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Indian Festivals

Picture this - sweets, music, dancing, greetings, firecrackers, kites, colorful consumes and lot more fun stuff. All of these and much more are ingredients of Indian festivals. There are many different kinds of festivals celebrated in parts of India. Some of them are Ganesh Chaturthi, Rathyatra, Onam, Pongal, Mahashivratri, Rakshabandhan, Ramnavi, Durga puja, Gandhi Jayanti, Idd, Pateti, Indian Independence day, Republic day, and Dasher. All these festivals are enjoyed in different parts of India. I am going to write here about 5 Indian festivals. They are Uttrayan, Holi, Janmashtami, Navratri and Diwali.

“Kapyo chhe!, Kaade Lapet!” you can hear these sounds on Uttrayan which is also known as kite flying festival. It is celebrated on January 14. Every year when the routine change takes place in the orbital path of earth, the sun appears to march back in the northern direction. Since the northern direction is considered auspicious in India, this festival inspires all to follow the path of righteousness. Uttrayan is when everyone young and old fly kites on the rooftops or terraces of their houses. Whenever you look up in the sky on Uttrayan, you can see the colorful kites like many rainbows at once. You need a kite and a Firki. Firki is a string to fly a kite. It is so much of fun. But sometime people try to cut your kite so you better watch out for that! There are music, dancing, lots of food and more! The South Indian celebrates Pongal festival on the day of Uttrayan to appreciate God’s generosity.

“Happy Holi!” This is the way people greet each other on Holi. Holi’s legend is about the victory of lord Vishnu over evil king Hiranyakashipu and his sister Holika. The king’s little son Prahalad was worshipping the Lord Vishnu. The king was unhappy and furious that Prahalad was worshipping Lord Vishnu instead of him. So the king forced Holika to sit in a fire with Prahalad. Holika had a boon that fire could not touch her but Holika obeyed the king’s order. Holika took Prahalad and sat in the fire. Holika was burnt to ashes while Prahalad came out safely because he prayed Lord Vishnu. From that day onwards, Holi is celebrated. On the first day of Holi, people burn a pile of wood. People pour water circling around the fire while praying for good health and well being of the family. Holi is also the festival of colors and celebrated in spring. On the second

day of Holi, which is called Dhuleti, people on the street spray colored water and smear colored powder (rang) on each other. The main colors are pink and red which is also called Gulal. They also enjoy folk songs and dances on that day. People have feast of dates and corn sweets.

“Nand gher anand bhayo, Jay Kanaiya Lal ki! Hathi ghoda palkhi, Jay Kanaiya Lalki!” All these and other phrases are sung, chanted and shouted with music on Janmashtami. This is a very popular and religious occasion because it is lord Krishna’s birthday. Lord Krishna established Dharma and destroyed evil Rakshshaas. He is really God in disguise himself. That is the reason why Janmasthmi is very special. It is believed that lord Krishna was born on stormy midnight, so people observe a fast on that day, which is broken on midnight. The image or idol of Bal Krishna is bathed and cradled. Devotees sing and dance with great joy. The temples are decorated in mostly Mathura, Gokul, Vrindavan and Dwarka where lord Krishna lived. On this occasion of Janmashtami, a popular ceremony known as “Dahi-Handi” takes place where a Matka (pot) containing yogurt, milk and butter is suspended high above the ground. The Matka is broken by a pyramid of group of people. By this way, people celebrate Janmasthmi.

“Rame Ambe ma Chachar na chok ma re lol”. “Ambe maa mane darshan dejo!” All these type of traditional songs are sung and danced on the occasion of Navratri. It is the festival of nine nights celebrated with cultural dimension in the region of Gujarat and some part of Rajasthan and Maharashtra states of India. People enjoy traditional folk dance called Garba in a circle throughout night. In the center of the circle, they place an image or idol of Goddess Ambe Mata to worship her. “Radha shyam rame Gokul ma Raas Gopio ghunti sath re!” Men and women dance dandia raas with small wooden sticks. Raas is another type of folk dance. Raas has its origin in the life scenes of lord Krishna.

“Boom, Bhoom” That sounds like fire crackers and fireworks. Diwali is the festival of lights. On Diwali people light up Diyas (Candle, Lamps), wear new traditional clothes and jewelry, visit relatives, neighbors and exchange sweets, dry fruits and gifts. Diwali is the day when people celebrated Lord Ram and his wife Sita’s return home to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile, which was hundreds of years ago. Since then people have been celebrating Diwali all over India. People clean and decorate their houses with beautiful Diyas and make Rangoli patterns with different colored sands in front of their doors. They also make garlands of flowers and Mango tree leaves to hang in front of their houses. Diwali is a 5 day festival. The first day is called “Dhanteras” when people worship the goddess of prosperity Lakshmi. They perform Lakshmi Pooja and wash precious coins and god goddess idols. The second day is called “Kali Chaudash.” It is when people worship Goddess Kali and God Hanuman to protect one from evil and spirits like Halloween. The third day is called Diwali. Diwali day people perform Chopda (accounting books) Pooja. The fourth day is “Bestu Varsh,” which is also New Year day on Hindu calendar. On New Year day, people get together cheerfully and greet each other “Happy New Year.” People send Diwali cards for best wishes to friends and families who live miles away. The fifth day is called “Bhaibij”. This day brothers go to their sister’s

house to eat delicious food made with love. People have vacation during Diwali and enjoy lots of food, fireworks and firecrackers on all five days of Diwali on streets. There is a good tradition of offering variety of homemade food with devotion to the God. When everyone pitches into make rows of food in front of god, it will appear a grand feast called “Annakut”.

Like I mentioned, people in India celebrate a variety of festivals. There are different regions and every region has a different culture. There are seasonal, religious and lot more different type of festivals. Every culture celebrates a festival in a different kind of fashion. That is why India is called the land of festivals. But that is not all! Indians enjoy all of these festivals even outside India all around the world with the same enthusiasm. How would life be without festivals?