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(Year 2001-2002)

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EDITOR’S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Happy New Year! With this greeting, we also welcome all of you to a brand new issue of Bal Sandesh. This past year was an extremely eventful one. Since our last issue, we have had a great India Nite, with some great participation from the kids of Bal Sabha. We have also had a great Pongal, and the Indian community has been busy as usual. Included in this issue are several poems, legends, and an article on the meaning of Diwali. As usual, we also have our enticingly tasty recipes from our very own Bawarchi. We hope that you have fun testing and tasting these wonderful recipes. Also included is a photo from the Bal Sabha Youth Discussion Group, which took place on December 30th at the Chandrasekhar residence.

Be sure to check out our website at: www.missouri.edu/~physmc/balsabha. On that website will be posting a list of topics and meeting dates for the discussion group, once they are planned.

The next Bal Sandesh will be published in May. We would appreciate any articles, poems, drawings, and jokes sent in by the last week of April.

The Editors

That Bothersome Tune
Indu Chandrasekhar (9th Grade)
West Junior High School

I have a tune stuck in my head
That just doesn’t want to go away.
I keep trying to force it out,
But I guess it’s here to stay.

It runs about from ear to ear,
Circles around the back of my head,
Flits between my eyebrows and hair,
And knocks in my brain like a peace of lead.

Its tempo pulses through my body,
The rhythms show in the steps I take;
Those crazy sharps and flats and grace notes
Are beginning to affect the decisions I make.

Right now it’s rippling through my mind,
Interrupting this calming bliss,
It seems to ruin every occasion!
I’m really getting tired of this.

The more I hear this looney tune,
The more I want it to go away.
I want this song to just get out,
But I guess it’s here to stay.

Bal Sabha Youth Discussion Group

This past December, 19 Indian youths met to discuss important issues concerning Indian Americans today. Their discussion ranged from topics relating to the popular film, “American Desi” to life for Indians after September 11th. The group had participants from 7th through 12th grade with college student mentors from around the US.
'Diwali' comes from the Sanskrit word 'Deepavali' - Deepa meaning light and Avali meaning a row. Diwali is celebrated on Amavasya - the 15th day or the dark fortnight of the Hindu month of Ashwin. Every home is alit with the orange glow of twinkling diyas (small earthen lamps) to welcome Lakshmi, Goddess of wealth and prosperity. Multi-colored rangoli designs, floral decorations and fireworks lend grandeur to this festival which heralds joy, mirth and happiness in the ensuing year.

Diwali is celebrated for five continuous days and each day has its significance with a number of myths, legends and beliefs, some of which are as follows:

The first day is called DHANTERAS or Dhantrayodashi, which falls on the thirteenth day of the month of Ashwin. The word 'Dhan' means wealth. In western India, entrances are made colorful with lovely traditional motifs or Rangoli designs to welcome Lakshmi. Lakshmi-puja is performed in the evenings. In southern India, cows are worshipped all day as they are supposed to be the incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi. A very interesting story about this day is of the sixteen-year-old son of King Hima. As per his horoscope he was doomed to die by snakebite on the fourth day of his marriage. On that particular fourth day of his marriage his young wife did not allow him to sleep. She laid all the ornaments and lots of gold and silver coins in a big heap at the entrance of her husband's boudoir and lighted innumerable lamps all over the place. And she went on telling stories and singing songs. When Yama, the god of Death arrived there in the guise of a Serpent his eyes got blinded by the dazzle of those brilliant lights and he could not enter the Prince's chamber. So he climbed on top of the heap of the ornaments and coins and sat there the whole night listening to the melodious songs. In the morning he quietly went away. Thus the young wife saved her husband from the clutches of death. Since then this day of Dhanteras came to be known as the day of "YAMADEEPDAAN" and lamps are kept burning throughout the night in reverence adoration to Yama, the god of Death.

