

## The Story of Diwali

By Dr. Shweta S Oza

Diwali, the festival of lights, is celebrated across India. Like many festivals worldwide, Diwali has several historical and mythological stories associated with it. One such story celebrates the return of Prince Ram, his wife Princess Sita, and his brother Prince Laxman from a challenging 14-year exile.

Long ago, in a time when men were tall, the heavens touched the ground, and worlds were porous, there was a king from the Sun dynasty named Dasarath. He had three queens and four sons. The eldest son, loved by all, was named Ram. His brothers adored him, and the queens cherished all their sons, but Ram was the most beloved. He had qualities that made it impossible not to like him; he was respectful, obedient, and always did the right thing, honoring the words of his elders and teachers.

Ram was married to Princess Sita, and his brothers were Lakshman, Bharath, and Shatrughna. One day, when the time was right, the royal priest counseled the king to announce Prince Ram's coronation as the crown prince on an auspicious day. Day before the coronation was to take place, the royal announcements were made, and everybody was informed that tomorrow beloved Prince Ram would be coronated as Crown Prince. The palace and city were filled with joy, as everyone decorated with flowers and lamps, singing and dancing in celebration.

However, this happiness was short-lived. On the eve of Ram's coronation, King Dasarath had to honor a promise made decades earlier and agreed to exile Ram for 14 years to the jungle. So, instead of being coronated as Crown Prince; Prince Ram along with his wife Princess Sita, and his brother Prince Laxman began their 14-year exile in the jungle.

During their time in the jungle, they faced many challenges. One day, the arrogant king Ravana kidnapped Sita by tricking her. Ram and Laxman received help from Jatayu, the king of birds, and Sugriv, the king of the vaanars. With the assistance of brave vaanar Hanuman, they located Sita on an island and built a bridge to reach her. Once there, they fought and defeated Ravana and his troops, proving the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness. Prince Ram & Princess Sita were reunited, and they all made their way back home to Ayodhya as the 14-years were about to be finished.

As they approached Ayodhya, they saw that on the darkest night, when no moon shone and the stars barely flickered, the light from the lamps—not just on the streets, but also in the hearts of the people—illuminated their path. It was the last night of their exile and Good had overcome the bad, and righteousness had prevailed over darkness.

This celebration became the festival of Diwali, a time for hope and happiness, marking the victory of righteousness, which is celebrated to this day.