lived was guarded by a five-headed serpent, Mura and his seven sons. But they were killed by the Lord with the assistance of His spouse Satyabhama.

Narakasura came face to face with the Lord and after a terrible fight he too was killed. Here the Lord swooned in the midst of the fight and was saved by His spouse, who killed the demon. But before his death Narakasura prayed to the Lord that the day of his death should be remembered and celebrated by one and all in his memory. This wish was granted. Krishna was accused by the demon’s mother of having killed her son unnecessarily. Vishnu pacified her by saying that Narakasura had been killed only in battle with the Lord and his death was that of a hero. So he had entered the portals of Heaven and attained salvation.

Narakasura’s mother was reassured and prayed that her son’s death be celebrated everywhere for one day by the people of the land as a gay festival. All the captives, mostly Devas, in the realm of the demon were released.

Here is a legend relating to the poor attaining prosperity by the grace of the Goddess of Wealth.

Poor girl’s plan

There was once a king who had four daughters. The king asked them who was responsible for their happiness. Three of the daughters attributed it to their father, but the youngest girl said, it was the Grace of the Almighty. The king got angry and to teach her a lesson married her off to a poor brahmin and banished both of them from the kingdom. The girl was happy inspite of her poverty. Her husband got the necessities of life by asking for alms. He never returned home empty handed.

One day he did not get anything, but saw a dead snake on the way. He brought it home and gave it to his wife. But, instead of rebuking him, she threw the snake in a corner.

The king of the adjoining country used to bathe in a tank by the riverside every day. He would remove his necklace and place it on the bank before his bath. A crow saw the necklace one day and took it away. On the way it saw the dead snake in the
The crow dropped the necklace and took away the snake. The news of the king's lost necklace spread like wildfire. The ruler announced a big reward for the finder. The wise girl gave the necklace to her husband and asked him to take it to the king. She strictly instructed him not to accept any reward from the king, but to ask for a boon. "The king," she told him, "should order all the people of his land not to light lamps in their home on Diwali night." The king thought that the brahmin was a fool, but at the same time agreed to do as he asked.

On Diwali night, the whole kingdom was in darkness. The brahmin's wife decorated her house with lamps and flowers. The Goddess Lakshmi who came out that night found the entire kingdom in darkness, but to her surprise there was one hut, brightly lit. She entered it and blessed the couple. They became rich overnight. The girl thus proved to her father that only by the grace of God, could one become very rich.

There are references in the Ramayana to the effect that the great Rama killed Ravana on Vijaya Dasami day and crowned himself King of Ayodhya on Diwali day. To commemorate the event the entire kingdom was illuminated.

Although the south celebrates the festival for one full day, in the north
said Sunita while Shirley sorted out some crackers to light immediately.

Quite a few people had gathered on the verandah for the fireworks. Lila Mausi had had rows of bulbs strung up all over the building so that the Lodge could be seen from afar. The man of work, Raju, helped Sunita set up the bottle for the rockets. After lighting a few phooljadis (sparklers) and anars, Raju began with the rockets. By now Lila Mausi had started handing out hot mugs of soup. People were sitting in small groups on the wicker chairs strewn on the verandah.

Suddenly there was a loud hiss. And a rocket, instead of going straight up, turned horizontal and shot through towards the grove of trees. Raju leapt back in surprise and some of the older visitors exclaimed loudly about the danger of crackers. Raju and Sunita started to light another rocket. Natasha went up the verandah steps to sit on the parapet.

"Hey, look! What is that glow beyond those trees?" she called out to her sisters. Everybody turned to where Natasha pointed and the next moment there was total hullaba-
loud exclamation from him. "Bibiji, Bibiji, there is water here." His voice sounded quite panicky.

Rambhajan, the gardener, came running with a rope and threw it down to Raju. He clambered up, drenched and covered with clayey mud. He was sent for a hot bath while the rest of the people walked back to the guest house.

"And so don't you think it is funny that there should be water down in that hollow?" Natasha asked. She had been telling Shirley and Sunita the story General Sharma had told her. She said the hollow was obviously the pool dug by the Nawab while the white building she had noticed beyond the trees was probably the house built for the French lady.

"But how did the water suddenly reappear?" Sunita asked.

"Maybe the falling log and the burning rocket did it," suggested Shirley.

