

I miss my family's blessings by Vijayshree Srilalan



I am born and brought up in South India, in a family who practices Hindu religion. We celebrate festivals like Pongal, New Year, Krishna Jayanthi, Ganesh Chaturthi, Onam, Navratri, Diwali and Karthigai. These festivals have national significance and everybody in the country would get the day off. Every festival brings unique memories of my childhood in India. The best memory I have of these festivals is the festive spirit surrounding me. Everybody around us celebrated these festivals and we used to meet our elders in order to get their blessings. Everybody would make sweets and snacks to share with people around us. Houses were cleaned and decorated with enthusiasm, love and laughter. Specifically, the festival called Navratri, meaning nine nights, has special memories for me.

Navratri is celebrated because the Goddess Durga battles and emerges victorious over the demon Mahishasura to help restore dharma. This battle occurred for over a span of nine nights and ten days, the reasoning behind why we celebrate Navratri. During this time, we worship gods like, Lord Saraswati, Lord Laxmi and Lord Durga. One of my fondest memories about Navratri was when my mom used to keep “golu”, which are dolls arranged in odd numbers of steps depicting different stories of hindu mythology. We used to decorate the steps and the surroundings with rangoli, colored paper and flowers. It is a tradition to invite people to come to our home to see our “golu”. We would also go to other people’s houses and see their golu. Pavadai (full skirt), Chundal (lentil snack), Vethlai pakku (betel leaves and nuts), Manjal (turmeric), Kumkum (vermillion), Cheepu (comb), Kannadi (mirror), Valayal (bangles), jewelry and flowers all form part of thamboolam which we give to our guests, when they come to our house. The last few days of Navratri are designated for Saraswati pooja and vijayadasami, during which we stop all work and decorate everything that is essential for our profession. Books are kept in front of Lord Saraswati and we do pooja to seek her blessings for good education. I miss all those moments and cherish my memories of all the times we celebrated these festivals.

After we moved to US in 2008, we are able to celebrate all our festivals in the evenings only. For Navratri, I am not in a position to keep golu like how my mom did. Instead, I invite few ladies and girls to our house and give tamboolam to them or else, I go to temple in one of the weekends during navratri and give tamboolam to few ladies and girls.

The above picture is showing our saraswati pooja celebration as well as inviting girls to our house to give tamboolam. I still celebrate Saraswati pooja and vijayadasami to seek the blessings of god, but miss my family and the blessings that I used to get from elders in our family.