

The Divali Festival.

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DIVALI, correctly termed Deepavali, a sanskrit word meaning "Row of lights" is an important Hindu festival observed with more pomp and hilarity than with an amount of religious fervour that attaches to it. The Puranic name for the day on which the festival is observed is 'Narakachaturdasi' which is the fourteenth day following the Full Moon in the month of Thulam corresponding to October. It is begun with an elaborate oil-bath at about 3 A. M., if not earlier, followed by a sumptuous feast consisting of various dishes. Crackers are profusely burnt by children and every street is beautifully illuminated. Relations and friends of every description are invited to partake in the bath, clothing and feasting. Sons-in-law must, at any rate, be invited and costly clothes presented. In South India, especially in Tamil Districts, invitations to sons-in-law should be very cordially extended; any neglect in that function is retaliated by a series of troubles and inconveniences proceeding from the bride-groom's house to that of the bride. Malabar does not attach much importance to the festival and the little that is done in Malabar is only an imperfect imitation of Tamil Districts.

The commercial year of merchants end with Deepavali and begins with the following day. They close the accounts of the year and begin fresh accounts for the ensuing year. If the accounts show such loss as would not permit the merchant to continue his business and pay his creditors he is branded as one who had his literal Divali Bath. He is on his way to be declared an insolvent. Of course, this insolvency has reference to the custom of striking Profit and Loss account on the Deepavali day and to the vast amount of money spent during the festival.

The origin of Deepavali can be traced to the good old days of Lord Krishna. Narakasura, the demon of Hell, was waging war against Indra, the Lord of Heaven. The latter with the help of all the Devas and elemental forces fought vigorously, but was no match for Narakasura. Many a time Indra was defeated. He sought the help of Sri Krishna and invited him to fight Narakasura. The invitation was accepted and Sri Krishna fought against the demon of hell. Satybhama, Krishna's wife, accompanied her husband and sat in Krishna's chariot all along the fight watching the progress of the encounter. Narakasura was no mean foe. Krishna was repulsed many a time. He realised that it was no

easy task to vanquish the demon. In the midst of the fight Krishna was overpowered and he fell on his chariot. He lay there stunned and stupified. Satyabhama knew how to bend a bow and shoot an arrow with unerring aim. Her spirit of chivalry has been roused. She could not waste her time in attending to a swooning husband at a time when the success or defeat in the battle depended on timely tact and action. This was no time for womanly grief and weakness. She knew that her mind and body were half of her husband's and that unless she too were vanquished her husband could not be deemed to have been defeated. She took her husband's bow and arrows and fought her foe with such military skill and valour that, when Krishna recovered from his stupor, he found his adversary exhausted and overpowered, so much so that he had to do nothing but to pass the edge of his CHAKRA across the demon's neck which severed its connection with the trunk in an instant.

The fight between Krishna and Narakasura lasted several days. But we are concerned only with the last day which was the starting point of Deepavali. After the fight Krishna was greatly fatigued. He had no bath, proper food and rest since the fight began. To commemorate the death of Narakasura, the victory of virtue over vice, Krishna celebrated his elaborate bath, feasted on choice dishes and spent the day in complete merriment. He proclaimed:— "Whoever observes this bath, feast and merriment year after year in memory of the victory of virtue over vice and devotes himself to fervent prayer on this particular day shall be absolved from sin and attain Heaven after the decay of this material body."

Lord Krishna's wish is carried out by the Hindus to this day. Of the several Hindu festivals mentioned in the Puranas some are local and some communal. It is only Deepavali that is observed by the Hindus of every sect and community with or without modification in the details which had to undergo modification by the efflux of time and modern civilisation.
