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## IndiaFEST 2011– Essay Contest

### MY FAVORITE HOLIDAY

My favorite holiday is Diwali. It is known as the "festival of lights" and the most significant spiritual meaning is "the awareness of the inner light". Diwali is a major festival of the Hindu religion. I like this holiday because all my family members and friends get together at one place. We wear new clothes and share sweets and snacks with family members and friends. We celebrate with fireworks and diyas.

The word Diwali has been derived from the word Dipavali, a Sanskrit word, meaning a row of lights. During Diwali, lamps are lit everywhere. It is celebrated to mark the triumph of good over evil, Diwali is a 3 or 5 day festival. Aside from Hinduism, other religions that celebrate this festival are Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism.

People clean, decorate their homes and business premises thoroughly before the first Diwali day as it is a very auspicious day, to welcome the goddess of wealth and prosperity to their homes. Do the laundry, clean all the rooms and sort out papers in both homes and businesses. It's like a spring cleaning of sorts, a "cleansing" ritual to rid yourself of any unnecessary elements in your environment. Homes are lit up with hundreds of diyas and colorful rangolis at the doorways. Decorate the entrance way with bells, flower garlands, wall hangings and lights.

Dhanatrayodashi - This is the first day of Diwali. "Dhan" means wealth and "Trayodashi" means 13th day. For some places in India, one performs Yamadipadan, is an offering lamp to Lord Yamata to prevent untimely death. Thirteen lamps made of wheat flour and lit with oil should be placed outside the house, facing southwards. Businessmen worship their treasures and begin new account books on this day. Diwali signifies the renewal of life and hence starting a new project or business is considered auspicious during these

days. It is customary to buy utensils and ornaments or jewelry on the first day of Diwali.

The second day of the festival, Naraka Chaturdasi, "Chaturdashi" is the 14th day. This was the day on which the demon Narakasura was killed by Krishna. It signifies the victory of good over evil and light over darkness. Naraka Sura Vadh is the day, with celebrations involving bursting firecrackers at dawn after Lakshmi puja. Some areas may put a huge Narakasura dummy made with firecrackers. This will be burst by a person dressed as Lord Krishna. The evening sky of Diwali is a colourful sight to watch.

Perform a 'Lakshmi puja', this is a ritual performed on the third day in order to seek divine blessings from the goddess Lakshmi. It consists of an elaborate ritual using grains, leaves, coins, and idols to prepare a ceremony. During this ritual, you can invoke the goddess by reciting the Vedic mantras or as you chant her name. Offerings are made and at the end, the aarti is performed quietly and a peaceful atmosphere should accompany the entire ritual.

Bali Pratipada, fourth day is celebrated as Govardhana puja, also called Annakoot, and is celebrated as the day Krishna defeated Indra and by the lifting of Govardhana hill to save his kingdom and cattle from rain and floods. For Annakoot, large quantities of food are decorated symbolizing the Govardhana hill lifted by Krishna.

Yama Dwitiya is fifth day, brothers and sisters meet to express love and affection for each other. It is based on a story when Yama visited his sister Yamini. Yamini welcomed Yama with an aarti and they had a feast together. Yama gave a gift to Yamini while leaving as a token of his appreciation. Brothers visit their sisters' place on this day and usually have a meal there, and also give gifts to their sisters.

Diwali has widespread acceptance all over the world. The U.S. Senate's Senate Resolution 299, recognizing the "religious and historical significance of the festival of Diwali", was passed unanimously on November 14, 2007. Now we all know about my favorite holiday, Diwali.