



Glory of Bharath » INDICA

Holi



Holi, is a spring religious festival celebrated by Hindus and Sikhs. In West Bengal and Orissa of India it is known as **Dolyatra** (Doul Jatra) or **Basanta-Utsav** ("spring festival"). The most celebrated Holi is that of the Braj region, in locations connected to the god Krishna: Mathura, Vrindavan, Nandagaon, and Barsana. The main day, Holi, also known as Dhuli Vandana in Sanskrit, also Dhulheti, Dhulandi or Dhulendi, is celebrated by people throwing coloured powder and coloured water at each other. Bonfires are lit the day before, also known as Holika Dahan (burning of Holika) or Chhoti Holi (little Holi). The bonfires are lit in memory of the miraculous escape that young Prahlad accomplished when Demoness Holika, sister of Hiranyakashipu, carried him into the fire. Holika was burnt but Prahlad, a staunch devotee of god Vishnu, escaped without any injuries due to his unshakable devotion. Holika Dahan is referred to as Kama Dahanam in South India.

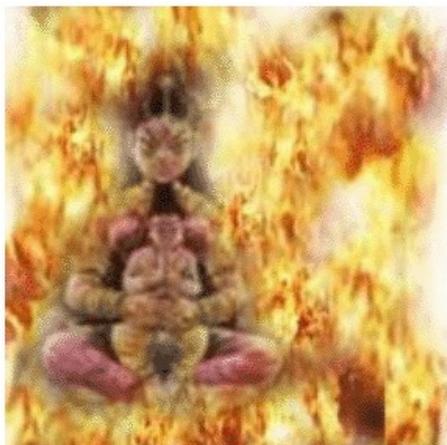
Holi is celebrated at the end of the winter season on the last full moon day of the lunar month Phalgun (February/March), (Phalgun Purnima), which usually falls in the later part of February or March.

Rangapanchami occurs a few days later on a Panchami (fifth day of the full moon), marking the end of festivities involving colours.

Legends

In Vaishnava Theology, Hiranyakashipu is the great king of demons, and he had been granted a boon by Brahma, which made it almost impossible for him to be killed. The boon was due to his long penance, after which he had demanded that he not be killed "during day or night; inside the home or outside, not on earth or on sky; neither by a man nor an animal; neither by astra nor by shastra". Consequently, he grew arrogant and attacked the Heavens and the Earth. He demanded that people stop worshipping gods and start praying to him.

Despite this, Hiranyakashipu's own son, Prahlada, was a devotee of Lord Vishnu. In spite of several threats from Hiranyakashipu, Prahlada continued offering prayers to Lord Vishnu. He was poisoned but the poison turned to nectar in his mouth. He was ordered to be trampled by elephants yet remained unharmed. He was put in a room with hungry, poisonous snakes and survived. All of Hiranyakashipu's attempts to kill his son failed. Finally, he ordered young Prahlada to sit on a pyre on the lap of his demoness sister, Holika, who could not die because she also had a boon which would prevent fire from burning her. Prahlada readily accepted his father's orders, and prayed to Vishnu to keep him safe. When the fire started, everyone watched in amazement as Holika burnt to death, while Prahlada survived unharmed, the burning of Holika is celebrated as Holi.



Holika with Prahlad

Later Lord Vishnu came in the form of a Narasimha (who is half-man and half-lion) and killed Hiranyakashipu at dusk (which was neither day nor night), on the steps of the porch of his house (which was neither inside the house nor outside) by restraining him on his lap (which is neither in the sky nor on the

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Activities from States

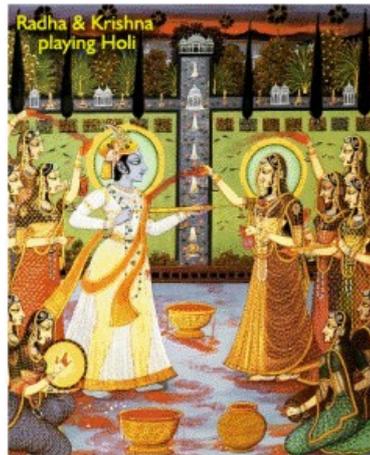
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earth) and mauling him with his claws (which are neither astra nor shastra).

