

Diwali : The Festival of Lights

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Deepavali or Diwali that falls on a moonless night in the month of Kartika (October-November) is widely celebrated all over India embracing all sections and communities. Diwali is derived from 'Dipavali' a Sanskrit word which means row of lights. Light represents strength and darkness weakness. The demonical forces which are at work within ourselves destroying the strength and purity of our lives are the symbols of darkness. In Brihadaranyak Upanishad there is a prayer.

Asoto ma sad gamaya

Tamaso ma Jyotirgamaya

Mrutorma amrutam gamaya.

(From the unreal, lead me to the real

From the darkness, lead me to light

From death, lead me to immortality).



Thus the Upanishad explains unreal and darkness means death and real and light means immortality. Troubled by the forces of staticity and darkness human beings seek light for their deliverance. The lamps of Diwali are meant as symbols, as a means of end. But, what is this end ? What is the real darkness, which must be dispelled ? It is the darkness within us, the darkness, which must be dispelled ? It is the darkness within us, the darkness of ignorance of selfishness of duality that has to be eliminated.

There are different legends associated with this festival. It was celebrated in Ajodhya as Lord Ramachandra's victory over Ravana of Lanka and safe return from 14 years of exile to his capital Ajodhya. The people of Ajodhya burning the lamps of earthen pots of ghee welcomed Ramachandra. Since then, people have been celebrating the festival to commemorate Rama's Victory over Ravana with same enthusiasm. In Assam region this festival is related to the killing of demon Natakasura by Lord Krishna.

Lord Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankar attained his Nirvana on the day of deepavali at Pavapuri. His disciples surrounded him and were in tears saying, 'Don't leave us'. Mahavira advised them not to grieve but to light the lamp

within their heart and conquer the darkness surrounding them. Thus, the Jain devotees celebrate this festival with great enthusiasm as Nirvana Day of Lord Mahavira.

Diwali is celebrated in honour of Goddess Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity. It is believed that the Goddess blesses those with prosperity, who keeps their houses neat clean on this day. She is supposed to visit the houses of her devotees at mid night. For the business community this festival signals the beginning of a new financial year and they open their new cash registers and books of account on this day.

There is another reason of worshipping Lakshmi on Deepavali. It was on this day that when Vishnu in the form of Vamana had sent the demon king Bali to netherworld Goddess Lakshmi was freed from the prison.

There are historical references that king Vikramaditya was crowned on this day at Ujjain commencing an era named after him. Abul Fazal's Akbarnama informs us that the Mughal Emperor Akbar had adopted Hindu way of life and began to celebrate many Hindu festivals like Diwali. The

Arya samajists celebrate the festival with pomp and show because Maharshi Dayananada, one of the greatest reformers of Hinduism and the founder of 'Arya Samaj' attained his salvation on this day. The Sikha regard Diwali as an auspicious day for the reason that the sixth Guru Hargovinda Sahib, who was held by the Mughal emperor Jahangir, was released from the Gwalior fort on this day.

Probably the most commonly celebrated aspect of Diwali is that it is the festival of lights. Homes, offices, shops and streets are lined with brightly lighting diyas or earthen lamps. It is also celebrated as the day of general 'Shradha'-oblations to the ancestral spirits of the family. Thus, the festival brings happy and joy for the people and weave them together in closer bonds of love and friendship.

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