

Keeping in touch with tradition

Youths join in the celebrations for the Tamil New Year

TODAY and tomorrow, three Indian communities — the Tamils, the Sikhs and the Malayalees — will celebrate the new year. Although the dates coincide, each group has its own way of ushering in the new year. *StarMetro* takes a look at what makes these three communities different yet alike.

Looking good: (From left) Sharala together with her younger brother Kuganeswaran and older sister Chitra, admiring their new clothers for the new year.



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CLEANING the house, buying new clothes, hanging fresh mango leaves at the entrance and preparing a tray of new, fresh things to be placed in front of the altar, Sharala Kutikander does not miss a beat as she helps her family prepare for the Tamil New Year.

The 24-year-old UCSI Frontiers Journalist and Mass Communication student shares the excitement with her family in welcoming the new year.

"I have been celebrating the Tamil New Year since I was young. I believe it is important to know about our culture and carry on celebrating it."

If the youth do not have any knowledge of our culture and celebrations, the tradition will die," she said.

Batu Caves Sri Subramanian Swamy Devasthanam Temple high priest S. Ravinatha Gurukkal added that many of the younger generation were well-informed on their religion and the practices of the new year celebrations.

"They are aware that the Tamil New Year gives each individual a chance to throw away the bad and bring in the good," he said.

Every new year, thousands of people would crowd the Batu Caves temple for prayers as part of the new year tradition.

Though they will not be able to return home for the festivities with their families, Kolej Tunku Abdul Rahman students Heemawathy Ravindran, Sivaginy Ponnudurai and Divashanavi Sivasooran will still be celebrating.

"I celebrate it every year and this year is no exception. My friends and I, together with a big group of students from the college hostel, would go to the temple to say our prayers for the new year," Sivaginy said.

"This is an exciting day. Last year, Heema and I were given a day off from National Service to go home for the new year and during the whole trip home, we were wishing everyone, even strangers on the road a 'Happy Tamil New Year.' That's how excited we were," she added.

Heemawathy's parents constantly remind her of the significance of the Tamil New Year, and she makes it a point to carry on the traditions of the new year.

This day is also celebrated by families feasting on vegetarian food.

Sharala's mother Letchumy Kandasamy believes in cooking every dish on the day itself as it is a new year, hence new dishes of food



New and fresh: Letchumy preparing the tray to be placed in front of the altar.



Good omen: Sharala hanging fresh mango leaves at the entrance of her home.



New beginning: Sharala lighting the 'kuthu vilakku' that symbolises the beginning of life.

must be cooked. "Even if there is left-over curry in the fridge, I would not take it out because it is old. Everything needs to be new and fresh for the starting of a new year," she said.

The Tamil New Year this year is called Vikruddhi and it marks the beginning of Chithirai month. S. Ravinatha is looking forward to a good year ahead.

"I have consulted the holy scriptures and some of the things to be expected throughout the year would be a good harvest season.

"The situation on the economic front in the country would be fruitful," Ravinatha said.

As part of the new year, most families would lay out fruits, fresh flowers, jewellery, new clothes, sweets, a mirror and kum kum (vermillion), arranged on a tray, ready to be placed before the altar a day before the new year.

Waking up in the morning for the new year, it is symbolic to look at the tray as a sign of a new and fresh start.

Families also give their children blessings and give money as well as a token of good luck.



All set: Ravinatha says the new year is a chance to throw out the bad and bring in the good.