

Daily News Special



Deepavali celebrations in a Hindu Kovil



Hindus engage in religious rituals



Hindu devotees lighting clay lamps



A ritual being performed in a Hindu Kovil

Deepavali - The festival of lights

Awareness of oneness

Ruwini Jayewardana

It's not just the festive mood in the air that makes you happy, but the fact that it is time for exchanging gifts, sweets and heartfelt wishes. People donning new attire gather to light clay lamps, sparklers and crackers for the blissful five-day long celebrations. Though there is a difference in customs, traditions and merry-making the feel of spreading good cheer

Hindus eagerly wait for Deepavali as it is the best of all festivals. Homes are cleaned, new clothes are stitched, sweets and other savoury dishes are prepared and in the night Goddess Lakshmi is worshipped

among the people across the length and breadth of the country remains the same. Spreading brilliance and warmth across the region Deepavali or Diwali derives its name from the Sanskrit term which translates into row of lamps. These oil lamps are lighted to signify the triumph of good over evil. Going with Hindu philosophy people believe that the birth of the 'inner light' or Atman which is linked but beyond the physical body took

place during this period. This awareness empowers humans to commit good deeds and in return brings us closer to divinity. Though Deepavali celebrations are mainly restricted to one day in Sri Lanka, the festival is celebrated in a grand scale with festivities that run for five days in India and is celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains.

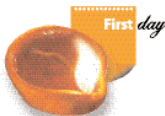
The festival also marks the birth of Goddess Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth. Lakshmi is believed to be incarnated on the new moon day during the churning of the Kshira Sagar, the Ocean of Milk. Later Lord Vishnu, in his fifth incarnation as Vaman-avastha, rescued Lakshmi from the prison of King Bali. The harvest season generally comes to a close with Deepavali. Farmers thank Lakshmi for the bounty of the year gone by and evoke her blessings for a prosperous harvest for the following year. Some believe that Deepavali celebrates the marriage of Lakshmi and Krishna while others say that the day commemorates the return of Lord Rama along with Sita and Lakshman from his 14 year long exile after vanquishing the demon king Ravana. His citizens at Ayodhya were delighted at his return that they illuminated the city with oil lamps to welcome the group. The festival is also dedicated to the Goddess

Kali, the symbol of strength in some parts of India. The elephant headed Lord Ganesha who denotes wisdom too holds a prominent place during the festive season. In Jainism the festival marks Lord Mahavira attaining Nirvana. Deepavali rituals are emblems which send across a message to the divine beings in heaven. It is a mode of expressing gratitude to gods for health, wealth, knowledge, peace and prosperity. Illuminating homes with lamps and skies with fire crackers hold a significant meaning in Deepavali. The sound of the crackers exhibit the joy of the people living on Earth.

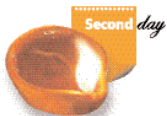
For nearly three decades Sri Lanka had been unable to get into the true celebratory mood of Deepavali. Hindus as well as their friends had followed the rituals with heavy hearts, praying to the gods for a much desired peaceful environment so that they could spend the next festival in harmony surrounded by their loved ones. Their pleas have been answered at last as unity had descended upon the nation.

With the embers of terrorism dying down, Sri Lankans irrespective of religion, cast or race gather to be swept away by the sweet fragrance of incense sticks, the brilliance of the oil lamps and the sounds of firecrackers illuminating hope and prosperity across the country.

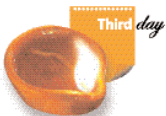
Deepavali rituals



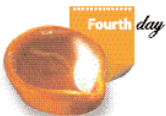
First day



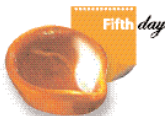
Second day



Third day



Fourth day



Fifth day

Dhanteras

The first day of Deepavali is known as Dhanteras. People renovate, decorate their houses and workplaces on this day and make traditional Rangoli motifs on the entrance, to welcome Goddess Lakshmi. Lamps and candles are lit throughout the night. It is considered auspicious to buy gold and silver on this day. Many people opt for buying new utensils on this day. In Maharashtra, offerings of lightly pounded dry coriander seeds with jaggery are made to the Goddess. Rural people rever their cattle on this day.

Choti Diwali

People take bath before sunrise, anoint themselves with oil and Ubtan (scrub made up of gram flour and fragrant powders). Bengalis believe that Goddess Kali killed the demon Raktaavja on this day. General customs followed during the second day of Deepavali is to light crackers. People illuminate their homes with diya, as to welcome the set the mood for celebrations in the following day.

Lakshmi Pooja

This is the main day of the festival. Jains have their own religious significance of the day, because they believe that Lord Mahavir attained Nirvana (or Eternal Bliss) on the day. Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the great saint who gave rise to Hindu Renaissance, also left the mortal world on this day. People wear new clothes and share gifts and sweets with their friends and relatives. Women prepare delicacies and whole house is illuminated with diyas (clay lamps) and candles. Fireworks and crackers are the kids' favorites on this day.

Padwa and Govardhan Pooja

The Govardhan-Puja or Annaakot is held on this day. In the temples of Mathura and Nathdwara, the deities are bathed with milk and adorned with precious clothes and ornaments. Then offerings of a large variety of delicacies are made to them.

Bhai Duj

The last day of this festival is called Bhai Duj. On this day, sisters invite their brothers and their family to their homes and treat them with delicacies. In turn, brothers offer them with gifts and sweets.