

Deepavali at Tharani's

"Happy Deepavali!" Tharani shouted out a greeting to Henry and Abby as they tiptoed around the elaborate *kolam* on the floor near the main door, careful not to step on it.

Tharani was dressed in a traditional South Indian outfit – a silk skirt and blouse. Her brother Ravi wore a *kurta*.

"Happy Deepavali", they greeted back.

"You promised to surprise me. What is it?" Henry asked Ravi.

"You will have to wait till it gets dark", Ravi said smiling.

Soon, lunch was ready and the table was set. Prayers were said in Sanskrit thanking God for the food.

"You start with the *vada* for the appetizer, and save the *payasam* for dessert. The others are part of the main course," Tharani's mom explained.

Henry ate a *vada*. "It tastes like a salty donut," he said, munching on the crispy, yet spongy appetizer. Following Tharani's lead, Abby tore a piece of chapatti, scooped in some dal, and put it in her mouth gracefully.

"Wow! The chapattis remind me of the wheat tortillas my grandma makes," Abby said.

"Ooh, that was filling," Henry said. Abby nodded in agreement. They thanked Tharani's mom and off they went to see Tharani's grandma.

"Did you eat your *lehiyam*?" Grandma asked. "The home-made medicine will keep your tummy happy after feasting."

"Paati, can you tell us the story of Deepavali? Abby and Henry want to hear it," Tharani asked her grandma.

"Of course, I'm sure you want to hear it again too," Grandma smiled.

'Deepavali' means 'row of lights' in Sanskrit. The festival signifies different things in different parts of India. In the south, it commemorates the death of a wicked demon, Narakasura at the hands of Goddess Rukmani and Lord Krishna. At the time of his death, out of remorse, he requested that people celebrate

his death with sparkles, lights, and crackers. Thus, Deepavali came to be. A typical Deepavali day begins with an early morning hair bath with sesame-oil, after which new clothes are worn. Crackers are burst before sun rise and prayers recited. It is also a day when family and friends get together to exchange greetings and sweets.”

Dusk set in.

“Show me the surprise now, won’t you?” Henry begged Ravi.

Ravi led Henry outside where Tharani’s dad had set the stage for fireworks.

“Wow! You have quite a collection,” Henry squealed as he saw the fireworks being set.

They took turns with the sparklers, fountain crackers, and the spinning wheel crackers that sprinkled and rained light in a scintillating display of radiance and color.

Rockets went flying into the night sky, lighting it up for brief moments. The visual extravaganza delighted everyone.

Soon it was time to leave.

“What a great day it was,” remarked Abby.

“Fun, fun, fun,” Tharani squealed.

“I thoroughly enjoyed every moment,” Henry cheered. “This was AWESOME! Can we celebrate Deepavali every week?”

Glossary:

Kolam-Geometrical pattern drawn using rice flour at the entrance of a house

Kurta-Loose shirt worn by boys

Vada-Fried snack from South India

Payasam-South Indian dessert made from milk, rice and sugar

Lehiyam-Medicinal paste that prevents indigestion

Review:

1) Is the story too Indian for kids in the US to understand?

3) What do you like/dislike about the story?

4) What would you like to be added/removed/modified?