



# Video Story Transcript

## DIWALI: From Darkness to Light, Hindus in America

**By: Storyteller Archana Lal-Tabak**  
www.bodymindmedicine.com

**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKsfXRzPe0s>

---

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

---

Hi, my name is Archana Lal-Tabak. My family is from the Pakistan side of India before the partition in 1947. In fact, my father was born in Burma and my mother was born in Kashmir and yet they had to flee again when they were young children. Burma is right by China on the east side of India, and near Tibet is Kashmir, which is in the northern state of India. They were persecuted there by the Muslims and the Communists and so they had to flee again in their young adolescent years. And they went to central India, north central India, a place called Kanpur. This is where they eventually met.

My father was there teaching medical school and my mother was a student at the medical school. And the patients all around were noticing that this gentleman was following my mom around and they said, "See that doctor who is looking at you?" And she had not noticed that he was looking at her. But, finally, he asked her out for an ice cream, which she could not really, even have because her stomach had been upset for many years and this is what had taken her into medicine. It turned out that later on, my father diagnosed that she had a retrocecal appendix many years later. And it must have been a sign of true love that he kind of knew what was going on and she was struggling. For two people who loved medicine, this was a true love story.

Actually, theirs was a love marriage. Back in those days, people in India did not cross over into different social castes or social hierarchy. They found that they were in north central India, however, and here people of different castes and different social status would, actually talk with each other and there were many faiths present. Finally, in this part of India they were able to practice their Hinduism without oppression and persecution. It turned out that my father, being rather poor in India, moved several times and I, myself, moved ten times by the time I was 13 years old. I was in Vietnam, in India, in America and back in India again.

And it so happens that one of those times when I was in India, I was about nine years old in 1972, staying with my favorite auntie and uncle and it was my favorite festival. This whole oppression of darkness to light, of... that my parents had been through reminded me of this festival Diwali, the Indian New Year, the Festival of Lights. And this festival was going on at the time that I was visiting India with my aunt and uncle. And at this beautiful festival, it turns out everyone decorates all of their houses with little tiny diyas - little tiny lights. They're little ceramic pots that are decorated and they're decorated with ghee or clarified butter inside with a little cotton wick coming out. Beautiful, beautiful lights and the whole house is decorated - inside and outside.

I was just totally amazed and intrigued by this beautiful festival. And I was playing with all the diyas, all the candles, all the wax, all the... all the little tiny tea lights and then, all of a sudden unbeknownst to me, I had been lit aflame. My uncle came over and put out my dress. I had, apparently, set myself on fire. And if I had not been careful or mindful and my uncle had not been watching, I would have been a burning girl somewhat like those women in India that used to throw themselves in their husband's funeral pyre, back in the old days. Something I cannot even imagine. Now it turns out that this beautiful festival of Diwali, with the whole house is decorated, it's cleaned, you're wearing new clothes and eating delicious foods - complete multisensory experience - comes after these nine days of darkness. This nine days of the dark goddess Durga. And the goddess Durga is nine days of honoring how we ourselves transform internally from darkness to light. And there's actually a ceremony where this huge statue that's wooden and paper mâché of the evil god Raman, it's burnt. This demon is burnt, publicly, like a huge burning man. And it, it's amazing to me how many people were involved in all this when I was growing up. Pretty amazing!

Now when I was in India, I went to many different schools. Mostly, I went to the rector convent and different convents like Catholic schools run by nuns, that were English medium. But there was one time that I was in an Indian boarding school and in this school, the matron was a Sikh woman. It turns out that my father's oldest brother was a Sikh as well. Apparently, in India, the oldest Hindu brother becomes a Sikh to protect the border because Hindus are mostly pacifists. Even though they have four castes and one of them is a warrior caste, they still have more pacifist tendency. So, the Sikhs protect the border. And I would sit with my matron in my boarding school and meditate with her and pray with her, with her Punjabi texts, just the way I used to sit and pray and meditate with my grandmother, Mummy Ji. Ji is a sign of respect in India, so often we'll have names after a Ji. Mummy Ji and I would meditate and pray and so did I with this beautiful Sikh matron.

