

Diwali from Hong Kong with Love

There is hardly any Indian who has not heard about Diwali, the festival of lights, a festival that symbolizes the victory of good over evil or righteous against the unrighteous and spiritual light over mundane darkness and ignorance.

The period of Diwali is now considered as the Hindu New year and coincides with the darkest new moon of the Hindu luni-solar month of 'Kartik' which takes place between Mid October and Mid November according to the Gregorian calendar.

In general we all know what we do or are supposed to do as soon as the bells start resonating with Diwali alerts, messages and greetings. One of the most common rituals to commemorate Diwali New Year is the lighting of Diyas or lamps and neatly placing them in front of the entrance door and decorating the floor in front with exotic designs from colored powder or paint also referred to as Rangoli. As generally known these ritual continues in memory of Lord Ram's return to Ayodhya after fourteen years of exile.

Time to Get Rid of the Old Stuff but Not "Old Staff"

Most of the time Diwali festival is observed with acts of worship, offerings to deities, fasting, feasting, vigil, rituals, fairs, charity, celebrations, Pooja, Homa, Aarti etc. But the true meaning of a festival lies in its essence and its underlying meaning which one should duly contemplate upon. All such sublime festivities and rituals give us a splendid opportunity to heal relationships.

During this Festive period that symbolizes victory of good over evil it is very congenial to also delve in a spirit of the peaceful warrior within oneself. The way of the peaceful warrior is to remove one's old and negative thoughts by way of forgiveness and apologies (saying sorry to loved ones and to acquaintances) and attempt to eradicate all misgivings and hurt feelings of others who may harbor ill feelings against your words or actions. In short this is the most auspicious time to make up and never break up.

By and large it is time to get rid of the old stuff and not "old staff". Such as clothes, files papers, unwanted or unimportant items and replacing them with new ones amidst the backdrop of cleansed homes and offices. Cleanliness is next to Godliness, that's what tradition extols but the only regret is that the message strikes home to many only once a year especially in our Homeland. Sorry folks! The truth always hurts and since Diwali is all about reveling in virtues and an honest observation for the purpose of invoking constructive measures should be taken with a grain of salt.

Diwali Mood of HK Communities

On a social scale the Sindhi community which has a fairly good mileage and clout amongst the Hindus of Hong Kong love to organize Diwali Balls. As I reminiscence in the early 70's we used to have one Diwali Ball organized by the pioneering and much loved Rani Hiranand one of the Harilela siblings of the second generation of migrants out of Sind. Now the seams seem to be bursting with over ten balls (not so inexpensive) all over HK in a span of one month. Each ball is known to be competing indirectly with ever increasing ostentations to include stage shows depicting Bollywood themes and dances, and not to forget the lavish culinary delights that may not suit those with low metabolic activity.

Now the Gujarati and the Marwari communities have since few years begun to flex their muscles into the 'Ball' area with vegetarian gastronomical varieties with non alcoholic beers and wines that is good enough to get anyone into a Dandia dance mode. Nepalese & Rajasthani communities also mark these celebrations in their own distinct way.

The Sikh community of Hong Kong merrily joins these celebrations by organizing mid night Shabad Kiratan. Hundreds of Sikh devotees gather at Khalsa Diwan Sikh Temple Wanchai to celebrate the return of the 6th Guru Har Gobind Sahib Ji after he freed himself and many other captive kings from

the clutches of Jahangir the Mogul ruler of that time and return to the Golden temple. As usual free kitchen (Langar) is served to all with a generosity of the divine spirit.

Even though there is a great difference in the mood, style and different reasons for observing Diwali celebrations among the Hindu- Indian communities, one thing remains common to all i.e. the spirit of unity called "Diwali."

Pooja Rituals 'Google the Guru'

On a religious note the prayer and the Pooja at home and office is almost mandatory.

In reality the Pooja is about invoking Goddess Laxmi to bestow prosperity and wealth for the coming year. Wealth being the Achilles heel of the Sindhis is now catching on irrevocably amongst all other Hindu communities as a part cherished by all. The Pooja ritual in the office is accompanied by a new set of accounting books, all blessed in red by the Swastika sign of Lord Ganesha, sprinkled with beetle nut and rice and flowers.

Once upon a time only the Hindu Brahmin priests were called to conduct the ceremonial chanting of Mantras and other formalities known mostly to the Priests themselves. But now a days, due to the rapid expansion of the Hindu Sindhi population, now into its fourth and 5th generation there is a rigid experience of 'Brahmin inflation'. i.e. More demand than supply for conducting ceremonies.

But in the age of the 'Google the Guru' the ladies have come to the rescue and are quite happy to download the Laxmi Arti and play the same on their children's 'I pad' and ever more than eager to adorn in red all the financial 'usb's and laptops' and I phones in absence of books in our advancing paper less society, always in the hope of more golden guineas from the Gods.

The adventurous and the believers of Lord Rama burn the effigy of the demoniac king Ravana to celebrate Lord Ram's victory signifying the ascent of good over evil, at the India Club Kowloon or wherever permissible.

Time to socialize

However the most hospitable extension of the pooja ceremonies is the hosting of cocktail parties for family, friends, business associates and staff during such time.

The ladies on the other hand are quite tense in preparing the ever increasing sizes of hamper sets laden with goodies and deciding between the VIP's and the NIP's(Not important persons= relatively speaking of course) to ascertain the inclusion of Dom Perignon Champagne or not. Ironically all this time spent for all of these hampers to come back to you as a token of reciprocity. Just like some passing the pillow game and the music stops when you start to wonder instead.

Soul Stirring:

As we experience that most festivals have become occasions for consumption. We are lured by discounts, and spend on food, clothing, parties and holidays and engage in a variety of rituals due to different reasons echoing from each others ancestral background.

However if you are looking for a contemporary reason to celebrate Diwali, here is a suggestion to ponder: It is incumbent on the present generation to not allowing such a symbolic festivity to shrink into a time for merely transient indulgences and seeking, only for oneself, but a time of sharing and a time to light up the lives of the destitute, the blind and the needy wherever and whenever it comes within your reach.

Let's all strive together to alleviate every kind of suffering prevailing on our Mother Earth with a spirit of universal love, with the desire for global peace and above all with the spiritual and cultural milieu of our glorious Diwali.

So a very Happy Diwali to all the readers with profound wishes for providence to shower all its blessings upon you and your close ones.

Dayal N Harjani aka Daduzen.

