



CV Hindu Cultural Society Information Sheet



Diwali



Happy Diwali! Happy New Year!

May the light of love and devotion shine brightly in your hearts

May the light of understanding shine in your minds,

May the light of harmony glow in your home

May the light of service shine forth ceaselessly from your hands.

May your presence light the lamps of love wherever you go.

May your smile, your words and your actions be as sweet as the sweets of this festive season.

May Maha Lakshmi bring you the true wealth of peace, health, happiness, and love.

Legends of Diwali

The Return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya

All that is good in mankind is concentrated in the deeds of the god-king Rama, the ruler of **Ayodhya**. Lord Rama, the moral man with his moral way of life is the reason for celebrating India's popular festivals of Dussehra and Diwali. Diwali comes exactly **20 days** after Dussehra on Amavas (new moon), during the fortnight of Kartik, some time in October or November.



On the day of **Dussehra**, Rama, killed the great demon **Ravana**, who had abducted Rama's wife **Sita** to his kingdom of Lanka. Rama, along with his brother **Lakshman** and devoted follower **Hanuman**, and an army of monkeys fought a great battle to rescue his lovely wife Sita. The war against Ravana lasted for ten days. Sita had been returned to her husband Rama and they now make their way to Ayodhya in triumph and glory. Thus, it is on the Diwali day that Lord Rama, the incarnation of **Lord Vishnu** in the **Treta Yug**, returned to his capital Ayodhya after the exile of fourteen years.

Consequently, to commemorate the return of **Rama**, **Sita** and **Lakshman** to Ayodhya, people celebrate Diwali with the bursting of crackers and by lighting up their houses with earthen diyas (lamps). This grand style of celebration has continued, year after year. To this day, the whole of Ramayana is enacted in dramas staged in cities, towns and villages, on the occasion of Dussehra and Diwali.

The Killing of Narakasura



This particular legend is popular in southern and western India. **Narakasura** was an evil demon king who acquired immense power from a blessing given by Lord Brahma after a severe penance. Under his rule, the villagers suffered a lot of hardship as the demon tortured the people and kidnapped the women to be imprisoned in his palace with his invincible might.

First published for Diwali Dinner, 3rd November 2005

www.cuhcs.org.uk



CV Hindu Cultural Society Information Sheet



Unable to bear the tyranny of the demon, the celestial beings pleaded with Lord Krishna to save them from his torture. But Naraka had a boon that he would face death only at the hands of his mother Bhudevi. So, Krishna asks his wife **Sathyabhama**, the reincarnation of Bhudevi, to be his charioteer in the battle with Naraka. When Krishna fell unconscious after being hit by an arrow of Naraka, Sathyabhama takes the bow and aims the arrow at Naraka, killing him instantly.

The message of **Naraka Chaturdashi** is that the good of the society should always prevail over one's own personal bonds. It is interesting to note that Bhudevi, mother of the slain demon Naraka, declared that his death should not be a day of mourning but an occasion to celebrate and rejoice. Hindus light fireworks, which are regarded as the effigies of Narakasura who was killed on this day.

The Emergence of Lakshmi

Lakshmi is the Hindu Goddess who governs all form of wealth and success and the paths, means and results of all forms of prosperity. As the Consort of Lord Vishnu, who is the god of preservation, Lakshmi Devi is the goddess of health and beauty. Lakshmi embodies sublime **beauty, siddhi, peace, strength, balance, auspiciousness, opulence and wisdom.**



As a female counterpart of Lord Vishnu, Mata Lakshmi is also called "Shri", the female of the Supreme Being. Goddess Lakshmi means "Good Luck" to Hindus. The word "Lakshmi" is derived from the Sanskrit word "Laksya", meaning 'aim' or 'goal', and she is the goddess of wealth and prosperity, both material and spiritual. Also 'lakh' which means "one hundred thousand" as a monetary unit in India, is the first part of Lakshmi's name, symbolizing her blessings that pour forth abundantly.

Diwali As a Harvest Festival



Diwali signifies **Harvest Festival**. As it occurs at the end of a cropping season and has several customs that reinforce the hypothesis of its having originated as a harvest festival. Every harvest normally spelt prosperity. The celebration was first started in India by farmers after they reaped their harvests. They celebrated with joy and offered praises to God for granting them a good crop.

On the second day of Diwali a ritual that is strongly suggestive of the origin of Diwali as an harvest festival is performed. Worship of the Goddess of Wealth, Lakshmi and performance of Aarti are a part of the harvest festival. On this day delicacies are prepared from pounded semi-cooked rice called **Poha** or **Pauva**. This rice is taken from the fresh harvest available at that time. This custom is prevalent both in rural and urban areas especially in Western India.

In many rural areas, Diwali signifies only this aspect. The reason being the fact that Diwali which is celebrated sometime in October/November co-incides with the end of a harvesting season, known as the **Kharif** season when the fresh crop of rice is available. Therefore, Diwali is also considered by many rural Hindus to be the harvest festival when farmers offer prayers, and express their gratitude to the Almighty for the bounty they received from him.

First published for Diwali Dinner, 3rd November 2005

www.cuhcs.org.uk