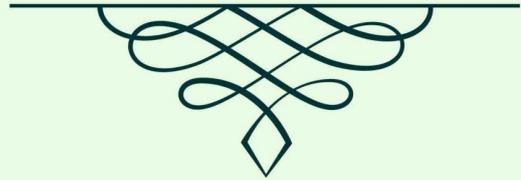




Eco-friendly
DIWALI
CELEBRATION





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Nothing bonds India and Indians like the festive season. Our love for celebration is second to none, and our festivities are known the world over. Our festivals are colourful, unique and above all unifying. As monsoon grips the entire nation, so does the hopeful anticipation of a wonderful festive season that lies ahead. Times like the pandemic make the reason to celebrate all the more necessary.

Over the past few years the chorus to celebrate festivals like Diwali in an eco-friendly manner has gained tremendous momentum. Not without reason though. The ill effects of man-made pollution are well documented. The ill effects multiply during festive times where people celebrate with gay abandon. There is ample proof that humans are responsible in a big way for the harms of climate change. Countries and corporates across the world are racing against time to reverse the effects of climate change before it is too late.

There is hope though. People off late have also woken up to the dangers and have curbed their festive spirit to help control the damage to their natural surroundings.



While avoiding crackers completely might seem unrealistic, shifting to eco-friendly or green crackers can help in maintaining the traditional flavor

of any festival.



Avoiding plastic and synthetic products to gift loved ones another way how you care. It is the value of a gift and not its cost that matters. Gift articles and gift wrappers

made from earthen or biodegradable materials will help spread your commitment to everyone around you. One should ditch the conventional polythene bags and go for cloth or paper bags



Festivals are a time to spend time with family and friends. More guests at home mean increase in usage of plastic crockery and cutlery. These can be easily

replaced by bio-degradable/disposable items that add to the spirit of eco-friendly festivities.



Another eco-friendly gifting idea is to gift potted plants to friends and family. In addition to being aesthetically pleasing, these plants can also act as natural air purifiers for your home.



Another activity that can add to the spirit of green celebrations is to create decoration materials using household items. This can also be a fun assignment for kids by turning it into a healthy competition of creating decorative material from used items.



Rangolis are like temporary tattoos for your floor. They not only beautify your home but also create a wonderful atmosphere of the festive spirit that lingers in everyone. Do away with artificial colours and opt for organic ones to maintain the beauty and colours of festive times albeit in a responsible manner. Flowers too can be a good substitute for colours to create beautiful rangoli design. Onam in Kerala is a perfect example where people use flowers to create wonderful and aesthetic designs. Once the rangolis serve their purpose, these flowers can be used as manure after they decompose.



Another important aspect is the food that is prepared and consumed during festive times. Most of us would remember the older times when every member of the family would gather and cook various delicacies for everyone. It was a moment to savour as every member came together and made cooking a fun activity. Sweets and snacks of every kind would be made in bulk for not just the family members to enjoy but also to be shared with the neighbours. In those days festivals really brought everyone closer. In today's times where most people only have a close relation with their mobile devices, taking a leaf out of the older times can work wonders and help get us back in touch with our true selves. Not to mention that home cooked food is always healthier than the mass produced stuff sold in bulk at the mall nearby.



Deepawali is the festival of lights. Legend has it that when Shri Ram returned to Ayodhya, the citizens decorated Ayodhya with thousands of lamps to welcome their beloved lord. Why not welcome joy to our lives this year by saying goodbye to artificial lights and celebrating Diwali the old way? By using diyas, candles, homemade lanterns, etc. our homes not only look gorgeous and aesthetic, but also substantially reduce the electricity consumption of our homes.

