

Holi

Holi means "festival of colours". Holi is the festival celebrated in month of spring. In spring month there are flowers all around. Flowers inspire us with hope, joy and new life. It is celebrated in March or April. Holi is a festival of fun and frolic and has been associated with the immortal love of Krishna and Radha. The enthusiasm and the festivity of the season are amazing. Each year all persons indulge themselves in the spirit of colors and enjoy the festival.

History

Hiranyakashipu was the great king of demons, and he had been granted a boon by Brahma, which made it almost impossible for him to be killed. According to the boon he cannot 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 crushed 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.

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, 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 celebration of this event.

Another legend has it that once upon a time an old woman's grandchild was to be sacrificed to a female demon named Holika. A Sadhu advised that abuse and foul language would pacify Holika. The old woman collected many children and made them abuse Holika in foul language. The demon fell dead on the ground. The children then made a bonfire of her remains.

Celebration of Holi

In Braj region like Mathura, Nandagaon, and Barsana Holi is celebrated with great enthusiasm. In Vrindavan and Mathura, where Lord Krishna grew up, the festival is celebrated for 16 days to celebrate 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 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.

In West Bengal and Orissa of India it is known as Dolyatra (Doul Jatra) or Basanta-Utsav ("spring festival").

Days of Festivals

Holika Dahan

This is like Dusshera where effigies are burned signifying the end of dark or demonic forces. The main importance of the festival is on the burning of the holy fire or Holika. The origin of the traditional lighting of Holi is attributed by some to the burning of demonesses like Holika, Holaka and Putana who represent evil.

Dhulandi

The next day, Holi, also known as Dhulandi or Dhulendi, is celebrated by people throwing coloured powder and coloured water at each other.

Food on Holi

Food preparations also begin many days in advance, with collection of gujia, papads, kanji and various kinds of snack items including malpuas, mathri, puran poli, and dahi badas, which are served to Holi guests. The night of Holi, the baithak take turns churning bhang into intoxicating milk shakes and they make sweet laddoos mixed with bhang.

Abeer and Gulal are the two most important things of the celebration in all possible colours. Next comes spraying of coloured water using pichkaris. Coloured water is prepared using Tesu flowers, which are first gathered from the trees, dried in the sun, and then ground up, and later mixed with water to produce orange-yellow coloured water.

Holi also means "sacrifice". Burn all the impurities of the mind, such as egoism, arrogance and

lust, through the fire of devotion and knowledge. Ignite cosmic love, mercy, generosity,

Selflessness, truthfulness and purity through the fire of Yogic practice. This is the real spirit of Holi. The call of Holi is to always keep ablaze the light of God-love shining in your heart. Real Holi is the illuminating hearts.