

Dev_Deepavali

By Jyotikar Pattni

Vedic seers believe that there are fourteen lokas in total. The seven lokas above are 'bhuh', 'bhuvah', 'svahr', 'mahah', 'janah', 'tapah', 'satyah', and the seven lokas below the bhumi-prithvi (earth) are 'atal', 'bital', 'satal', 'rassatal', 'mahatal', 'talatal', and 'paatal'. Dev_Deepavali is the fifteenth day of the bright cycle of the moon (shukla-paksha chadrama) 'poornima deena' from the Deepavali day falling on the darkest day of the Kartika month. The Vedas call upon all three worlds to commemorate a rite, ritual and spiritual occasion to congress all together in communion rather than oblique surrender to one almighty.

The cosmic Gods whose chiefs are namely: Indra ya, Agnee, Vayau, Yamaya, Nirriti, Varuna, Kubera, Issanaya, Somam, Rudra, Vishwakarmaraja, Prajjapatti, Vasus, all together commemorate Deepavali on the poornima – full moon of the Kartika month. According to Vedas, there are altogether 33 trillion Cosmic Gods.

Devis and Devas from the seven spiritual spheres (lokas) descent on earth to commemorate the glory of Shree Rama and Sita being their coronation after the defeat of Ravana and return from fourteen years of vaanvas (dispersing into the forest life upon the evil malice of Manthara). Vedas believe there are eighty four thousand Devas and sixty four Devis present on that night!

Our spirit of life is covered by sheaths, namely the anna-maya kosha (physical sheath), praana-maya kosha (metaphysical covering), mano-maya kosha (mental sheath), vijnana-maya kosha (intellect), aham-maya kosha (ego), param-manas kosha (higher mind), and finally the ananda-maya kosha (super consciousness covering of peace and blissfulness and eternal delight).

Analogy of the cosmos is similar and when all together deities and cosmic gods congregate together on the full moon after the Deepavali, people all over India bath in all sacred places of divine rivers like the 'Varanasi gath' of Ganges, Banares, and many others.

On Dev_Deepavali (full moon day) it is said that God descends from heaven to bathe in the Ganga. On this occasion amidst chanting of Vedic hymns people light *diyas* (earthen lamps) and burst firecrackers to welcome the cosmic Gods, Devas and Devis. Uttar Pradesh Tourism organizes a festival called Ganga Mahotsav so people can experience this celestial event and feel the ritualistic pulse of the ordinary people. 'Varanasi', the sacred corridor (tirtha) is the embodiment of living sacred heritage.

Dev Deepavali is celebrated on the occasion of Kartika Poornima when the Ghats of 'Varanasi' come alive with thousands of Diyas (earthen lamps). Dev Deepavali, celebrated on the fifteenth day of Deepavali, is a tribute to river Ganga by the people of Varanasi. It is observed with great fanfare and feasts. It is believed that on the day of Dev Deepavali, the Gods descend on Earth. It is interesting to note that the Kartika Purnima festival also coincides with the Jain light festival and Guru Nanak Jayanti. To mark the occasion and also to showcase the cultural heritage of Varanasi, the Uttar Pradesh Tourism department organizes a four-day Ganga Mahotsav around this period. A large number of Hindu devotees start assembling from the day of the Prabodhini Ekadasi (the eleventh day of the fortnight) itself. The official celebration is usually held on the Dasaswamedh Ghat. On the occasion of the Ganga Mahotsava, reputed artists and performers from all over the country come and perform, making the celebrations more eventful.

On the eve of Kartika Purnima, the number of pilgrims begins to increase manifold and most of the pilgrims camp by the riverside. In the evening, pilgrims and local people decorate the entire riverbank with tiny earthen lamps ('Diya'). These lamps are lit as a mark of welcome to the Gods as they descend on earth. The little sparks of fire flicker elegantly and is a wonderful sight to watch. The 'Ganga-Aarti' is an important event in the evening. Almost all Ghats organize their own ceremony. Huge lamps are set ablaze and the priest holds forth the lamp as the multitude chants the hymns.

The river gives Varanasi its uniqueness; besides the ghats Varanasi could be any sprawling, overcrowded Indian city. Stretching the entire length of the city, the ghats (a ghat is any bank of a river with steps built into it) each have their own name and character. Assi Ghat, the tourist ghat, has broadband internet shops, bookstores and hotels. There are two main cremation ghats, as well as the Maharajah's ghat and various temple ghats. For Dev Deepavali, the ghats were decorated with lighted candles, hundreds of them all twinkling. Many people admired the views by boat, although many more walked along the ghats themselves. We were warned to watch our clothing, our dupattas (scarves) especially from catching on fire from the lamps. On our boat, we each lighted a small leaf-bowl filled with flower petals and a candle. One makes a wish, then lets the candle float away on the Ganges. The longer one can see one's candle's flame, the more likely one's wish will come true. May Delight of eighty four thousand lights of moon and sixty four thousand shaktis of moon bring health, abundance, love, compassion and great universal humanity here on Earth.