The second day is called NARKACHATURDASHI or CHOTI DIWAL. The story goes that the demon king Narakasur ruler of Pragyotishpur (a province to the South of Nepal) after defeating Lord Indra had snatched away the magnificent earrings of Aditi, the Mother Goddess and imprisoned sixteen thousand daughters of the gods and saints in his harem. On the day previous to Narakachaturdashi, Lord Krishna killed the demon and liberated the imprisoned damsels and also recovered those precious earrings of Aditi. As a symbol of that victory Lord Krishna smeared his forehead with the demon king's blood. Krishna returned home in the very early morning of the Narakachaturdashi day. The women-folk massaged scented oil to his body and gave him a good bath to wash away the filth from his body. Since then the custom of taking bath before sunrise on this day has become a traditional practice especially in Maharashtra. Another legend is about King Bali of the nether world mighty power had become a threat to the gods. In order to curb his powers Lord Vishnu in the guise of a Batu Waman- a small boy-visited him and begged him to give him only that much land which he could cover with his three steps. Known for his philanthropy King Bali proudly granted him his wish. That very moment that small boy transformed himself into the all-powerful Lord Vishnu. With his first step Lord Vishnu covered the entire heaven and with the second step the earth and asked Bali where to keep his third step. Bali offered his head. Putting his foot on his head Vishnu pushed him down to the underworld. At the same time for his generosity Lord Vishnu gave him the lamp of knowledge and allowed him to return to earth once a year to light millions of lamps to dispel the darkness and ignorance and spread the radiance of love and wisdom.

The third day of Diwali is the most important day of LAKSHMI-PUJA. On the dark night of Amavasya, all of a sudden that impenetrable darkness is pierced by innumerable rays of light for a moment a blaze of light descends down to earth from heaven as golden-footed Deepa-Lakshmi alights on earth in all her celestial glory. She is worshipped all day. Feasts are arranged and gifts are exchanged on this day when nicely dressed men, women and children go to temples and fairs, visit friends and relatives. Everything is joyous, gold and glitter! One of the most curious customs, which characterizes this festival of Diwali, is the indulgence of gambling, especially on a large scale in North India. It is believed that goddess Parvati played dice with her husband, Lord Shiv on this day and she decreed that whosoever gambled on Diwali night would prosper throughout the ensuing year. This tradition of playing cards- flush and rummy with stakes on this particular day continues even today. One very interesting story about this Diwali day is from Kathopanishad of a small boy called Nichiketa who believed that Yama, the god of Death was as black as the dark night of amavasya. But when he met Yama in person he was puzzled as the dark night has become a bright one. Yama explained to Nichiketa on this Diwali day of amavasya that by only passing through the darkness of death, man sees the light of highest wisdom and then only his soul can escape from the bondage of his mortal frame to mingle with the Supreme Power. Thereafter, Nichiketa realized the importance of worldly life and significance of death. Nichiketa's all doubts were set at rest and he whole-heartedly participated in Diwali celebrations.

The fourth day is PADWA or VARSHAPRATIPADA. Govardhan-Puja is also performed in the North on this day.
Diwali (Continued)

As per Vishnu-Puran the people of Go-
kul used to celebrate a festival in hon-
our of Lord Indira and worshipped him
after the end of every monsoon season
but one particular year the young
Krishna stopped them from offering
prayers to Lord Indra who in terrific
anger sent a deluge to submerge Gokul.
But Krishna saved his Gokul by lifting
up the Govardhan Mountain and hold-
ing it over the people as an umbrella.
Govardhan is a small hillock in Braj,
near Mathura and on this day of Diwali
people of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar
Pradesh and Bihar build cow dung,
hillocks, decorate them with flowers
and then worship them. This day is
looked upon as the most auspicious
day to start any new venture. In many
Hindu homes it is a custom for the wife
to put the red tilak on the forehead of
her husband, garland him and do his "Aarathi" with a prayer for his long
life. In appreciation of all the tender
care that the wife showers on him, the
husband gives her a costly gift. This
Gudi Padwa is symbolic of love and
devotion between the wife and hus-
band. On this day newly married
daughters with their husbands are in-
vited for special meals and given pre-
sents. In olden days brothers went to
fetch their sisters from their in-laws
home for this important day.

The fifth and final day of Diwali Festi-
val is known by the name of "BHAYYA-DUJ" in the Hindi-
speaking belt "BHAV-BIJ" in the
Marathi-speaking communities and in
Nepal by the name of "BHAJ-TIKA".
As the legend goes Yamraj, the God of
Death visited his sister Yami on this
particular day. She put the auspicious
tilak on his forehead, garlanded him
and led him with special dishes and
both of them together ate the sweets,
talked and enjoyed themselves to their
heart's content, while parting Yamraj
gave her a special gift as a token of his
love and in return Yami also gave him
a lovely gift which she had made with
her own hands. Since then this day is
being observed as a symbol of love
between sisters and brothers. (Based on
an article by Malini Bisen)

The Origin of Narmada River

Sajal Kantha,
2nd Grade, Fairview Elementary

Narmada is one of the most sacred rivers in India. This is a legend about the origin
of this river.