In Vrindavan and Mathura, where Lord Krishna grew up, the festival is celebrated for 16 days (until Rangpanchmi) in commemoration of the divine love of Radha for Krishna. Lord Krishna is believed to have popularized the festival by playing pranks on the gopis here. Krishna is believed to have complained to his mother about the contrast between his dark skin complexion and Radha's (Shakti or energy that drives the world) fair skin complexion. Krishna's mother decided to apply colour to Radha's face. The celebrations officially usher in spring, the celebrated season of love.



There is alternative story detailing the origin of Holi. This story is about Kamadeva, a god of love. Kama's body was destroyed when he shot his weapon at Shiva in order to disrupt his meditation and help Parvati to marry Shiva. Shiva then opened his third eye, the gaze of which was so powerful that Kama's body was reduced to ashes. For the sake of Kama's wife Rati (passion), Shiva restored him, but only as a mental image, representing the true emotional and spiritual state of love rather than physical lust. The Holi bonfire is believed to be celebrated in commemoration of this event.

Legend on Pootana: When the female demoness called Pootana tried to kill boy Krishna, by giving him her poisoned nipples to suckle. The miracle boy Krishna is said to have sucked her nipples so intensely that he drained the demoness of her life. Hence, the biggest celebration of Holi takes place at Mathura where this incident happened with Krishna. After the death of demoness Pootana, people of Mathura till date celebrates this festival in the evening by lighting bourn fire.

Brij Ki Holi / Lath Mar Holi:

Two towns namely Nandagow (where Lord Krishna grew up) and Barsana (where Shri Radha grew up), near Mathura, are considered (till today) as the epicenter of the Holi celebrations. In India it is famously known as BRIJ KI HOLI / LATH MAR HOLI. While Lord Krishna was growing up in Vraj, he popularized the festival with his pranks. Where he played Holi with Gopies of Vraj and they also responded him with equal enthusiasm and the festivities have continued ever since. So, continuing this ritual Men and Women of Vraj even today clash in a colorful display of battle of the sexes. Men of Nandagow raid Barsana with hopes of raising their flag over Shri Radhikaji's temple. They receive a thunderous welcome as the women of Barsana greet them with long wooden sticks. The men are soundly beaten as they attempt to rush through town to reach the relative safety of Shri Radhikaji's temple. Men are well padded, as they are not allowed to retaliate. In this mock battle the men try their best not to be captured. Unlucky captives can be forcefully led away, thrashed and dressed in female attire before being made to dance as a custom. This type of Holi is famously known as "Lath Mar Holi"

Rituals

The earliest textual reference to the celebration of Holi is found in the 7th century Sanskrit drama, Ratnavali. Certainly there are perennial rituals attached to Holi: the first is smearing of coloured powder on each other, and throwing coloured and scented water at each time.

Traditional Holi



Flowers of Dhak or Palash are used to make traditional colours

The spring season, during which the weather changes, is believed to cause viral fever and cold. The playful throwing of natural coloured powders has a medicinal significance: the colours are traditionally made of Neem, Kumkum, Haldi, Bilva, and other medicinal herbs prescribed by Ayurvedic doctors. A special drink called thandai is prepared (commonly made of almonds, pistachios, rose petals, etc.), sometimes containing bhang (Cannabis indica). For wet colours, traditional flowers of Palash are boiled and soaked in water over night to produce yellow coloured water, which also had medicinal properties.

Celebrations

Dol-Purnima, the festival of colour is celebrated with great festivity and joy. On this day, people come out wearing pure white clothes and gather together in a common place where they play it with gay abandon.

