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Holi

By Alisha Goyal
Contributor

Holi happens to be one of my favorite festivals. I particularly enjoy the color part of it. Holi is celebrated by people throwing colored powder and colored water on friends and family, which give the holiday its common name "Festival of Colors". It is celebrated at the end of the winter season on the last full moon day of the lunar month in February/March. Some people also celebrate Holi as the arrival of spring.

In some parts of India, Holi can be celebrated as long as 16 days. However, 2 days are most important and celebrated by all. First day is Holika Dahan (burning of Holika) or Chhoti Holi (little Holi), when bonfires are lit. Second day is actual Holi when they apply color to the people's faces. There are mythological stories that go with the celebration of each of these days.

Holika Dahan

There once lived a devil but a powerful king called Hiranyakashyap. He considered himself god and wanted everybody to worship him. His son Prahlad however began to worship Lord Vishnu. To get rid of his son, Hiranyakashyap asked his wicked sister Holika, to enter into a blazing fire with Prahlada. She had a boon that fire cannot kill her. Prahlada chanted Vishnu's name the entire time and he escaped from the fire unhurt. However Holika was burnt to death. Tradition of burning Holi or Holika Dahan comes from mainly this legend to honor Prahlada. It also symbolizes victory of good over evil and end of dark or demonic forces.

Holi:

Actual day of Holi is also associated with the love between Lord Krishna (an avatar of Vishnu) and Radha. According to the legend, young Krishna asked Yashoda why his skin was so dark and Radha's was so fair. Yashoda advised him to apply color to Radha's face and see how her color would change. It is also believed that Lord Krishna popularized the Holi festival by playing pranks with the Gopis. One of Krishna's pranks was splashing gopikas with water using Pichkaris (water guns). Another popular legend of Holi is the celebration of death of Ogress Pootana who tried to kill infant Krishna by feeding him poisonous milk. Moral of all these legends is the victory of good over evil.

As with many other Indian festivals, food preparations begin many days in advance. Some common Holi food items are: Gujia, Papad, Kanji, Malpua, Mathri, Puran Poli, Dahi Badas and most importantly Thandai drink.

Different parts of India celebrate Holi differently and have their own little traditions. In Punjab it's celebrated as "Hola Mohalla", in Uttar Pradesh as "Lath Mar Holi", in Bengal as "Dol Jatra", in Maharashtra as "Shimga" etc. What is important is it brings people close together. Tradition of Holi is that even enemies turn into friends and there is no difference between rich and poor. Everybody celebrates the festival together.

Alisha Goyal is a student at the 4th grade Bala Vihar class of Chinmaya Mission, Phoenix Chapter (www.chinmayaphoenix.org). Chinmaya Bala Vihar classes are conducted every Sunday at Sierra Vista Academy in Scottsdale. She wrote this article as part of her Balavihar curriculum.

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