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FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

by

THE SHRI LUXMI NARAYAN TEMPLE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Of all the celebrations and religious festivals of the followers of SANATHAN DHARMA (ETERNAL RELIGION), commonly called HINDUISM, Deepavali has a prominent status. How it started and what significance it has, has often been covered by the smoke of confusion. What people are unanimous about is that Deepavali means a 'ROW OF LIGHTS'.

Deepavali follows closely upon the Navaratri period, which is observed as a special thanksgiving to God as the Cosmic Mother for providing people with all the needs of life. Human beings are dependent on the Creator for their existence more than they admit. In this regard, the Bhagavad Gita (3, 10) refers to the very ancient arrangement made between God and our ancestors, the Rsis:

In the beginning of creation, the Lord of all creatures sent forth generations of men (Rsis) along with sacrifices (Yajna) for Vishnu, and blessed them by saying: Be thou happy by this Yajna because its performance will bestow upon you all desirable things.

We are therefore bound forever to show our appreciation to God by offering thanksgiving prayer on a daily basis.

References in the ancient Sanathan literature attest to the remote antiquity of Deepavali, and with the passage of time, many popular events became associated with it, bringing added colour and new meanings. Although the celebrations are characterised by great pomp, entertainment, feasting, enjoyment, and fanfare, its basis is deeply spiritual, by association with GOD and LIGHT.

When Deepavali celebrations actually began, cannot be fixed with certainty, for its origins are concealed in the mists of time. What is, however, certain is that it has always been associated with light. Historically, it is evident that thousands of years ago, Deepavali was observed as a harvest festival in the land called Bharath (modern day India) when the civilisation was agricultural: Crops were harvested; there was abundant food in the home; good crops of cotton assured that there was clothing for the family for the full year. Life was bright and happy. LUXMI MATA has honoured the home with HER presence. Moreover, the entire family celebrated the festival as a thanksgiving, performing Pooja with elaborate offerings and special rituals. In fact the harvest was regarded as Prasad, the grace, compassion and favour of the Divine Mother, who is glorified in the DURGA SAPTASATI (chapter 5) as LIGHT, AUSPICIOUSNESS, PROTECTOR, BEAUTY, ENERGY, CONSCIOUSNESS, INTELLIGENCE, PEACE, DIGNITY, DEVOTION, COMPASSION, CONTENTMENT – all of which are intimately associated with our everyday life.

Luxmi Pooja forms the most important part of the Deepavali festival. In the Sanathkumar Samhita, the story of King Bali is narrated. The king had extended his authority over all lands, even Luxmi and other Devas came under his strong influence. In the absence of Luxmi, the entire world, deprived of their basic needs for living, suffered tremendously. Even the performance of Yajna (rites) ended, as Bali owned everything. The Devas approached Bhagavan Vishnu for help, with passionate prayer. Bhagavan assumed the form of Vamana (dwarf) and asked Bali for land in extent just three steps. In the first step, He measured the land, in the second step the heavens and there was nothing left for the mighty king with all his material possessions, to give. The king was truly embarrassed. However, Bhagavan had the solution: In the third step, He measured Bali's body. The story points to a universal truth for all humanity, confirmed by the first sloka in the Isopinishad:

Everything animate and inanimate that is within the universe is controlled and owned by the Lord. One should therefore accept only those things necessary for himself, which are set as his quota, and one should not accept other things, knowing well to whom they belong.

In this way, Bhagavan Vishnu freed Luxmi, defeating Bali who now realised that he was in reality the owner of nothing. Everything belonged to God. The world experienced immeasurable joy, with God's infinite bounty made freely available to all. Freed from the clutches of demoniac rule, the subjects saw within their hearts divine light; they expressed their immense pleasure and thanks to LUXMI-NARAYAN, in sharing and caring for one another. The countless lamps that illuminated the whole country, symbolized the new spirit.

From an unbroken, historical tradition, it is evident that the follower of Sanathan Dharma celebrated Deepavali at all times, in prosperity and adversity, in peace and war, in whatever circumstances the land called Bharatha Varsha was placed. Over the

hundreds of millennia, the country experienced many changes and crises, attacks from outside terrorists and foreign cultures, but the light symbolising the hope and aspirations of the follower of Sanathan Dharma, kept on burning.

The festive period must never be allowed to overshadow the basic adhyatmik or spiritual aspect of Deepavali: Deity worship, participating in Sathsangh, Darshana of God at the temple, reading of scriptures, singing of bhajans and kirtans, feeding the poor and needy as well as animals.

Humanity wants light and enlightenment. Human beings aspire to progress towards light. They want to move away from darkness and drive out ignorance. The row of lights is the symbol of fulfilment of humanity's desire. We recognise the great light that shines over the entire universe by the symbol. It is the light in the hearts of all, but suppressed in the case of many. Deepavali is the externalisation of that light.

Universal light belongs to no time, nor place, nor colour, nor creed, nor religion. Light, good health, wealth, prosperity (material & spiritual) is not the monopoly of any group or sect. It is a universal product, the possession of all. Therefore, HUMANITY celebrates.

May this Deepavali bring joy, happiness, and prosperity to all communities in our land. May the darkness from their hearts and minds be dispelled and replaced by the ETERNAL DIVINE LIGHT.

Shri Luxmi Narayan Temple - Moberi