



Little Miss Happy Diwali
by Adam Hargreaves
HarperCollinsPublishers, 2020

Diwali is an annual celebration. It is a Hindu festival and it is the most eye-catching of religious festivals. If you live in an area with a significant Hindu population you are bound to have noticed. Diwali is the 'Festival of Lights'. The irony is not lost that our relatively new Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, is also a Hindu. He once took his oath as an MP on the Hindu Holy Book of Bhagavad Gita. A personal achievement it must have been for him on Monday 24th October in the week of Diwali when he became Prime Minister– a time of light, joy and delight as he took on the nation's top job. By stark contrast, the Prime Minister has had to grapple with the nation's tough economic situation. He will try and bring glimmers of light back to the country in the months ahead.

What do we know about Diwali? There is a case for taking a simplified approach to learning about someone else's faith. One way, for example, is to spectate at a Diwali festival; another might be to read a basic text and go from there. Why not start at the very basic?! One of the Mr Men and Little Miss bestsellers is *Little Mr Happy Diwali*. If it's on the shelf in a shop, you can't miss it, as it's bigger than the normal Mr Men/Little Miss book size and it is so colourful. It captures the scene of Diwali celebrations. All the Mr Men and Little Misses get on with each other; they put aside any nasty traits, including Mr Mean. As you read the story you learn about the creative and colourful shapes of 'Rangoli', sweets called 'Mithai' and the 'Sitar' musical instrument.

At the end of the book, it explains in two simple paragraphs the original reason for Diwali. The story goes as follows. There was once a great warrior prince called Rama, who was married to a beautiful princess called Sita. Sita was kidnapped by the demon Ravana, who looked the grisly part with lots of heads and arms. The monkey God Hanuman helped Rama rescue Sita, which Rama did by the unleashing of a golden arrow at the beast. The villagers put rows of lights on the path for Rama and Sita as they returned home.

There is also the alternative story of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, who found her way into people's homes with the help of lamps and the above-mentioned 'Rangoli' to greet her. We know that Diwali is celebrated on the street, but it is also a home celebration for Hindus. There are other stories about Diwali for children, including the equally colourful 'Rama and Sita', by Malachy Doyle.

We have our own take on the theological meaning of 'light', as do Hindus. But sometimes it is useful to cross borders, as Christ did, to see where the 'Other' is coming from. The purpose of interfaith dialogue is to seek common ground on matters of mutual concern. It is also to respect one another's faiths which, like ours, should strive towards compassion and understanding, and to combat evil and injustice.