

It was another Saturday, time for the weekly visit to the local Shani temple, the god of almost all evil in the Hindu pantheon. It continues to be a belief of the Hindu that the Shani bhagavan can bring with him great pain and suffering; however, in addition to pain and suffering, he can bring great joy and riches to those who are on his good books. To this, add that in a person's life there is a seven and a half year period, during which a person is necessarily under the bad influence of the Lord, the importance of the Lord, both preemptory as well as a cure gains tremendous significance.

It was the same with mine, and given that I was currently in the middle of the seven and half year period, it was regular visits to the temple. It did not matter what the weather was, nor did the health of the residents in the house matter. All that mattered was that we visited the temple on Saturdays.

Moreover, in addition to the visit, a ritual has to be performed to appease the deity. It has never ceased to tickle my funny bone that the gods are anthropomorphic in more than just appearance. Even the Lord has a system of *quid pro quo*. To be on his good books, one has to offer something. It could be something as small as a flower, but he does not seem to do anything for nothing.

Coming back to the ritual, it is not something that seems to be extravagant. All one has to do is to light a diya, an Indian earthen oil lamp. However, as all gods go, there is a catch to this as well. One cannot use any random wick and cannot use any random oil in the lamp.

The wick is a black cloth bag of tiny proportion, black being the color of the Lord himself, and containing sesame seeds. A small sachet is made using the cloth and the sesame seed, placed in sesame oil, oil extracted from the sesame seed. This is then lit with the belief that a person who is regular in the above would have minimal impact of the seven and half years and would reap the goodness of the lord.

I usually go with my father and having completed my revolutions of the lord, (there are nine to signify each one of the nine lords in the Navagraha of Hindu belief), I sat down to follow my favorite pass time in temples, watching the people and the expression on their faces.

My sight fell on this small boy, dragged around by his mother. In front of the deity, his mother did not talk to him, but rather told him by sign language to join his hands in prayer, to close his eyes. It did not strike her that she needs to have her eyes closed to pray, she was more intent in ensuring that her son was following the correct protocol.

When the time came to light the diya, she dragged her son to the altar, where a separate tray was set aside for the above-mentioned purpose. She took out her

black cloth piece, removed the jar that contained the sesame seeds, poured some on to the cloth, made a knot and placed the knotted piece in the earthen lamp. Over this preparation, she proceeded to pour the oil out from the container. I am not sure if the kid had seen this before; however, he was spellbound, watching every action of his mother more intently than he would watch his morning cartoons. His face just made it above the tray and he got a clear view of the entire event.

Having completed the setup for the lamp, the mother went on to light a match to light the wick. As soon as the wick caught fire, the boy blew on the match with the intent of putting out the flame. Unknown to him, his action also resulted in the extinguishing the diya.

It became apparent that the mother did not notice her son's action and attributed the same to a random gush of air. She went on to light the match from the flame of another lamp in an attempt to light her lamp. She did not realize the already used match did not have much wood left and the flame was precariously close to her fingers. Her son noticed how close the flame was to her fingers and blew on the match. Again, the son managed to extinguish the lamp along with the match. This time around, the mother noticed that it was her son who was responsible for her not being able to light the lamp.

She gave him a sharp slap, one that really seemed to hurt, for the boy's face went from being gay to sorry. The son was left holding his cheek as she turned her attention to the lamp. With the knowledge of having put her son in his place, she went on to light another pre-used match. This time as she lit the wick, the match's flame moved closer to her fingers. Her son noticed and made the motion to blow on the lamp. Apparently, the slap still hurt, for he raised his palm to his cheek and stopped himself from blowing again.

This time the flame reached her fingers and she reacted sharply, dropping the match, and immediately put her finger to her mouth. She did not look down at her son and began to drag her son out of the temple. They left the temple, she sucking on her burnt finger and him holding on to his cheek.