"I think General Sharma knows something about the French lady's disappearance," said Natasha. "He looked most knowing when I asked him what had happened to her."

"Well, I don't think he will tell us if he does not want to do so," said Shirley.

"Anyway there is nothing we can do today. We will go and look at the hollow in the morning," said Sunita.

The next morning the three were up bright and early. Before breakfast they dressed up in warm clothes and ran down to the hollow. They found Raju and Rambhajan already down there looking at the water in the hollow in puzzlement. By now it had risen to fill almost half the hollow.

"Let us go and look at the white house," said Natasha. The others agreed and set off. They could not use the drawbridge but Shirley suggested that they walk along the rim of the hollow and go across holding on to the creeper for support. It was a sturdy creeper and over the years had developed stems as strong as tree trunks.

The three got across, Shirley and Sunita helping Natasha along. Soon they found themselves before a dilapidated white building. Not a single pane of glass was standing and the wooden doors had rotted away. They picked their way through the overgrown garden and entered the doorway. The inside was as dilapidated as outside and there was a musty smell which stopped them from going in any further.

"I don't think there is any treasure here anyway," said Sunita. "Let us stay outside." The others agreed and walked around the house. At last they came back to where they began and sat down on a stone to rest. The sun had come out by now and it was quite warm. As they sat there enjoying the sun Natasha saw a lizard emerge from beneath a flat stone and look at them with curious eyes. It immediately darted back. She peered under the slab to see where it had gone. To her surprise she saw that there was a ring on the side of the slab which folded under it. Why would anyone make a stone slab like that? She tried to pull out the ring but it was too rusty to move.

She saw a stout stick lying nearby and used it to try and loosen the ring. Suddenly she was rewarded with a loud click and the iron ring fell open.

"Shirley! Sunita! Come and see what I found!" she called. The other two came running. Together they pulled at the ring
and after much pulling, the slab moved. To their surprise it moved to a side revealing a deep hole with steps cut into the side.

They went down the steps carefully. As they went deeper into the ground Shirley pulled out a torch and switched it on. They found themselves in a narrow passage. They went up it. They seemed to have been walking for some time when they came to a widened part of the passage. Shirley played her torch around and the three stood stunned. For, in one corner stood the most beautiful statues that they had ever seen. Time had dulled the sheen but it was obvious that they were made of gold, marble and silver. There were statues of cupids with jewel encrusted arrows, dancing ladies whose dresses were again inlaid with precious stones and huge marble busts.

“Hey, there is water at my feet!” exclaimed Sunita. Shirley shone her torch on the floor and they saw a thin trickling of water flowing near their feet. She followed the trickle to a wall which was showing damp patches and as they looked on, a part of the wall started crumbling.

“Let us hurry back,” said Shirley. The urgency in her voice made the other two also turn back and hurry out.

Once they were out in the sunshine again, Shirley turned to the other two. “I think we have solved the mystery of the French lady’s disappearance. I think that passage most probably led
to the hollow. Maybe it was partly natural and partly made by the lady to escape from the Nawab. I think there must have been a pipe or maybe a natural spring which was use to fill up the pool. She had that source blocked somehow and stowed away the statues there. Maybe she took all the jewels with her and wanted to return later to take the statues. Something must have happened to prevent that. Last night when the rocket and log fell into the hollow it might have broken that blockage which is why the water is reappearing once again.

“What are you three doing here?” General Sharma stood behind them. “Your Mausi is looking for you everywhere for breakfast.”

“Gosh! We forgot all about breakfast!” exclaimed Sunita.

“No wonder. You were looking for the French lady’s treasure, weren’t you?” General Sharma asked, his eyes twinkling at them.

“Yes and we think we found it,” said Natasha. “Found it? Where?”

“Here down this passage,” Sunita said pointing down the hole in the ground. They told General Sharma what they had found and also Shirley’s theory.

“You are probably right. And I can tell you why she did not return,” said General Sharma. “When I was serving in Paris during the second World War, I came across her. I recognised her though she did not know me. She was living on a lovely farm in Provence. I was billeted on her farm and became good friends with her. She told me that she and one of the Nawab’s aides had fallen in love and the Nawab had come to know about it. He was so furious that he wanted to kill her.