Uttar Pradesh



Lath mar Holi being played in Barsana, Uttar Pradesh

Barsana is the place to be at the time of Holi. Here the famous Lath mar Holi is played in the sprawling compound of the Radha Rani temple. Thousands gather to witness the Lath Mar holi when women beat up men with sticks as those on the sidelines become hysterical, sing Holi Songs and shout Sri Radhey or Sri Krishna. The Holi songs of Braj mandal are sung in pure Braj Bhasha. Holi played at Barsana is unique in the sense that here women chase men away with sticks. Males also sing provocative songs in a bid to invite the attention of women. Women then go on the offensive and use long staves called lathis to beat men folk who protect themselves with shields.

In Mathura, the birth place of Lord Krishna and in Vrindavan this day is celebrated with special puja and the traditional custom of worshipping Lord Krishna, here the festival last for sixteen days. All over the Braj region and its nearby places like Hathras, Aligarh, Agra the Holi is celebrated in more or less same way as in Mathura, Vrindavan and Barsana. In Gorakhpur, the northeast district of Uttar Pradesh, this day is celebrated with special puja in the morning of Holi day. This day is considered to be the happiest and colorful day of the year promoting the brotherhood among the people. This is known as "Holi Milan" in which people visit every house and sing holi song and express their gratitude by applying colored powder (Abeer). Holi is also considered as the end of the year as it occurs on the last day of last Hindu calendar month Phalgun. People also kickoff for the next year planning with new year Hindu calendar (Panchang) at the evening of Holi.

Kumaon, (Uttarakhand)

The uniqueness of the Kumaoni Holi of the Kumaon region in Uttarakhand lies in its being a musical affair, whichever may be its form, be it the Baithki Holi, the Khari Holi and the Mahila Holi which starts from Basant Panchmi. The Baithki Holi and Khari Holi are unique in that the songs on which they are based have touch of melody, fun and spiritualism. These songs are essentially based on classical ragas. No wonder then the Baithki Holi is also known as Nirvan Ki Holi.

The Baithki Holi begins from the premises of temples, where Holiyars (the singers of Holi songs) as also the people gather to sing songs to the accompaniment of classical music. Kumaonis are very particular about the time when the songs based on ragas should be sung. For instance, at noon the songs based on Peelu, Bhimpalasi and Sarang ragas are sung while evening is reserved for the songs based on the ragas like Kalyan, Shyamkalyan and Yaman etc.

The Khari Holi is mostly celebrated in the rural areas of Kumaon. The songs of the Khari Holi are sung by the people, who sporting traditional white churidar payajama and kurta, dance in groups to the tune of ethnic musical instruments like the Dhol and Hurka. The Holika made is known as Cheer which is ceremonially made in a ceremony known as Cheer Bandhan fifteen days before Dulhendi. The Cheer is a bonfire with a green Paiya tree branch in the middle. The Cheer of every village and mohalla is rigorously guarded as rival mohallas try to steal the others cheer. Dulhendi known as Charadi , in Kumaoni (from Chharad) , or natural colours made from flower extracts, ash and water) is celebrated with great gusto much in the same way as all across North India.

Bihar

Holi is celebrated with the same fervour and charm in Bihar as in rest of north India. It is known as Phagwa in the local Bhojpuri dialect. Here too, the legend of Holika is prevalent. On the eve of Phalgun Poornima, people light bonfires. They put dung cakes, wood of Araad or Redi tree and Holika tree, grains from the fresh harvest and unwanted wood leaves in the bonfire. Following the tradition people also clean their houses for the day. At the time of Holika people assemble near the fire. The eldest member or a purohit initiates the lighting. He then smears others with colour as a mark of greeting. Next day the festival is celebrated with colours and lot of frolic.