I loved looking at different cultures and religions. I went to the synagogues with my Jewish friends. I went to churches with my Christian friends and, of course, beautiful temples that were 5000 years old in India itself.

Now eventually my family moved to the states and we came here when I was 13 in 1977. When we came here, I went to a public school, which was a very interesting experience, culturally, as well. And I dated a few, maybe just a few Christian and Jewish men, you know, because Indian girls were supposed to have arranged marriages and not date. But I did. And I, actually married my first husband, who was Jewish, and then later on I met my current husband Jim. And although Jim was Greek and Slovakian, he had been doing yoga and meditation for several decades and we had a lot in common. We were meant to be together. He, actually, prepared an ayurvedic meal for me on one of our first dates. Now how many American men cook ayurvedic meals? Not many. Ayurveda, actually, is the knowledge or science of life in India. It is 5000 years old and I'll tell you more about that in a minute.

But, basically, what I found was that through the oppression and the persecution that many, many generations and cultures have gone through, often that is transmitted in the families. And my own family, I found, had suffered a lot of adversity and several had died way too young. In fact, in my 20s, I, myself, suffered from debilitating illnesses including a serious autoimmune illness. And, at that time, I was led to studying Indian

medicine and the western field of psycho neuro immunology. My family is all physicians. They're all trained in western medicine and I found that I was able to completely heal myself through the psycho neuro immunology using some natural lifestyle factors, which I later learned were present in ayurveda.

And when I did workshops and this, my mom would come and say, "Well, that's how we live. We eat this way, we dress this way, we behave this way, we walk like this."

And it's, basically, so much a part of the Indian culture. This knowledge or science of life is a part of the whole Indian culture, part of the Hindu religion so that the people would do it. So, they have fasts for detoxification during Navaratri, which was that... the goddess Ji I told you about. And then they have celebrations like Diwali with the multisensory experience of eating. In fact, my mom always said, "Make sure there's every color of the rainbow in every meal."

And it turns out, holistically, that is the best way to eat to get all your anti-oxidants, to get all your nutrition. Now I hope that as I've raised my son who is now 17 years old and (his name is Anand, which means bliss) that I can teach him some of these things that I have learned.

And we have raised him with yoga and meditation and some new thoughts, Christian traditions and other traditions. And, in fact, since we are cross-cultural couple and interfaith, we really honor all paths. And at our son's school, we've often tried to take in the Hindu culture and the foods and the multisensory experience but often met resistance, at times, because people didn't understand that the Indian Diwali, Festival of Lights, the Indian New Year was similar to Kwanzaa and Hanukkah, and even similar to Christmas and the winter solstice. It was a winter festival of light.

I imagine that someday, perhaps, people would understand this more and they would be a little tiny stamp just like those other stamps for the New Years and the festivals of light, that there would be a Diwali stamp, as well, a stamp that would have a little tiny diya, beautifully decorated with a little cotton wick in the ghee coming out to celebrate the Indian New Year and the Festival of Light.

I often find that when I need some help, I turn to the goddesses because in India, people have many gods and goddesses. It's polytheistic, pantheistic. There's a god and goddess for everyone. And even as I was developing this beautiful story for you, I found that I was stuck at times and I needed some prosperity, abundance, inspiration, creativity. So, I called in the goddesses. I had goddess Durga helping me from the inaction and darkness and paralysis of the trauma that my family went through to the light. I had goddess Lakshmi with prosperity and abundance that is celebrated during Diwali. And I had goddess Saraswati and she was the one with the creativity and the arts, came in to help me with the story. So, in India we embody all these gods and goddesses and thank goodness for Ganesh, the elephant god, who removes the obstacles along the way. And I'm so grateful to be here with these gods and goddesses today, embodying them and honoring the divine in all of us. Thank you.