

Diwali

Festival of Lights

Diwali is perhaps the most well-known of the Hindu festivals.

The word Diwali means 'rows of lighted lamps'. Diwali is known as the 'festival of lights' because houses, shops and public places are decorated with small earthenware oil lamps called *diyas*



Celebrating Diwali

For many Indians this five day festival honours Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.

People start the new business year at Diwali, and some Hindus will say prayers to the goddess for a successful year.

Lamps are lit to help **Lakshmi**, the goddess of wealth, find her way into people's homes.

They also celebrate one of the Diwali legends, which tells of the return of Rama and Sita to Rama's kingdom after fourteen years of exile.

In Britain, as in India, the festival is a time for:

- spring-cleaning the home,
- wearing new clothes
- exchanging gifts (often sweets and dried fruits) and

- preparing festive meals
- decorating buildings with fancy lights.
- huge firework displays often celebrate Diwali.

In India Hindus will leave the windows and doors of their houses open so that Lakshmi can come in. Rangoli are drawn on the floors - rangoli are patterns and the most popular subject is the lotus flower.

The meaning of Diwali

The festival celebrates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance, although the actual legends that go with the festival are different in different parts of India:



- In northern India and elsewhere, Diwali celebrates Rama's return from fourteen years of exile to Ayodhya after the defeat of Ravana and his subsequent coronation as king;
- In Gujarat, the festival honours Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth;
- In Nepal Diwali commemorates the victory of Lord Krishna over the demon king Narakaasura;
- In Bengal, it is associated with the goddess Kali.