

HOLI

Holi is a popular ancient Hindu festival. It is celebrated predominantly in India. Holi is popularly known as the Indian "festival of Spring", the "festival of colours", or the "festival of love".

The festival signifies the arrival of Spring, the end of winter, the blossoming of love, and for many a festive day to meet others, play and laugh, forget and forgive and repair broken relationships. The festival also celebrates the beginning of a good Spring harvest season. It lasts for a night and a day, starting on the evening of the Purnima (Full Moon day) falling in the Vikram Samvat Calendar, in the Hindu calendar month of Phalgun, which falls around middle of March in the Gregorian calendar.

Holi celebrations start on the night before Holi with a Holika Dahan where people gather, perform religious rituals in front of the bonfire.

The next morning is celebrated as Rangwali Holi, a free-for-all festival of colours, where people smear each other with colours and drench each other. Water guns and water-filled balloons are also used to play and colour each other. Anyone and everyone is fair game, friend or stranger, rich or poor, man or woman, children and elders. The fight with colours occurs in the open streets, open parks, outside temples and buildings. Groups carry drums and other musical instruments, go from place to place, sing and dance.

Vishnu legend

There is a symbolic legend to explain why Holi is celebrated as a festival of triumph of good over evil in the honour of Hindu god Vishnu and his follower Prahlada.

King Hiranyakashipu was the king of demonic Asuras, and had earned a boon that gave him five special powers: he could be killed by neither a human being nor an animal, neither indoors nor outdoors, neither at day nor at night, neither by *astra* (projectile weapons) nor by any *shastra* (handheld weapons), and neither on land nor in water or air. Hiranyakashipu grew arrogant, thought he was God, and demanded that everyone worship only him.

Hiranyakashipu's own son, Prahlad, however, disagreed. He was and remained devoted to Vishnu. This infuriated Hiranyakashipu. He subjected Prahlada to cruel punishments, none of which affected the boy. Finally, Holika, Prahlad's

evil aunt, tricked him into sitting on a pyre with her. Holika was wearing a cloak that made her immune to injury from fire, while Prahlad was not. As the fire roared, the cloak flew from Holika and encased Prahlad, who survived while Holika burned. Vishnu, the god who appears as an avatar to restore Dharma in Hindu beliefs, took the form of Narasimha - half human and half lion (which is neither a human nor an animal), at dusk (when it was neither day nor night), took Hiranyakashyapu at a doorstep (which was neither indoors nor outdoors), placed him on his lap (which was neither land, water nor air), and then eviscerated and killed the king with his lion claws (which were neither a handheld weapon nor a launched weapon).

The Holika bonfire and Holi signifies the celebration of the symbolic victory of good over evil, of Prahlada over Hiranyakashipu, and of the fire that burned Holika.

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holi>