Bengal

On the Dol Purnima day in the early morning, the students dress up in saffron-coloured clothes and wear garlands of fragrant flowers. They sing and dance to the accompaniment of musical instruments like ektara, dubri, veena, etc. Holi is known by the name of 'Dol Jatra', 'Dol Purnima' or the 'Swing Festival'. The festival is celebrated in a dignified manner by placing the idols of Krishna and Radha on a picturesquely decorated palanquin which is then taken round the main streets of the city or the village. The devotees take turns to swing them while women dance around the swing and sing devotional songs. During these activities, the men keep spraying coloured water and coloured powder, abir, at them. The head of the family observes fast and prays to Lord Krishna and Agnidev. After all the traditional rituals are over, he smears Krishna's idol with gulal and offers "bhog" to both Krishna and Agnidev.

Goa

Holi is a part of Goan or Konkani spring festival known as Sismo, one of the most prominent festivals of the Konkani community in Goa, and the Konkani diaspora in the state of Karnataka, Maharashtra and Kerala. Sismo is also known as Sisirotsava and lasts for about a month. The color festival or Holi is a part of entire spring festival celebrations.

Gujarat

Holi is celebrated with great fanfare in Gujarat. Falling on the full moon day in the month of Phalguna, Holi is a major Hindu festival and marks the agricultural season of the Rabi crop. A bonfire is lit in the main squares of the villages and colonies. People gather around the bonfire and celebrate the event with singing and dancing, which is symbolic of the victory of good over evil. Tribals of Gujarat celebrate Holi with great enthusiasm and also dance around the fire.

In Ahmedabad, a pot of buttermilk is hung high on the streets and young boys try to reach it and break it by making human pyramids. The girls try to stop them by throwing colored water on them to commemorate the pranks of Krishna and cowherd boys to steal butter and 'gopis' while trying to stop the girls. The boy who finally manages to break the pot is crowned the Holi King. Afterwards, the men, who are now very colorful men, go out in a large procession to "alert" people of the Krishna's possible appearance to steal butter from their homes.



Holi Bonfire

Maharashtra

In Maharashtra, Holi is mainly associated with the burning of Holika. Holi Purnima is also celebrated as Shimga. A week before the festival, youngsters go around the community, collecting firewood and money. On the day of Holi, the firewood is arranged in a huge pile at a clearing in the locality. In the evening, the fire is lit. Every household makes an offering of a meal and desert to the fire god. Puran Poli is the main delicacy and children shout "Holi re Holi puranachi poli". Shimga is associated with the elimination of all evil. The color celebrations here traditionally take place on the day of Rangapanchami, unlike in North India where it is done on the second day itself. During this festival, people are supposed to forget about any rivalries for the day.

Manipur



Yaoshang

Manipuris celebrate Holi for six days. Here, this holiday merges with the centuries-old festival of Yaoshang. Traditionally, the festival commences with the burning of a thatched hut of hay and twigs. Young children go from house to house to collect money, locally known as nakadeng (or nakatheng), as gifts on the first two days. The youths at night perform a group folk dance called 'thaabal chongba' on the full moon night of Lamta (Phalgun) along with folk songs and rhythmic beats of the indigenous drum. In Krishna temples, devotees sing devotional songs, perform dances and play with aber (gula) wearing traditional white and yellow turbans. On the last day of the festival, large processions are taken out to the main Krishna temple near Imphal where several cultural activities are held.

Punjab





Hola Mohalla

There is a Sikh festival of Hola Mohalla, simply Hola takes place on the first of the lunar month of Chet which usually falls in March. This, by a tradition established by Guru Gobind Singh, follows the Hindu festival of Holi by one day; Hola is the masculine form of the feminine sounding Holi. The word "Mohalla" is derived from the Arabic root hal (alighting, descending) and is a Punjabi word that implies an organized procession in the form of an army column. But unlike Holi, when people playfully sprinkle colored powder, dry or mixed in water, on each other, the Guru made Hola Mohalla an occasion for the Sikhs to demonstrate their martial skills in simulated battles.