



# 卐 diwali - the season of festivals 卐



The most important Hindu festival, festival of lights, Diwali is the grandest Home-Coming party for Lord Rama and is celebrated as a five day extravaganza of harvest festival for all, new year for businesses, shopping galore, and a day of family reunion and merriment in general!

**Don't forget to share Diwali joy and sweets with your office colleagues and neighbors!**

**D**ipawali (*dīpāvalī* – row of lights; दीपावली) is the most important festival of almost a billion people of India, the oldest continuous living civilization with most ancient spiritual and faith systems. Commonly, though erroneously, referred to as 'Hinduism' by others, this system calls itself as 'Philosophia Perennia' or Sanatan Dharma (*sanātana dharma* – sanātana= eternal, dharma= principles, truth, righteousness, duty, nature, ethics etc.; सनातन धर्म). Just like science is only called science no matter which scientist is your parents liked, **Sanatan Dharma is an ocean of wisdom of great visionaries across the ages – no personal agenda, no mission against 'the others', just pursuit of the truth!** Since it was experienced, discovered and envisioned by seers and yogis at a time when religious or faith based rivalry, violence or oppression was unheard of, 'Hinduism' is just a way of living and has no specific name for itself. In that sense, *by its very definition, every living thing – human, animal and plant – is 'Hindu' at various spiritual stages of life cycles.*

**Dipawali** is commonly called by its shortened name – **Diwali**. It is in every sense the festival of lights. Celebrated on the new-moon night of the month of Kartik (*kārtika* – name of zodiac; कार्तिक) in October/November, **it is primarily a harvest festival.** Almost all ancient/original cultures of the world have certain harvest festivals at this time of the year – e.g. Halloween of the pre-Christian Europe, Sukkot of the Jews. But in India, it is a full five day affair, with many important events falling during this period, that kept on adding to the already weighty importance of Diwali. There are wonderful interesting epic legends that bring the joy and meaning of life alive by creating a visual panorama through its characters and events (instead of dry sermonizing).

**Diwali is also the grandest home-coming party in the world,** celebrated on the occasion of the return of Lord Rama (*rāma* – benefactor, *kalyāṇakārī*; राम) from his long fourteen years of exile in the forest, twenty days after killing Ravana.

By modern '*conservative*' measures, more than two millennia *before* common era (astronomical references put it seven millennia before), on the day of **Vijaya Dashami** (*vijayā dashamī* – vijayā= of victory, dashamī = tenth day; विजयादशमी), **Lord Rama** killed the mighty king Ravana (*rāvaṇa* – one who makes others cry, the biggest bully ever; रावण), who had abducted his wife Sita (*sītā* – from the plough's furrow, daughter of king Janaka; सीता). For this reason Vijaya Dashami is also called Dashahara (*dasha-harā*– killing of the ten headed, *rāvaṇa*; दशहरा). *Coincidentally, Jewish Yom Kippur falls on the 10th day of Tishri month, a day after Dashahara. It is followed by the harvest festival Sukkot, just like Dashahara is followed by Diwali!*



*Lord Rama flanked by Lakshmana and Sita and served by Lord Hanuman!*

*Every year, on Dashahara a giant effigy of Ravana is burnt to celebrate the victory of Rama over Ravana, representing good over evil - both of which define each other! Without evil there is no good and vice versa! And both are created by the same Supreme Divine! Hence in Hinduism there is no sin by nature but by deeds of free will only. A lion (by his nature) or a butcher (by his duty of profession) get no sins for their acts, but*

*killing is sin otherwise!*

There is an interesting and often unknown reason why **Divine Lord Vishnu** (*viṣṇu* – the all pervading; विष्णु) had to take avatar (*avatāra* – the descent, of divine beings to earth; अवतार) in the human form as Rama. Ravana was a powerful Rakshasa (*rākshasa* – the one who chose to protect the primordial waters; राक्षस) and upon his mother's behest performed extreme austerities to please the Creator Lord Brahma (*brahmā* – the expansive, God The Creator; ब्रह्मा). Upon his grace, Ravana asked for eternal immortality which Lord Brahma said could not be bestowed (because of his deeds!). So Ravana asked for "*immunity from killing at the hands of Garuda, Naag, Yaksha, Daitya, Danava, Rakshasa, Devataa* (all '*other super creations*' of the Creator, much powerful than humans or animals! *I am not afraid of other creatures, and humans I consider them (weak) as a straw!*". After his boon, Ravana became the worst bully the world has ever seen. Hence the name Ravana. To kill him and still honor Lord Brahma's boon to him, Lord Vishnu, the ever practical and wise, takes birth as Rama – the "Best Among Men" and partial avatar as his three brothers!

