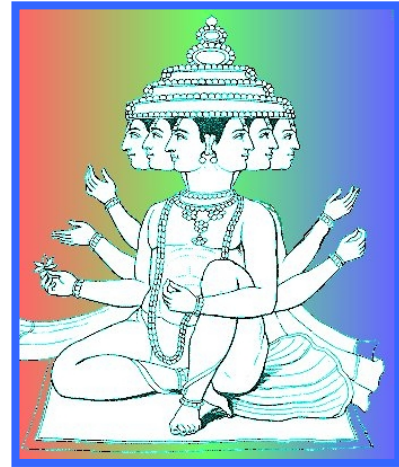




*Kartika* month is considered as the most auspicious month of the Hindu year. It is the month which acknowledges the maximum number of festivals. The day marks beginning of the month long *Kartika*. The whole of the month, persons both old and young, worship Lord *Laxmi Narayan* and or *Radha Damodar*. The day begins with a cold water bath before sunrise followed by *Narayan puja*. '*Habisa-anna*', prepared specially for the occasion, is eaten once in a day and only after 12.00 noon. During this month all the pious Hindus refrain themselves from eating fish, meat or egg. All of them take pre-dawn bath and visit temples as a matter of routine. The last five days are considered more sacred in which there is wide participation. Taken together the days are called '*Panchuka*', the last day being the *Kartika Purnima*. Every day they take food only once in the afternoon which is known as '*Habisa-anna*'. For all the five days the women after purification bath in the early morning draw beautiful flower-designs around the *chaura* (a small temple like structure with a *Tulasi* plant overhead) with coloured powder produced indigenously. Fasting for the day is commonly observed. Most of the *Shiva* temples get crowded with devotees offering prayers to Lord *Shiva* who is said to have killed the demon *Tripurasura* on this day. Group-singing of *kirtans* and loud beating of *Mrudanga* and cymbals continue for the whole day.





In the city of Cuttack and some other places huge images of *Kartikeswar* are built and worshipped. At night they are taken out in procession and are immersed in the river *Mahanadi*, near a *Shiva* temple. Exactly at this place a big fair known as '*Bali Yatra*' is held for about three-four days. The

name of the festival has two significances. Some are of opinion that on this day the *Sadhabas* were sailing off to Bali for business purposes and therefore, the name. Some others believe that *Sri Chaitanya* the great vaishnavite saint of Bengal on his way to Puri landed on this day at Cuttack after crossing the sand-bed (Sand is Bali) of the river *Mahanadi*.

Thousands of People congregate at the fair-ground where innumerable varieties of goods are bought and sold. People also enjoy boating with friends and family in the moon-lit night.