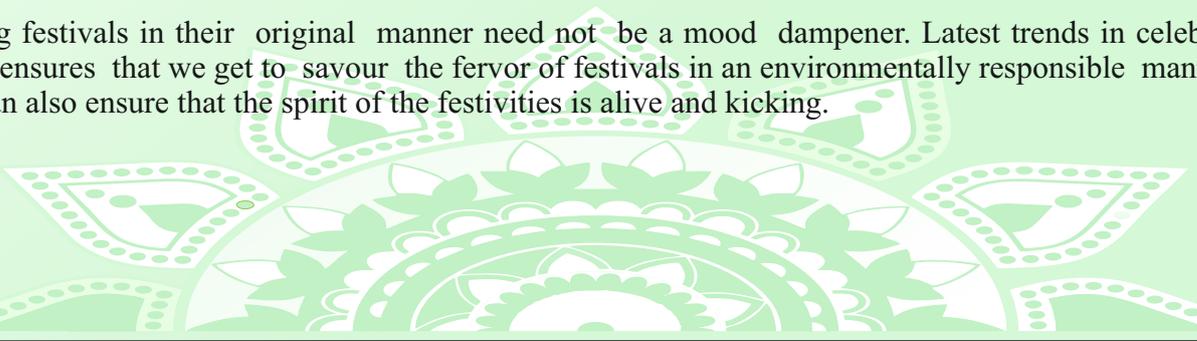


Diwali is a time when an average Indian household gets into a cleaning spree, by removing the old unwanted or non-usable items. True happiness is making others happy; more so when others are lesser fortunate than us. One can share household items, stationariness, electrical and electronic items, clothes etc that are in good condition and not in use with the underprivileged. This gesture will not only transcend boundaries of rich and poor but will also help in promoting the concept of product life extension thereby leading to sustainable consumption. It is also the time wherein a family looks forward to buying new household stuff. When

buying electrical and electronic items one should go for star labeled products. More the stars, more the energy saved and less money spent. One should also look for other Eco-labels such as ECO MARK (Indian eco label), Leaping bunny (for cosmetics), GOTS (for clothing), organic label (for food) etc when buying, upholding the environment friendly factor.

Children are the most impressionable. The values you inculcate in them now stay with them forever and help them grow into responsible adults. Engage them in making Diwali an eco-friendly exercise. Help them make gifts from articles found at home, or from sustainable products. Helping them plant a tree is a good beginning to empower them towards saving the environment. To inculcate the value that creating something is always preferred than destroying something will go a long way in making your child an ideal citizen.

Not celebrating festivals in their original manner need not be a mood dampener. Latest trends in celebrating Green Diwali ensures that we get to savour the fervor of festivals in an environmentally responsible manner. In doing so we can also ensure that the spirit of the festivities is alive and kicking.



Green Crackers

The last year and half has been somewhat of a nightmare for most of us with COVID wreaking havoc on all lives. Having spent major part of this time in the shackles of lockdown and curfews; we can all agree that some joy in such trying times is well deserved and relieving. With COVID cases going down, the government has allowed ease in restrictions on celebrations and public gatherings.

No other festival defines the Indian spirit of celebration like Deepawali, popularly known as Diwali- the festival of lights. It is one of the most popular festivals of India which is celebrated without much restrictions of religion. For Indians, Diwali symbolizes the **spiritual "victory of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance"**.

It is a time when more than a billion Indians get together for prayers, feasts, merriment, and of course, fireworks. The Indian firecracker industry is worth 5000 crores per some estimates. A majority of this is spent during Diwali. The whole of India erupts in the sound and light of firecrackers during Diwali. Unfortunately, once the celebrations die down, the air continues to linger with something much more than joy. Firecrackers and air pollution form a dangerous nexus.

Firecrackers and Air Pollution

While major Indian cities attract a big part of the population due to better opportunities, the sad fact also remains that cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad etc are already struggling to clear off the Air Pollution Index owing to its rapidly increasing automobile population and Industrialization.



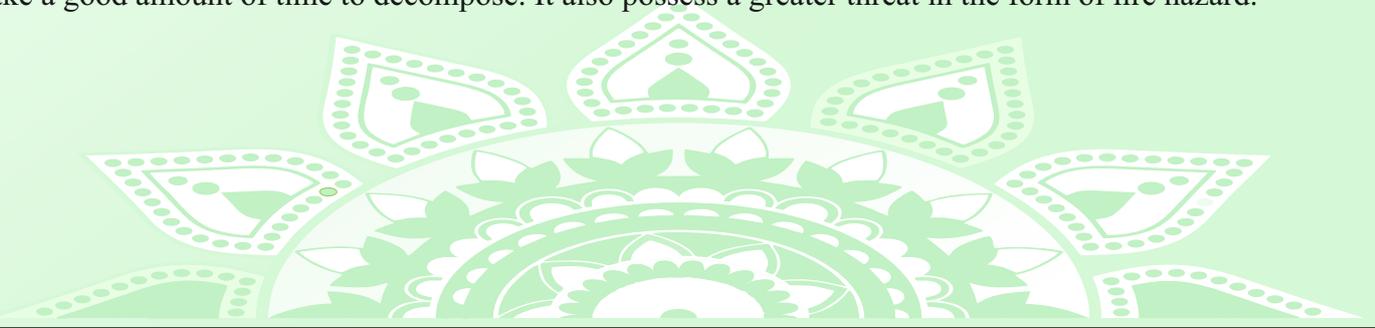
Fireworks of every kind like bombs, rockets, sparklers, etc contribute to aggravate the smoke levels and particulate matters. This pushes the air pollution index to exceedingly poor to severe levels. Bursting of firecrackers increases the concentration of dust and pollutants in the air with chemicals such as copper, zinc, sodium, lead, magnesium, oxides of sulfur and nitrogen etc. The air laden with these chemicals forms a haze the following morning thereby further worsening the air quality (which continues to remain in the "severe" category for 3-4 days in some cities). The Air Quality Index (AQI) has reached an alarming stage going above 700 in some of the regions of Delhi. One can

