipun and a little roli. A strand of (red thread) of any thickness is tied around the part of the karva. The top cover is also decorated in the thaali is placed on the cover. The women sit facing the and one elder member of the family narrates the story and does the chanting, each woman doing the puja. First of all, roll teeka is applied on the forehead of Gaur before the start of the puja. All the women doing puja also apply roli teeka on their foreheads and parting (known as maang). Everyone does puja by dipping the third finger of the right hand in water sprinkling it with the help of the thumb three time the deity; the same procedure has to be repeated aipun and roli

and, lastly, the rice is showered, depicts the bathing of the deity, decoration with a putting of the teeka with roli and, lastly, worship the deity with rice.

After the puja, each one collects her Baya back and given it to the eldest member of the family who blesses the woman with all the happiness in life. This eldest woman can be mother-in-law or in her absence, sister-in-law or wife of husband's elder brother or some other such family relation. After this Moonrise is eagerly awaited and everyone in the family from smallest kids to eldest menfolk keep a lookout for it. Its very festive to see everyone in the neighbourhood walking around streets and on rooftops waiting for moon to rise. To show their affection and appreciation, husbands come home from work early on these days and break the wife's fast with their own hands after the moon sighting.

Once the moon is sighted, women gather on the terrace and offer prayers to the moon 7 times. They see the moon through chalni (a metallic ring with net). Then they look at their husband's face the same way. They pray for their husband's and family's welfare. Then they have a sip of water and in this way the fast comes to an end. In the state of Uttar Pradesh, women decorate the entrance walls of their home with drawings of goddess Parvati, the Moon and the Sun. The evening puja is performed with earthen lamps and a 'karva'. (earthen pitcher). Before looking at the moon, the women pray to the figurines at their doorstep.

In state of Rajasthan, the women make 'Karvas' with mud containers, filled with rice and wheat. Most women wear their wedding day veils on this occasion. In state of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh also many women observe this fast. The first 'Karva Chauth' of any new bride is a very important festival. New clothes, new Jewellery and gifts from both mother and mother-in-law are received. The wedding day outfits are worn once again, henna is decoratively applied on hands and feet and the family gathers to celebrate it with them.

(Courtesy: Different Sources)

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