In the first grand novel of the world, Ramayan (*rāmāyaṇa* – the travels of rāma; रामायण), comprising of 24,000 beautiful metrical verses, the life and adventures of Lord Rama in human form are described in the most interesting and poetic way. **Its antiquity can be guessed by the fact that it was composed in a time when script was not yet commonplace.** Having all the Nava Rasa (*nava rasa*– nine moods; नवरस) and elements of heroism, romance, mystery, super humans, terror, amorphous bodies, sorcery, surprise, humor, loyalty, bravery, fidelity, idealism, non-compromise on principles – the Ramayan is still unsurpassed in its beauty, wisdom and depth of human emotions and moods and a master story. It has effected every successful story ever told in India or elsewhere in every form of expression. Its direct popularity spread as far from Persia to Cambodia, without the force

of sword or any allurements! It is the first classic story of heroism that has been emulated all over the world even today, from Odyssey to 'Star Wars' to Hollywood thrillers.

**Lord Vishnu took the Rama avatar to present before us the epitome of ideal human being living in social activity. Lord Rama teaches us the ideal and proper conduct at every step of his life.**

Ramayana has many beautiful poetic expressions. It has many more real facts that make it a real history of India. It is one of the many ancient compositions of India used by sociologists, anthropologists, historians, linguists to judge the life of its time. As per Indian traditions, Ramayana and Mahabharata (*mahā-bhārata* – the great (battle of) bhaarat; महाभारत) are called *itihāsa* (*itihāsa* – thus happened, history; इतिहास) meaning history. Late in 2002, NASA discovered an ancient man-made bridge between India and Shri Lanka. A similar account is found in Ramayana when Lord Rama builds a huge bridge of boulders across from present day Rameshwaram to cross over to Lanka. In April 2002, a team of British scientists discovered an ancient city submerged off of the shores of Tamil Nadu in southern India. Three years ago, a Shiv temple was unearthed in Karnatak (*karṇāṭaka*; कर्णाटक) near Bangalore city, that is 7000 years old and is still functional. All this proves the antiquity and reality of the basic narrations in ancient compositions like Ramayana, Mahabharata. One has to remember that the writers were great poets and visionaries who created visuals by words and used the poetic style of saying that includes figures of speeches, vivid narratives.

Half a millennia ago, the great poet Tulsidas (*tulasī dāsa*; तुलसीदास), translated the Ramayan that was composed in Sanskrit (*saṁskṛita* – well perfected, the ancient indian language mother of all; संस्कृत) into a local dialect of his time – 'avadhi' for the benefit of the masses. Some of the gems from his epic poem are worth pondering upon, as they explain deepest Indian philosophy in simple couplets called chaupai (*chaupāī* – with four parts, two per line; चौपाई). [Other examples were given in last issue of taraṅg and removed from here to avoid repetition]

1. *hari anant hari kathā anantā,*  
*kahaññ sunaññ bahu bidhi sab sanā*

हरि अनन्त हरि कथा अनन्ता  
कहहिं सुनहिं बहु बिधि सब सन्ता

*Divine Lord is limitless, endless so are the tales of Divine Play; the wise and noble say and listen them in various ways!*

**This reflects the grandest of thoughts from the oldest composed books of the entire world – the Veda – that “truth is one but expressed variously by the knowers” (*ekam sat viprah bahudā vadanti*). If only this simple concept is understood by all ‘leaders’ in the world, there would be no violence, oppression or terrorism in the name of god and religion. In the last two millennia, all major wars have been about who you bow down to in prayer! A shame for all ‘leaders’ in the business of god-stuff!**



## The five days of Diwali

### 1. Dhan Teras

(*dhana-tērasa* – wealth; thirteen; धनतेरस, धनत्रयोदशी) The first day is the thirteenth day of the previous fortnight, and two days before Diwali.

As per the horoscope of the sixteen year old son of king Hima (*hima*; हिम), he was doomed to die by a snake-bite on the fourth day of his marriage. On that fourth day of his marriage his wife did not allow him to sleep. She laid all the ornaments and lots of gold and silver coins in a big heap at the entrance of her husband's bedroom and lighted many lamps all over the palace. And she went on telling stories and singing songs. When Yama (*yama* – divinity of death; यम), arrived there in the guise of a serpent, his eyes got blinded by the dazzle of those brilliant lights and he could not enter the prince's chamber. So he climbed on top of the heap of the ornaments and gold and sat there whole night listening to the melodious songs. In the morning he quietly went away. (Does it remind you of the Arabian Nights and the reason the stories were told?)

As such this day has a great importance for the merchants, specially in Western India. Houses and business premises are renovated and decorated. Entrances are made colorful with lovely traditional motifs of Rangoli designs to welcome the Mother Maha-Lakshmi.

### 2. Narak Chaturdashi

(*naraka-chaturdashī* – fourteenth day; नरक चतुर्दशी) The second day is also called Chhoti Diwali (*chhoṭī diwālī* – small diwali; छोटी दिवाली).