“So she and the aide blasted the passage one Diwali night and blocked the source of water to the pool. Then they escaped through a passage they had dug through to a village lower down the mountain and ran away. But as they were leaving on a train, they saw one of the Nawab’s minions on the station. They were sure he had seen them. So they decided not to return to collect the rest of their treasures. Anyway the jewels were enough to help them live comfortably. So they escaped to France. The Nawab, as you know, fled the country after Partition and no one knows what happened to him later.”

“Who owns the treasure now?” asked Shirley.

“I think as Lila Mausi is the owner of the Lodge, she owns the treasure as well,” said General Sharma.

“Well, I am happy. Lila Mausi can sell it and use the money so that she need never work so hard again,” said Natasha.

“I am sure she will,” said General Sharma.

“I am glad we came here for Diwali, aren’t you?” Shirley asked. The other two could do nothing but agree.
it is celebrated for five days. The first day goes by the name Gnana Thrayodasi or dhanteras. Businessmen celebrate it in a particular way. Silver or metal utensils are purchased and smeared with turmeric and kumkum and the place illuminated. The second is Narakachaturdashi when Krishna's victory over Narakasura is celebrated by rising before dawn, having an oil bath, wearing new clothes and exchanging sweets. The third day is Lakshmi pujan when silver coins, gold and valuables are offered worship in the evening. Businessmen open new account books. The fourth day is observed as Bali padyami. The story relating to the incident is of King Mahabali being pressed down to the underworld by Lord Vishnu who took the Vamana avatar and claimed three 'steps' of land. The fifth day is known as Bhaubeej or Bhaidooj Day, when sisters indulge their brothers with an oil bath early in the morning. Both dress in new clothes and the brothers are offered arati and sweets.

Different meanings to Diwali

Diwali is celebrated in different parts of the country in different ways. Rama's coronation is observed on Diwali day in Rajasthan, Durga Puja and Kali worship are observed in Bengal and in Uttar Pradesh victory over Ravana is celebrated and commemorated. In Tamil Nadu it is observed as Naraka Chaturthi with people rejoicing over the killing of Narakasura by Krishna and Satyabhama.

It is also believed that on Diwali day, Goddess Lakshmi married Lord Vishnu, Rama and Sita returned to Ayodhya and Lord Mahavira of the Jains attained Nirvana. Such is the glory of the great festival day!

In North India, Diwali revives the ancient art of Rangoli. These decorative designs are considered to be the symbols of rejoicing. Diwali brings many types of Rangolis. In different parts of the country they go by different names. (See Children's World October 1994)

Generations have passed yet the happy spirit of Diwali remains, for it is casteless and classless. It is a festival bound to the lives of the people. It brings equality among all and unity in particular. Friends and foes meet and greet one another in happiness on Diwali day. The joyousness of Diwali is unparalleled. It is a festival which is looked forward to throughout the year as all purchases are postponed till Diwali, especially the purchase of new clothes. It is truly a great national festival.
"Diwali is so lovely at home. I wish we were at home," said Shirley with a huge sigh.

"Yeah, but Daddy could not have gone to their doctors' conference at Cairo without Mummy you know. As Mummy said, without her, he is like a headless chicken," said Sunita.

"Anyway Taragarh is a new place for us, so we can explore it at least," said Natasha, her chubby nine-year-old face brightening despite the absence of her parents.

The three of them had been sent to Taragarh in the hill state of Himachal Pradesh for the Diwali holidays while their parents were abroad. They were staying at a guest house run by an old friend of their mother's whose husband had left her quite badly off. Lila Mausi was a plump, gentle person who worked all through the day, with just one gardener to help her.

"It is almost eleven o'clock," said Shirley looking at her wrist watch. "Didn't Lila Mausi say that we should be ready to leave by twelve? You know she wants us to go down to Palampur and buy crackers."

"Yes, let us hurry. I love buying crackers," said Natasha.

"Do you think we should take her? She is too small I think," Sunita asked Shirley.

"Don't be mean, Sunita. After all you are only four years older than me." Natasha was most indignant.

"No, Natasha is not too small," said Shirley who often felt the burden of being the oldest at 14 as she had to mediate in battles between Sunita and Natasha. "But Natasha, one of us should stay back and help Lila Mausi. She said she would have to wash almost 300 lamps. You know they
have to be quite dry by
tomorrow or they can't be
lit. As it is with tomorrow
being Diwali, she is up to
her neck in work. Do you
think you could do that?" she asked.