often see the sky lit with sky lanterns on the eve of Diwali. While pollution has always had a deteriorating effect on the atmosphere, the news isn't pleasant for people either.

Effects

The thick smoke generated by firecrackers can cause respiratory illness in people particularly in young children and senior citizens. It is also known to aggravate the condition of people suffering from cold and allergies and causing congestion of throat and chest. The booming sound of crackers increase the decibel levels further contributing to the pollution. The exposure to air and noise pollution increases the risk of heart and respiratory related disorders. Even animals are not immune to such adverse effects. While household pets can show signs of disturbance due to high levels of sound (cases have been reported where a house pet has passed away due to shock caused by loud explosion sounds), the situation is even more grim for strays who have maximum exposure to such pollution.

Firecrackers are also known to increase the toxic and harmful chemicals in the bodies. While some crackers are often labeled as "biodegradable" or "eco-friendly", they are usually made of treated papers, wires or bamboo rings which take a good amount of time to decompose. It also possess a greater threat in the form of fire hazard.



Alternatives

Many Indian states and UTs have imposed a ban on bursting and sale of firecrackers owing to its pollution caused. But the blessing in disguise has paved the way for the Green Crackers to bloom in the Indian market. Green Crackers- developed by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), is said to emit pollutants at a 30% lesser rate. Green crackers don't contain banned chemicals such as lithium, arsenic, barium and lead. Sound levels are known to come down by 110-125 decibels as compared to their conventional counterparts which are known to emit sounds of around 160 decibels. Additionally, Green Crackers have been named as 'safe water releaser (SWAS)', 'safe minimal aluminium (SAFAL)' and as 'safe thermite crackers (STAR)'.

Way forward

While completely eradicating the use of crackers seem like a distant dream, and not always practically possible, we can collectively strive to minimise the effects to some level.

An ideal world would be where conventional crackers don't exist. Even if a small percentage of people refrain from using such crackers, a start can be achieved towards reducing pollution.

The younger age group is more prone to bursting crackers while being oblivious to the harms. By inculcating in them the habit of using green crackers, they can be influenced at a very young age towards the ill effects of pollution. The younger population can be made to use safer alternatives like paper popper, glow sticks, inflated paper bags, etc.

Time restrictions and curfews played a vital role in curbing the spread of COVID. Similarly, restricting the time where one can burst crackers can also work towards achieving the goal of reducing pollution.

COVID introduced the majority of population towards using face masks. While they help keep COVID at bay, they can also be used to protect oneself from the pollution, particularly for people with respiratory illnesses.

Picking up one's litter is a habit that everyone needs to inculcate in themselves for a better tomorrow. The aftermath of a cracker bursting frenzy is a horrific sight. It becomes our moral responsibility to clean up the mess post the celebrations.

Celebrations are our way to express the joy within. And in uncertain times like the pandemic which has thrown life out of gear, where lives and households have been destroyed, where livelihoods have ended, such moments of celebrations need to be cherished with all heart.

But nature has taught us the hard way that we can never take her for granted. We are merely another lifeform on her thriving ecosystem. And as much as we might want to convince ourselves, we are rarely in control of the situation.

Thus, celebration with responsibility is need of the hour. The protection of our environment is not just the responsibility of corporates and governments. It has to become an individual prerogative. Moments need to be celebrated. But we must thrive to make life itself a celebration. And that change begins with 'me'!



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