SHUBH DIWALI…With love from May at No 10

The achievements of our British Indian communities – one and a half million people – demonstrate just how much a country can achieve when talent is unleashed and people of all backgrounds are able to fulfil their potential - that’s what is important…Mrs May said in her Diwali message

Prime Minister Theresa May hosted a reception to celebrate Diwali and welcomed more than 150 key figures from across the Hindu, Sikh and Jain communities. Mr Dinesh Patnaik, Acting Indian High Commissioner and Jitendra Patel, Trustee of Neasden Temple were joined by the Prime Minister in the traditional lamp lighting ceremony.

The Prime Minister was also joined by the Secretary of State for International Development, Priti Patel, Secretary of State for Local Government and Communities, Sajid Javid, Lord Gadhia and Foreign Office Minister Alok Sharma. Conservative Friends of India Co-chairman Mr Shailesh Vara introduced the community veterans and business leaders to the prime minister.

“Thank you, and welcome to 10 Downing Street. It is great to have so many of you here at this special time of year and an honour to host my first Diwali reception as Prime Minister,” Mrs May said.

“For me, one of the most remarkable things about this festival is the sheer scale of its reach and the universal appeal of its message. Look at India – over a billion people, speaking hundreds of different languages, following various different faiths – united by this festival of light. Look at the rest of the world, and the colourful celebrations taking place from Singapore to South Africa, Australia to Nepal.

“And look at Britain, where, right now, people are buying gifts on Leicester’s Golden Mile, preparing *pendas* on Soho Road in Birmingham, and stringing up lights on Wembley’s Ealing Road – all in time for five holy days that are such an important part of our national life.

“When we analyse the true meaning of Diwali, its relevance extends beyond India, beyond the Indian diaspora and even beyond the Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists who, in different ways, mark the festival. Its messages apply to every single one of us – whatever our background, whatever our faith.

“Now I have to say I haven’t read all 24,000 verses in the epic poem about Lord Rama’s return to *Ayodhya*. But I do know the story of his homecoming from the many Diwali celebrations I have attended in my own constituency over the years. Over a number of years the children have acted out the story.

“The values he embodied are values which we can all heed. Values of charity, sacrifice and responsibility; to paraphrase Mahatma Gandhi: losing ourselves in the service of others.  Values of good conduct – *dharma* – taking the right path and ensuring that good triumphs over evil. Values of hope, optimism, of forgiveness – of the new beginnings and clean slates represented by the Hindu New Year as people wear new clothes and say prayers for the year ahead.

“I think these are the values we need more than ever as we forge a new, positive, ambitious role for Britain in the world. The mission of my government- that fairer Britain- is to build a country that works for everyone – a country where no matter who you are, you can achieve your dreams.

“The achievements of our British Indian communities – one and a half million people – demonstrate just how much a country can achieve when talent is unleashed and people of all backgrounds are able to fulfil their potential - that’s what is important.

“Our political system becomes more representative and more effective – and I am so proud to have Priti Patel in the Cabinet; Alok Sharma in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; MPs like Shailesh Vara and Rishi Sunak in the Commons; and peers like Jitesh Gadhia, Dolar Popat, Sandip Verma and Ranbir Suri in the Lords.

“When talent is unleashed, our education system offers more choice and opportunity. Indeed, it is Hindu Schools, like the Avanti Trust, who are achieving great things and underlining why we need to go further in supporting faith schools. Our economy becomes more successful and dynamic – including those up-and-coming industries that attract such a diverse range of entrepreneurs, like technology, film and, close to my own heart, fashion.

“And our society becomes stronger, as people from all backgrounds play their part in making our schools, hospitals, police forces and armed forces the best they can be.

  So as we gather here today, as we celebrate the achievements of British Indians and all our many diverse communities, I want us to remember the importance of removing the barriers that prevent people from reaching their potential.

“I want us to be proud of what Diwali means to our nation – after all, it was here in Downing Street that Prime Minister Modi chose to start the last Hindu New Year.

And, next month I am delighted to be returning his visit when I go to India – it will be my first bilateral outside of the European Union and I’m going from Delhi to Bangalore - a true celebration of relations between our countries and our shared ambitions for the future. Above all, I want to wish you all a *Shubh Diwali* and give my best wishes to those celebrating*Bandhi Chhor Diwas* too.