Religions Ans Religious Practices Of Indians In South Asia: Deepavali, Navarathri, Ganesh Chaturthi, Thaipoosam And Mahashivratri

Hinduism has been known as, one of the oldest religions on the earth and has no founder for it. Hinduism also has been known as a fusion of variety of beliefs. Meanwhile, Hinduism has many sects, such as Shaivism, Vaishnava, Shaktism and so on. The presence of Hinduism can be seen widely in South Asia. Some reports are showing that there are 900 million followers of Hinduism around the globe around the year 2019. There are several monuments or temples that is representing Hinduism throughout South Asia. Their certain theories are explaining that Hinduism has been spread throughout South Asia due to nature of contact, trade, imperialistic and colonial era. The religion has its very own beliefs, symbols, rituals and festival which has been practiced over the years. There are several major festivals celebrated by Hindus in South Asia throughout the year. Such as Deepavali, Navarathiri, Ganesh Chaturthi, Thaipoosam and Mahasivaratri.

Firstly, Deepavali also as been known as Diwali is one of the major festivals celebrated by the Hindus in South Asia. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, Diwali means a Hindu festival in October or November that is a celebration of light and of hopes for the following year. And also, Deepavali means a row of Light. As per Ajay Matharu ‘It is a time filled with light and love; a time when Indians all over the world rejoice. It is the darkest night of the darkest periods, yet it is a celebration of light! Diwali is heralded as the triumph of good over evil.’ According to the Hindu epics, Diwali is a day which is a celebration of the demise of the demon king Naragasura and the union of Lord Vishnu and Mahalakshmi. Hindus celebrate the festival by light up the oil lamps, candles and lights around their house. It is not only has been seen as a decoration but the light that has been light up will be seen as the light of God. In South Asia, countries like Malaysia, Singapore are given special holidays on Diwali. It will be celebrated as a major festival at there. This festival also has been seen as a family reunion among the Indians. They will start the day by taking an oil bath and visiting temples, then followed by the feast at the house and visiting the neighbourhood which strengthen the bonding. Not only that, As in South Asia countries, this festival brings a positive thought or a vibe and happiness in their home. Therefore, it considered as a major Hindu festival in South Asia that brings joy, a positive vibe and thoughts which marks the sorrow and the darkness faced by one is vanishing away, which brings mental strength to one.

Beside that, Thaipoosam is also considered as a major Hindu festival in South Asia. Thaipoosam is a Hindu festival celebrated at the temple of Lord Muruga. Thaipoosam will be celebrated in the tamil month of Thai (January) and which commonly will be held grandly celebrated at Batu Caves. Thaipoosam is very ancient Tamil festival. Thaipoosam is celebrated as the day when the Asura, the darkness of ignorance is defeated by the light of enlightened wisdom of God’s grace. This has been seen as major festival celebration of the Hindus in South Asia, for instance, nations like Malaysia and Singapore. As the Deepavali, Thaipoosam festival has been given special holiday for it. On this day, ‘kavadi’ is the main aspect and making offering is also a key element in Thaipoosam. Devotees make many types of offerings including, carrying kavadi, giving charity, shaving their heads, carrying the milk pot and so on.

Hence, Thaipoosam is also celebrated as a day when the devotees make their offerings to Lord Muruga. The day is considered as an important day for the Hindus for them to be fully involved spiritually towards the Lord Muruga and make their offering. And the devotees will be taking a fast of 48 days before taking ‘kavadi’. They will be following certain strict practices during the fasting period. And this will be an event that promotes the good practices and consider as a negative thought vanishing moment abstractly for the devotees.

Mahasivarathiri is a major festival celebrated by the Hindus in South Asia such as nations like Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. ‘The Great Night of Shiva’ known as Mahasivathiri is one of the most significant events in India’s spiritual calendar. This is one of the major celebrations in Shaivism. The Art of Loving organization stated ‘This night brings a sense of deep serenity and benevolence. Any meditation done on this day is a hundred times more effective’. This celebration will be held at Shivan temple. Some of the Lord Shiva devotee will perform poojas, chant Vedic mantras or Rudram, practice sadhana and meditation. All these sacred practices install a sense of peace within us and oneness with the world. The importance of this festival is to promote a deep rest for the body, mind and ego. That deep rest awakens a devotee to the highest knowledge of the Shiva Tattva. This night is not just a night of wakefulness, this night can be a night of awakening for oneself (Sadhduru, 2020). In a nutshell, this festival has been seen as a festival that will brings someone closer to the god and it also helps one to retain the mental health’s strength.

Besides Mahasivarathiri , Navarathiri is one of the major festival celebrations in Hinduism under Saktism Sect. Even in India, the devotees of Saktism took it as a major festival and celebrate it grandly, even in southeast Asian countries like Malaysia and Singapore Hindus still consider it as an important festival which bring positive vibes and joy to their lives. It will be 10 days of grand celebration of the female devotees Parvathi the consort of Shiva, Lakshmi the consort of Vishnu dan Saraswathi the consort of Brahma. Vijayatasami will the day of the grand victory. This festival will be celebrated to commemorate the victory of Athi Parasakhi over Demon Mahishasura. Goddess Durga represented power, which gave us the strength to fight challenges, while Goddess Lakshmi represented wealth and Goddess Saraswathy gave us knowledge. According to the legend of the Navaratri, the story lies on the battle that took place between goddess Durga and the demon king Mahishasura, who represents selfishness. This day signifies the victory of good over evil. Some people will be undergoing a fasting and will be perform puja then they will break their fast. Scientifically, the rituals that has been done during this prayer creates certain energy and spreads, which release the divine power which gives enough potent powers to maintain our physical and mental balance.

Ganesh Chaturthi which celebrates the birthday of Lord Ganesha, is a Hindu Festival will be celebrated around August to September on the fourth day in the month of Bhadra. The Ganesh Chaturthi is widely celebrated in Southeast countries like Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. The south Asian Hindus mostly will perform certain poojas at home or even at the temple and offer some sweets like ‘mothagam’ and ‘kollukaddai’ to the Lord Ganesha. God Ganesha as been known as the god of wealth, sciences, knowledge, wisdom and prosperity. This is what cause the Hindus to remember him and seek his blessings before starting any important work. During the celebration, devotees bathe the images and mostly they will permanently dump them in nearby rivers, lakes, or the seas. The Hindus believe that who pray to Ganesha are able to fulfil their wishes and desires. There by, the main essence of the festival is the devotees who pray to him are set free of sins and it leads them on path of knowledge and wisdom throughout the journey.

In a conclusion, there are several Hindu festivals will be celebrated widely through South Asia. There some named Deepavali, Mahasivarathiri, Ganesh Chaturthi, Thaipoosam and Navarathiri are among the major festivals celebrated by the Hindus at South Asia. All these festivals are given different theories and philosophies behind the celebration. But each of them helps a man to become spiritual and scientifically promotes certain mental health and peace within them. These festivals are celebrated to create a special atmosphere, diverting the mind from worldly concerns and joyfully focusing on spiritual matters and to give people spiritual impetus and inspiration, which helps them to perform their daily duties. The celebrations also brings happiness in ones' self and also to the surrounding environment. So, these festivals play an important role in a Hindus life, especially in South Asia. It not only brings joy or spread happiness to the Hindus but also being a celebration that welcomes other races to celebrate along it. For instance, in Malaysia we can see other races are taking part in the celebration of Deepavali and Thaipoosam. Rather than being seen as a festival of certain religion, these festivals are having the image of reunion and a space which being an inspiration to the humankind to do well in performing their daily duties.