

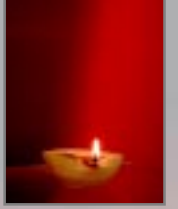
The Puranic story

Tradition has associated Deepavali with Narakasura Samhaaram, a *Puranic* (mythological) story depicting the annihilation of Narakasura. According to Hindu mythology, Narakasura, an all powerful demon, was a tyrant king ruling from his capital, Pragjyotisa. He had acquired untold strength through severe penance and he used it to harass everyone. He terrorised other kings and imprisoned their daughters. He harassed the devas and the sages, who unable to bear the tyranny, complained to Krishna.

In the Song Celestial, the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says that whenever righteousness suffers and unrighteousness triumphs, He will manifest Himself. He is born in every age to protect the good, to destroy the wicked and to establish righteousness.

And so Krishna, - '*Thushta nikkiraka sishta paripaalana,*' - answered the prayers, and with His consort Satyabama, killed Narakasura. He restored dharma and peace. He freed all the maidens who were held captive.

Narakasura attained enlightenment at the last moment and, in accordance with the teachings of Hinduism that no one is eternally doomed, was blessed with God's *darshan* (appearance). Acceding to his request, this glorious event is remembered and celebrated by Hindus all over the world as Deepavali.



Meaning in the myth

The story of Narakasura is bewildering and the battle episode may appear gruesome. But the destruction of ignorance, darkness, sorrow and hatred brings with it a wonderful message of enlightenment, peace, joy and cheer. Man's life is a constant battle between opposites - right and wrong, darkness and light, knowledge and ignorance, love and hate - and therefore the spirit of Deepavali bears great significance for him.

This story may be a myth but as Ruskin describes, a myth is a story with a deeper meaning ; something more than what is apparent. Mythology should not be dismissed as mere fiction. It is in fact, a clever device adopted by the ancient sages to teach humankind, not only literature, history and the sciences but also religion and the grandeur of a religious life. The deliverance of dharma and enlightenment from the clutches of evil and hatred through the Grace of Light, brings peace, and joy on earth. This then is the spirit and essence of the Deepavali message. The saga of lights therefore is a timely reminder that within us reside the *Narakasuras*, the evil tendencies. These have grown upon us and must be removed through the Light of Knowledge so that we may attain enlightenment. The whole chronicle celebrates the human spirit and acknowledges the ultimate victory of good over evil.