

The Festival of Holi

Holi is one of the most important festivals of India. Like any other festival in India, Holi festival is celebrated with a lot of enthusiasm, gaiety and communal spirit. What particularly marks this festival is the spirit of friendliness it evokes among people. By the very nature of how it is observed, by throwing colors at each other in a good natured way, this festival is known to dissolve away years of misgivings among people by infusing them with a spirit of fun and enthusiasm. Holi is observed with particularly feistiness in Northern parts of India but provides much excitement in several other regions.

Depending on the particular region in India, the actual day of Holi is celebrated under different names and people of traditions. However, irrespective of the region, the same spirit of fun and festivity pervades across all of India at this time of the year. Mother nature also appears to lend a hand in this spirit signifying the departure of winter and announcing the arrival of spring, a season full of flowers and lush green crops.

Although it is the least religious holiday, it is probably one of the most exhilarating ones in existence.

When is Holi celebrated?

Holi is celebrated on the **full moon day** in the month Hindu month of **Phalgun**, which is generally the month of March as per the Gregorian calendar.

How is Holi celebrated?

On the eve of Holi, people gather at important crossroads and light huge bonfires. This particular ceremony is called **Holika Dahan**. At this time, children are allowed to play pranks and visit the neighborhood singing songs that ask for treats.

Celebration of Holi is particularly boisterous in Northern parts of India, with people throwing colored powder or water at each other in gay abandon, causing loud bursts of laughter and merriment in the process. Ill feelings among people get washed away as they smear each other with color and laugh at their achievements in making each other looking funny and ridiculous. This custom of throwing colors appears to have evolved from the legend of Lord Krishna who expressed his love to his beloved consort "Radha" by smearing color on her forehead. This action still appears to invoke feelings of mutual love and fellowship among people observing Holi.

Songs, dance on the rhythm of **dholak** and mouthwatering Holi delicacies are other highlights of the day. In addition to delicacies, people are likely to indulge in an intoxicating substance "Bhang" (cannabis) mixed in with food, arousing much laughter and merriment among onlookers.

Significance of Holi

Several legends leading to this festival abound. The traditional lighting of a bonfire, "Holika Dahan" is marks the end of evil, personified by the sister of the demon King **Hiranyakashyap** who demanded is probably related to the evil actions of the Demon King, Hiranyakashipu, who wanted everybody in his kingdom to worship him as God. His own son "Prhalad refused to do so, and instead, became a devotee of Lord Vishnu. Hiranyakashyap tried to punish his son by placing him in the lap of his sister 'Holika" and setting fire around him. Holika had a boon that she would never burn from fire; however, this time she was burnt to ashes while Prahalad remained unscathed by the grace of God Vishnu.

In **South India**, people worship **Kaamadeva**- the god of love and passion for his extreme sacrifice. Some other legends persist in other parts of India; however, they all celebrate the triumph of good over evil.