The king Naraksur (*narakāsura* – king of the nether world; नरकासुर) defeated Indra (*indra* – king of gods; इन्द्र), and took away the earrings of Aditi (*aditi* – mother of the gods; अदिति). Lord Krishna, killed the evil king on the day before, and arrived home early morning before sunrise, and took an oil bath and massage to clean himself after the battle. To mark this, it is customary to take oil bath before sunrise on this day.

Also, on this day, the charitable but proud king Bali (*bali* – powerful; बलि) was giving away alms after a special Yajna (*yajña* – fire ritual for a resolution; यज्ञ). Lord Vishnu, guised as a dwarf brahmana (*brāhmaṇa* – knower of the truth, academic, scholarly class which is the brain of the society; ब्राह्मण), asked for only as much land as he could cover in three steps. When Lord Vishnu covered the earth in one step, the heavens with the second, humility and surrender dawned on Bali and he offered his head for the third step. When Lord Vishnu put his foot, Bali was pushed down to the nether worlds, the narak. But for his generosity, Lord Vishnu granted him the lamp of knowledge and allowed him to return to earth every year to light millions of lamps to dispel the darkness of ignorance and spread the light of knowledge.

### 3. Dipawali or Diwali

(*dīpāwalī* or *diwālī* – row of lamps; दीपावली, दिवाली)

The day of Diwali, the darkest night of Kartik month, is the day of worshipping Divine Mother Maha-Lakshmi (*mahā-lakshmi* – the great divinity of resources; महालक्ष्मी) or Lakshmi Puja day. On this day the sun passes through the zodiac Tula (*tulā* – weighing balance, zodiac sign libra; तुला) – which is shown as a balance. This is the end of the financial year for traditional merchants even today and old account books are balanced and new ones started. This day is also called Chopad Puja (*chopaḍa pūjā* – worshipping the account books; चोपड़ पूजा)



– i.e. respecting the account books. ***If companies like Enron and Arthur Anderson had even a fraction of this respect, we won't have had the biggest business corruption scandal ever in the whole world!***

On this darkest night, lot of earthen (or nowadays electric) lamps are lighted all over the house to dispel darkness and invite Divine Mother Lakshmi. Divine Mother Lakshmi is believed to be roaming the fields and farms and the streets showering her grace on houses that are clean and well kept, and homes where people are industrious and don't fight. (This is symbolic of the fact that families who are united and hard working and hygienic will prosper by their own good deeds!)

There are many important events of this day. The Jain Prophet, Bhagavan Mahavir (*mahāvīra*; महावीर), attained Nirvan (*nirvāṇa* – enlightenment, liberation; निर्वाण) on this day. The young, patient, determined and seeker Nachiketa (*nachikētā*; नचिकेता) was sent to the door of Yama by his own father out of frustration by his constant questioning. A guilty Yama granted his unattended guest three boons and Nachiketa asked for the highest knowledge even when tempted with wealth, women and even eternal life! The more Yama tempted him, the more resolved he got to get the truth about “after death”.

And, on this day Lord Rama, returned to his home capital Ayodhya, after killing king

Ravana.

On this day, people express their joy by making special dishes, making and sharing sweets, and bursting fire crackers of many kinds. They invite and go to friends and neighbors.

#### 4. Govardhan Puja

(*go-varadhana pūjā* – worship of the (mountain that is) cattle-nourisher; गोवर्धन पूजा)

The cowherds of Vraj used to worship Indra – the rain god. Lord Krishna still in his youth, advised the cowherds to worship the nearby mountain Govardhan instead. In this way, Lord Krishna taught the local farmers and cowherds about the importance of the mountain which actually brings the rains (and not some abstract god), bringing them rain of prosperity, and conserving top soil, rich flora and fauna of the mountain. (*This is not modern interpretation, this is the classical account found in Bhagavat Purana*). **This was perhaps the earliest lesson in the world in ecology and conservation.**

This day also marks the coronation of emperor Vikramaditya (*vikram-āditya*; विक्रमादित्य) and the Vikram Samvat, one of the ‘recent’ Indian calendars prevalent even today, started on this day in 57 BCE. This year is 2060 Vikram Samvat. Hence, Diwali also marks as the new year eve.

#### 5. Bhai Dooj

(*bhāi dūja* – (meet) brother (on) second day; भाई दूज)

The fifth day is celebrated as Bhai Dooj or Bhaiya Dooj, and brothers visit their sisters home. Sisters put the auspicious tilak on their brothers’ forehead, pray for them, and they eat delicious dishes and sweets together.

**In these days when life is in the fast lane, pressure of work and bills, Diwali season stands out in its importance to give it a perspective, sit back and enjoy personal relationships, reflect back on the year gone by, resolve to work hard for the next year, and conduct business in an ethical and moral way. This is also the season to let bygones be bygones, forge new friendships and strengthen old ones.**

– Shashikant Joshi

**Don't forget to share  
Diwali joy and sweets with  
your office colleagues and  
neighbors!**

**How will they know, if  
you don't tell them?**