Narmada means one who brings tenderness. Once Lord Shiva was in deep medita-
tion in the forests and hills of AmarKantak. He had been in meditation for a long
time, but suddenly he found his meditation broken. When he opened his eyes, he
found a beautiful maiden praying to him with hands folded in great devotion. Lord
Shiva was very pleased and said: “You have inspired tenderness in my heart and so
I name you Narmada and will grant you a boon.” Narmada asked Shiva that she
always be pure and free. Her wish was granted.

Narmada’s beauty and tenderness attracted all the Gods who wanted to marry her.
She however loved her freedom and kept hiding from the Gods. But one time she
got caught. To escape, she turned herself into a stream and slipped through the cap-
tor's fingers. She flowed further and further down toward the plains. Since then she
has been flowing as the great Narmada rivers.

Your Voice

By Indu Chandrasekhar
9th Grade, West Junior

It seems like everywhere I go,
I can always hear your voice,
Even when you’re far away.

It lulls me to sleep,
It keeps me awake,
It twiddles my emotions each day.

Anxious that I am not near it,
Worried that I might not see it,
I am afraid I won’t hear what you have
to say.

Just one thing can solve my problem –
I would simply like to hear your voice,
I’m glad that today, you’re not far
away.

Peace

By Anand Palaniappan
9th Grade, West Junior

PEACE is not something you wish for,
It’s something you make,
Something you do,
Something you are,
And something you give.

PEACE is loving life,
Touching soul’s timelessness,
Feeling relation to all life.

PEACE opens her floodgates after a
storm,
After the baby has been born,
After the last tear has been shed.

PEACE is not just the absence of war,
It is a way of living.
MASAAL VADAI

Ingredients: ½ c. Toor dal
1/2 c. Channa dal
1 Large or 2 medium onions
2 Green chilies
1 tsp. Red chili powder
A small bunch of coriander
½ tsp. Fennel seeds
Salt to taste

Directions: Soak the dals in water for an hour. Drain well. Grind coarsely. Chop onions, coriander leaves, and mix all the ingredients to form a mixture with little moisture. Moisten your hand with water, and make small patties with a diameter of about 1½ - 2 inches. Deep fry in oil until golden brown. Remove, drain on a paper towel, and serve piping hot and crisp with ketchup, coriander chutney, mint chutney, or khatta meetha chutney.

CORIANDER CHUTNEY

Ingredients: 2 tsp. Urad dal
4 Red chilies
4 Green chilies
1 tsp. Tamarind paste
Salt to taste
1 Bunch coriander
1 tbsp. Oil
¼ tsp. Asafetida

Directions: Fry dal, and red chilies, and after they fry well, add asafetida and green chilies. Wash coriander, and select the tender leaves and stems. After removing the seasoning from the stove, toss the cut coriander leaves a couple of times in the hot oil. For best results, do not add leaves or stems that are not tender. Grind all ingredients with 4 teaspoons water to a thick paste.

Ganesha: Why He Has Only One Tusk
By Sneha Kantha
6th Grade, Smithton Middle School

Ganesha has only one tusk, and that is why he is also known as Ekdantha. Here is a legend explaining how that came to be.

Once Parsurama, who was a favorite disciple of Shiva, went to Kailash to visit his master. On arriving at the inner apartment, Ganesha, who was guarding the place denied Parsurama entrance.

But Parsurama did not stop. He urged his way, and after a long dispute the two started getting physical. At first, Ganesha had the advantage, seizing Parsurama in his trunk and giving him a twirl that left him sick and senseless. On recovering, Parsurama threw his axe at Ganesha who, recognizing it as his father’s weapon, received it with all humility upon one of his tusks, which immediately broke off. That is why Ganesha has only one tusk.

Parvati was outraged by this and was about to curse Parsurama. However, Krishna stopped this from happening by appearing as a little boy and appeased Parvati’s anger.