Natasha nodded,
though reluctantly as she
was not sure whether she
was still being given a
brush-off though more
sweetly.

Natasha spent a pleas-
ant afternoon helping Lila
Mausi clean the little
earthen lamps. She ar-
ranged them neatly on the
back verandah and went
in to wash her hands.

"Here is a piece of burfi
for you," said Lila Mausi.
"You must be tired, wash-
ing all those lamps. Just
go outside and rest for
some time now."

It was quite cold and
Natasha was thankful for
the woolly pink cardigan
she wore. She walked
down the broad porch
steps and along the nar-
row gravel path towards a
grove of trees. As she
emerged through the trees
she stopped in her tracks
in delight. Before her was
spread a panorama of
beauty.

A few steps away the
ground dipped sharply to
form a deep hollow which
was planted with velvety
grass at the bottom. It
had been freshly mown

and the dried up grass
and leaves were piled up
to a side. The sides of the
hollow were planted with
all kinds of flowering
plants which were in full
bloom at present. Towards
one end of the hollow was
an iron contraption almost
covered with a flowering
creeper. The flowers
nodded their heads in the
gentle breeze and the
humming of bees as they
flitted from flower to
flower was very soothing.
Beyond the trees on the
other side of the hollow
she could see a white
building. Natasha felt she
could stand there for
hours just drinking in all
this loveliness.

As the afternoon ad-
vanced, the nip in the air
forced her back indoors.
She went down the nar-
row hallway to the lounge
where there was a log fire
in the old-fashioned grate.
The lounge was empty
except for old General
Sharma who was en-
sconced in the huge arm-
chair near the fire.

General Sharma was
almost 80 years old and
was a permanent fixture
at Taragarh Lodge. He
had grown up in Taragarh
and later joined the
British Army. He had
travelled all round the
world and after his retire-
ment, returned to his
childhood home. Ever
since Lila Mausi opened Taragarh Lodge he had been living here.

“Good afternoon, Uncle,” said Natasha going closer to the fire.

“Good afternoon, child. Didn’t you go with the others to buy crackers?” Nothing escaped General Sharma’s notice.

“No, I was helping Lila Mausi with the diyas,” Natasha replied.

“What grand Diwalis we had when I was a child,” said General Sharma in a nostalgic voice. “I remember how Taragarh Palace used to be lit up. It seemed to light up the whole hill-side.”

“Taragarh Palace? Where is that? We have not seen it in our explorations,” said Natasha.

To her surprise, General Sharma went into loud guffaws of laughter. “Where do you think you are staying now, child? This was Taragarh Palace. It was built almost 70 years ago by the Nawab of Pratapgarh as a summer palace. I remember the party he threw when it was completed. I ate so much that I got a stomach ache and had to be taken to the void in the middle of the night.”

“Tell me more about Taragarh Palace. It seems so interesting,” begged Natasha.

“Oh, it was interesting, all right. That Nawab was a real nawab. He fell in love with a French woman but could not marry her as he was already married. So he built a huge house for her opposite the palace. To prevent his wife from knowing when he went across he had a huge pool dug between the house and the palace and a drawbridge constructed across it. The house was surrounded by trees so that it could hardly be seen from the palace. Whenever he wanted to visit her he would have the bridge lowered and go across, drawing it up after him. “One Diwali night he went to visit her and found that the French woman had disappeared along with all the jewels and precious knick-knacks he had given her. He could never find out how she vanished without using the drawbridge. In a few days the water in the pool also vanished leaving only a little slush and mud at the bottom. He searched high and low for the woman but could not find her. Neither could he find the pool waters.”

Natasha had been listening to him open-mouthed. “Did no one know what had happened to her?” she asked.

“Some people said she had escaped through an underground passage while others said she had been murdered by the Nawab’s wife. But only one person knows what really happened,” General Sharma said.

“Who?” asked Natasha.

General Sharma only looked sly and knowing. Just then Shirley and Sunita came in carrying a huge bag of crackers.

“Good evening, Uncle. Natasha, come outside. Lila Mausi said we could light some crackers tonight. It will look lovely,”
Ronita Chatterjee (8)
India
Festival of Lights

Vaidehi N. Kirtkar (8)
India
Folk Dance
Just Released

The Rainbow That Ran Away

The Himalayas Call

Putki On Her Way To China