

Holi



Holi falls on the day of the full moon during Phalguna, and is the most colourful festival in the Hindu calendar. It is full of joy and optimism for the start of spring, a season of hope and new beginnings. Following the cold indoor months of winter, people emerge to see a new sparkling world of colour and life.

ORIGINS

Holi is a very ancient festival, originally known as 'Holika'. It has been mentioned in early scriptures

such as Jaimini's Purvamimamsa-Sutras and Kathaka-Grhya-Sutras. Originally, it was a special rite performed by married women for the happiness and well-being of their families. The festival falls on the full moon (Purnima) of Phalguna. Shree Krishna is said to have playfully celebrated Holi with the people of Nandagow and Vraja.

According to the Puranas, Holi is important for three reasons:

- It was on this day Lord Shiva

opened his third eye, reducing Kamadeva (the God of Lust) to ashes. Kamadeva's foolish pride led him to aiming an arrow at Lord Shiva, who was deep in meditation. However, aware of this, Lord Shiva killed Kamadeva before he could do any harm.

- An ogress named Dhundhi lived in the kingdom of Prthu (Raghu). Here she used to trouble the children of the Kingdom, and due to several boons, she was invincible. However, she was

sensitive to taunts and pranks, and on this day the village boys all collectively drove her away by creating a fire, chanting and mocking her.

- Perhaps the most widely known story behind Holi is of Bhakta Prahlad.
- The demon king, Hiranyakashipu was father to a boy named Prahlad. Although being born into a demon family, Prahlad always had a strong belief in God and was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. However, Hiranyakashipu was not pleased as he saw himself as the Lord of the Universe and demanded his son to worship him. Prahlad disagreed, and although multiple attempts were made to take his life, he survived. It was on this day that one such attempt was made. Hiranyakashipu asked his sister, Holika, to help him kill Prahlad. Holika had a boon which meant she could not be burnt by fire, so she took Prahlad in her lap

and sat on a pyre of wood, which was set ablaze. Although Hiranyakashipu intended to kill Prahlad, it was Holika that died and Prahlad survived, as she had misused her powers. Hiranyakashipu was later killed by Lord Narasimha, an avatar of Lord Vishnu.

CELEBRATIONS

There are formal religious observances on this day.

An image of Holika is set alight in a simple ceremony with the Raksoghna Mantras of the Rig Veda being chanted to ward off evil spirits. Coconuts and corn are often roasted and eaten. The religious significance of this is to mark the burning of the undesirable tendencies (selfishness, greed, egoism), and celebrate the coming of spring, a victory of good over evil.

People all over India and the world also celebrate Holi with much pomp and celebration. Throwing gulal (coloured water or perfumed

coloured powder) on one another is the most significant celebrations that happen. This playful activity of throwing coloured paint is designed to remove the barriers that people sometimes build around themselves. Holi renews the spirit of unity and brotherhood among families and in the community.

Popular in

Holi is celebrated by NHSF (UK) chapters all across the country!

Significance

True devotion saves from the greatest of fears and obstacles. Our lives become as joyful and colourful as the fun and games of Holi