



## LIGHTS AND MORE

IT IS THAT TIME OF THE YEAR WHEN INDIA GEARS UP TO CELEBRATE ARGUABLY ITS MOST FAVOURITE FESTIVAL – DIWALI. SO WHILE YOU ARE GETTING READY, HERE ARE SOME INTERESTING STORIES, LEGENDS AND CUSTOMS THAT WILL KEEP YOU ENTHRALLED. **BY BINDU GOPAL RAO**

**T**he festival of lights has an important connotation as it has a history that dates back to time immemorial. In fact

Diwali traditions are deep-rooted in mythology and refer to two of the most revered texts – the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Diwali is celebrated to honour the victory of Lord Rama over King Ravana and his return home after his 14 year exile. In South India the festival is celebrated to mark the victory of Lord Krishna over Narakasura as documented in the *Mahabharata*. In East India, it is believed that Goddess Kali defeated the demon Bakasura on Diwali. Naturally Diwali is counted amongst the most important festivals in the country and the celebrations go on for five whole days in several parts. Celebrations start by cleansing the house by disposing unwanted things, repainting and refurbishing as basically it is believed that Lakshmi will feel welcome in a clean home. Likewise lighting lamps is an important tradition because it is believed that illumination of homes is a must to invite good fortune. Lighting lamps is in fact a symbol of light over darkness and the victory of knowledge over ignorance. While these are some basics, there are traditions that vary based on local beliefs and cultures. Even the card parties of today have a religious connection. It is believed that Goddess Parvati was very amused by the concept of gambling while playing a dice roll with Lord Shiva and she announced that anyone who plays dice on this day, would be showered with wealth. Likewise on Dhanteras it is



THE FACT THAT INDIA IS A LAND OF DIVERSE CULTURES CAN HARDLY BE OVER EMPHASIZED. LIKEWISE DIWALI IS CELEBRATED WITH MYRIAD INTERPRETATIONS ACROSS THE LAND

widely believed that gold and silver should be purchased as it is done in order to worship the lord of wealth – Lord Kubera.

The festivities of Diwali are inextricably tied with faith. The temples of Mathura and Nathdwara celebrate Diwali differently. Here the deities are bathed in milk and adorned with precious clothes and ornaments and a large number of delicacies are offered to the Lord. In several parts of Andhra Pradesh, performances of Harikatha are staged. In fact Jains celebrate a festival of lights to commemorate the attainment of nirvana by Saint Mahavira on the same night as Diwali. Likewise the Sikhs celebrate Bandi Chhor Divas to commemorate the release of Guru Hargobind – who along with 52 others were detained in the Gwalior Fort by the Mughal emperor Jehangir. A few Newar Buddhists also celebrate Diwali marking it as a date of Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism.

## THE FIVE DAY FESTIVITIES

**Day 1:** Dhanteras is celebrated as the birthdays of the Goddess of Wealth Lakshmi and the God of Health and Healing Dhanvantari. This is the day reserved for shopping for gold or silver articles.

**Day 2:** Narak Chaturdasi or Choti Diwali involves making sweets, drawing colourful rangolis and special bathing rituals.

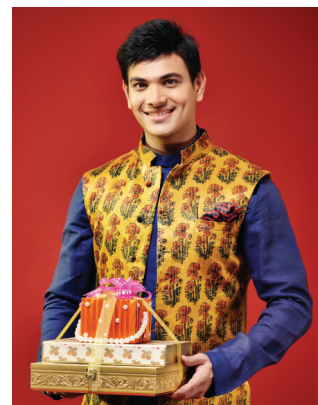
**Day 3:** Lakshmi Puja is the day when everyone wears new clothes and prays to Goddess Lakshmi in the evening.

**Day 4:** Padwa celebrates the bond and love between a wife and husband where husbands give gifts to their wives.

**Day 5:** Bhai Duj celebrates the sister-brother bond when siblings celebrate together and sisters give gifts to their brothers.

## TRADITIONS GALORE

The fact that India is a land of diverse cultures can hardly be over emphasized. Likewise Diwali is celebrated with myriad interpretations across the land. In North India, people generally use the festival as an excuse to meet relatives and friends and also exchange gifts. For the Gujarati community, it is a cause for a double celebration as apart from Diwali, they also celebrate the Gujarati New Year the day after Diwali. In fact many businessmen close the financial books of



**KUNAL CHAUGULE**

CABIN CREW, MUMBAI

Diwali is one of the most important festivals in our family. This is the ideal occasion for calling relatives over. It is also the time when I love buying traditional dresses. I have been flying for five years, four of them with SpiceJet. Each and every Diwali celebration here has been a memorable one.



**ANJALI RAMNANI**

CABIN CREW, HYDERABAD

I am based in Hyderabad but my family is in Mumbai. So Diwali is the perfect time for all of us to get together. I look forward to meeting all my friends and bursting crackers with them. This used to be my mother's favourite festival. So all my Diwali celebrations this year will be in her memory.





**MEHAKDEEP KAUR**

CABIN CREW, AMRITSAR

I always look forward to Diwali. Many of my relatives are working professionals and we hardly get any time to meet one another during the other times of the year. But during Diwali, we can sit together and share our thoughts in a relaxed manner. I also like going out on shopping jaunts with my friends.



**ROHIT DOGRA**

SENIOR CABIN CREW, DELHI

I always look forward to Diwali because this is when around 25 of my relatives come to our place from India and abroad. We play cards, which is considered a *shagun*. I have been with SpiceJet for eight years and like other festivals, have many fond memories of the Diwali celebrations here in the past.



the previous year and worship their new accounts books on Diwali. In North Karnataka, Diwali starts with the worship of vessels with water and gold on Dhanteras. Unmarried girls from the nomadic Lambani tribes of Karnataka celebrate Diwali and men and married women are kept out of the festivities. In some villages in Belgaum, Diwali is celebrated with a castle building competition among the children judged by the elders of the village. Maharashtra celebrates the festival for five days and the locals also pray to the cow and its calf thus celebrating motherhood. Similarly cattle are worshipped in South India as cows are considered as incarnation of Lakshmi. In the interiors of Himachal Pradesh, Bhuddhi Diwali is celebrated by dancing around a bonfire. The celebrations take place a month after Diwali as it is said that the news of Lord Ram's return to Ayodhya reached them late in those days. In Punjab, the day after Diwali is called Tikka and sisters make a paste with saffron and rice and place it on their brother's forehead as a symbol of protection. Whatever the tradition, remember that Diwali is celebrated on the darkest night, illuminated with the brightest lights – with the hope that your life is always illuminated with light.

IN PUNJAB, THE DAY AFTER DIWALI IS CALLED TIKKA AND SISTERS MAKE A PASTE WITH SAFFRON AND RICE AND PLACE IT ON THEIR BROTHER'S FOREHEAD AS A SYMBOL OF PROTECTION

## DIWALI CHECKLIST

- Clean your home; use the occasion to de-clutter.
- Put up festive decorations with lots of lights.
- Do a Lakshmi Puja in the evening and keep your doors open.
- Let the dice roll – have a card party.
- Indulge in luxe shopping – buy gold.
- Make traditional sweets – this is the time to indulge.