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My Brief Annual Festival.

The Hindus have many festivals in a year. One of them is "Deepavali", and this is the best of all. It is celebrated by old and young, and rich and poor with great pomp and rejoicings.

"Deepavali" is composed of two words meaning "the feast of lamps" and "Narakasura's death". The first phrase "the feast of lamps" informs us that "Deepavali" is also celebrated in honour of the goddess "Laxshmi". There is an old superstitious belief which says that the goddess "Laxshmi" has the power of wealth. If she entered a house the people who live in it would be rich. To make her enter the house the people who live in it must have their house well lighted as soon as the sun sets and the day begins to grow dark. They must have the front door open. That is why on this day we see all the lights burning in every house where a Hindu lives. The second phrase "Narakasura's death" gives another reason why the Hindus celebrate "Deepavali". The legend that is behind it tells us that "Deepavali" is celebrated to show God how thankful and glad the people are that Narakasura was killed.

Everyone likes to wear new clothes on a festival day. The Hindus wear new clothes on "Deepavali" for a certain reason. This reason comes in contact with the second phrase "Narakasura's death". Long ago there dwelt a cruel tyrant, and he ruled a country in India. His name was Narakasura. He ill-treated the sages and imprisoned pretty maidens. The sages and the maidens prayed to "Lord Krishna" who answered their prayers by having the tyrant killed. He was killed by Satyabama, "Lord Krishna's wife", and the day

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of his death is known as "Deepavali". Before his death, "Deepavali" was only celebrated to honour the goddess "Lakshmi". Since he died the celebration commemorates two events. Only when he was going to die did he realize the wrong that he had done, so he asked for the Lord's forgiveness. He also asked for a favour. He asked the Lord to see that the people followed his advice. He stated that every Hindu must get up early in the morning, have an oil bath, and wear new clothes before the sun rose on that particular day, no matter how poor he was. If he could not afford it he should at least wear a new piece of thread round his wrist or waist. If the people did not do this then they would have to suffer for the sins they had committed.

It is usually the poor who enjoy the festival most. They do not have happy times as the wealthy people have everyday. Their only day for amusement is on that day, and so they try their utmost to make it as enjoyable as possible. All their savings are spent on that day, and they are always looking forward eagerly to it. Everything is planned carefully, as to what they should do and to where they would go on that day.

On the eve of "Deepavali" the ladies make cakes and other eatables. Every light is lit on that day. Early on "Deepavali" the people have oil-baths, and put on their new garments. The custom of the Tamils is to have an oil bath after attending a funeral. They believe in an old saying which says that a funeral house is haunted by devils and ghosts which are liable to go home with the people who attend the funeral. So if they have an oil bath the devils will not stand near them. Then a ceremony is performed by the mistress of the house on "Deepavali" Day.

Free hand drawings drawn with rice flour, is the first step carried out in the ceremony. These drawings represent various things, and they are drawn at the porch and

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at the altar. A picture of "Laxshmi" decorated with garlands and flowers is put up at the altar. Lights burn in light-stands, and trays full of cakes are placed before the picture. A large banana leaf with padi spread in middle lies on one side of the altar. Besides the padi, camphor, betel leaves, and arecanuts are also kept on the leaf. A tumbler with a coconut at its base stands on the padi. The smoke and smell of incense fills the house. Turmeric and ochre are used to paint the pillars and threshold of the house. Then the people begin to worship, and they also fire crackers. After worshipping they have a meal of vegetables. They also make presents of cloth to barbers, dhobies, and to servants. In the evening they go to temples, and some stay back and read sacred books at home. Thus "Deepavali" ends in our native country of India and beyond.

Some people think that "Deepavali" is not the chief festival of the year. If it is not the chief one, then why does the government give us a holiday on that day, instead of giving it for some other festivals, such as the Harvest Festival, and Thai Pusan. Every government school and office gives us a holiday for "Deepavali", to let us celebrate the tyrant's death.

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