

-- Rakshabandhan --
A Bond of Universal Protection

Its time each brother extends his vow to protect and to have pure feelings towards all women just like he does for his own sisters.

Love, care and protection are needed by all human beings. The festival of Rakshabandhan, celebrated in the month of *Shravan* (August) on full moon day, commemorates the sacred loving relationship between brothers and sisters. On this day sisters tie a decorative thread on the wrist of their brothers, apply a *tilak* on their forehead and pray for their well-being who in return promise to take care of and protect the sisters.

The deeper significance of this festival has been lost in the loud commercialisation and ritualistic traditions marking the day. Today sisters choose flashy and stylish *Rakhis* for brothers and look forward to receiving expensive gifts from them. Unknown to many, this festival is rooted in several myths and a spiritual truth of great significance that reflect its purity and power of protection.

How did this festival come to be celebrated as a promise for protection of sisters by brothers? It is believed that there was a 12-year long war between deities and demons, which was won by the latter. The king of deities Indra vowed to claim back his sovereignty by waging another war with the demons. Before going to war his wife Indrani tied him a *rakshasutra* as a symbol of protection. Indra won the battle and the deities reclaimed their sovereignty over heaven.

According to another legend, when Yamuna, the sister of Yama, the lord of death tied a *rakhi* to him, he declared that whosoever would tie this bond of purity and eschew lust would be liberated from the fear of death and attain a place in the land of immortality, i.e. heaven.

These stories highlight the fact that when purity is upheld in any relationship it turns into a power of protection. Today it is a sad truth that even though brothers vow to protect the honour of their sisters, many women fall prey to the lust of men. Today most women or girls feel unsafe and insecure due to the rising incidence of crime against women. It is not possible for a brother to protect his sister all the time. If the brother is younger, physically ill or staying far away how can he protect his sister?

In this scenario, what can we do to make this festival more meaningful and empowering? It is important to create awareness amongst men who indulge in crime against women to think of their own sisters for whose well-being they feel responsible and concerned. Isn't it time that each brother extends his vow of protection and to have pure feelings and vision towards all women just like he does this for his own sister?

If we think about it, everyone including males, needs protection in today's times of wide spread fear and insecurity. Humans have limited resources and power. Nobody can ensure the safety of others. Only God is the Supreme Protector who can provide us true safety and security.

In fact the deadliest enemy of all humans are the vices — lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego. These vices are the root cause of all criminal and sinful actions done by humans and they are born out of body consciousness. Brahma Kumaris see all humans as spiritual beings and make them aware of their spiritual identity as brother souls. This soul consciousness and outlook enable the aspirants to go beyond the evil effects of physical attractions and repulsions and thereby enable them to overcome vices like sex-lust, ego or attachment. That is why, after tying rakhi, Brahma Kumaris do not accept any material gifts but request people to donate and sublimate their inner vices and negative traits in the subtle fire of spiritual knowledge and rajyoga meditation.

The practice of soul consciousness also empower the seekers to connect their mind to the Supreme Soul in meditation, so that His pure company through such mental communion help them to get rid of vicious addictions, habits and impure lifestyle. By purifying the self in this way, one can get complete divine protection from all calamities, dangers and diseases.

This exactly is the subtle meaning and true message of Raksha Bandhan in which applying of *tilak* on forehead implies promoting the practice of soul consciousness among all men and women in order to unite all humans in the bond of pure love. Similarly, tying of nylon thread round the wrist, spiritually reminds people of their pledge for purity which itself is the source of their and their sisters' peace, happiness and protection.

By such meaningful way of observing Rakhi in spiritual manner and by fostering the practice of spiritual brotherhood of all souls under the fatherhood of one Supreme Soul, the essential unity and universal brotherhood of mankind can be realized irrespective of physical distinctions in terms of caste, creed, community, nationality, sex, religion and race.

Today, when there is so much of fear and insecurity everywhere, it is highly relevant to highlight the spiritual significance and relevance of Rakhi festival and to celebrate it in true spirit.