



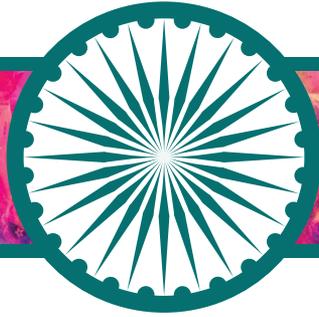
HOLI

FESTIVAL OF COLOR

SHRAMAN

SOUTH ASIAN MUSEUM

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SPRING HAS ARRIVED!

The coming of spring has been celebrated in South Asian literature for thousands of years. The vibrant colors, fragrances, and frolicking animals and birds inspired artists to capture the renewal of life. This poem by Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), the first South Asian author to win a Nobel Prize for literature, is a good example:

ORE BHAI PHAGUN LECECHE OR "O FRIEND, SPRING HAS ARRIVED!"

O Friend, the fire of colors has caught the trees in the forest,
in their branches, in their flowers, in their fruits, and in their
leaves—

in every corner of them, and also in places not visible to the eyes!

The sky has become suffused with colors, and songs of joy have
made the world indifferent (to worldly concerns). O Friend, the
restless new leaves of this season are as if rustling within my
mind!

O Friend, look, look at the play of color on the earth! It has
broken the meditation of the vast sky. The stroke of its laughter
could no longer keep the sky silent, and is making the sky shiver
now and then.

The breeze is running all along the forest; it does not know the
names of the flowers,
and as if because of this it is going from groves to groves
and asking the flowers: "Who are you?"

HOLI FACTS

The Holi festival occurs on the last full moon in the month of Phalgun (February-March), marking the beginning of **spring**. Participants engage in revelry as they sing, dance, throw colored powder, and build bonfires. These activities reflect the world awakening from its winter slumber.



19th century Hindu
calendar

Holi festival developed out of a long tradition of festivals celebrating the winter harvest and the arrival of spring. The earliest mention of a spring festival or **vasantotsava** in South Asia dates between 1500-1200 BCE.

Holi is celebrated differently in **different regions** of South Asia. In some places, it may be celebrated for 2-3 days; while in others, Holi lasts longer than 2 weeks! Regardless of its duration, normal daily activities halt and communities come together to celebrate the changing seasons and the stories and legends associated with this event.

The legends and myths associated with Holi also differ depending on the region but they share in common themes such as **‘good overcoming evil,’ ‘love,’** and **‘playfulness.’**

BONFIRES AND COLORS



Two common features in most Holi celebrations is the lighting of a bonfire and the throwing of colored water and powders.

● **Bonfires symbolize:**

- Transformation and renewal as seasons change
- Fertility, as ash is a great fertilizer for soil and new life
- Purity, as the flames cleanse the impure
- Good triumphing over evil
- Love

● **Throwing of colored water and powder:**

- The practice has existed for more than 2,500 years
- People of all backgrounds are invited to participate
- Brings communities together through playfulness
- Bright colors resemble the vibrancy of spring

SPRING FESTIVALS AROUND THE WORLD

The coming of spring is celebrated around the world in different ways. Here are some examples of important celebrations:



Nowruz:

the traditional Persian New Year marks the first day of spring. Celebrations include a traditional spring cleaning and *Suri*, the festival of fire in which participants jump over bonfires to symbolize light (the good) winning over darkness (the bad).



Songkran:

the traditional New Year's Day in Thailand. Along with visiting elders and going to a Buddhist monastery, festivities include throwing water.



Holla Mohalla:

One day after Holi, this 3-day spring festival showcases the Sikh's martial skills in mock fights and the art of fire breathing.

SPRING FESTIVALS AROUND THE WORLD

Spring Equinox in Teotihuacan: thousands of people gather at Teotihuacan, an pre-Hispanic archeological site near Mexico City, to celebrate the spring equinox. Many celebrants climb the 360 steps to the top of the Pyramid of the Sun.

Chinese Spring Festival: the traditional Chinese New Year coincides with a spring festival - feasts, new clothes, fireworks and family reunions.

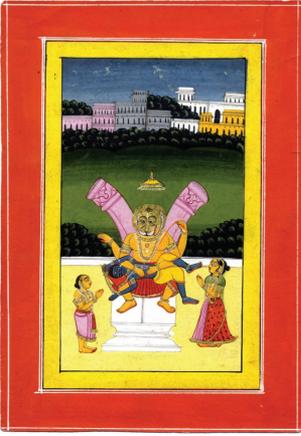


Walpurgis Night: named after the English missionary Saint Walpurga, this traditional spring festival is celebrated across Central and Northern Europe. The festival includes dancing and bonfires.

Las Falles: large dolls or puppets are paraded and burned during Spain's 5-day holiday; some say Las Falles began in the Middle Ages, when artisans burned pieces of wood they had saved during the winter in celebration of the spring equinox. Over time, the holiday has developed into a celebration to commemorate Saint Joseph.



PRAHLADA AND HOLIKA



Prahlada and his mother, Kayadu, paying homage to Vishnu as Narasimha (Man-Lion) as he defeats Hiranyakashipu

Hiranyakashipu, a demon, received a boon from Lord Brahma, the Hindu deity responsible for creation, that gave him magical powers. Believing he was immortal, Hiranyakashipu regarded himself as the ruler of the universe. His son, Prahlada, did not worship his father; he was a devout worshipper of Lord Vishnu, the Hindu deity who maintains order in the universe. Hiranyakashipu was outraged at his son and tried to dispose of him in a variety of ways but each time Lord Vishnu protected Prahlada from injury. Hiranyakashipu asked his evil

sister, Holika, to sit on a bonfire with Prahlada in her lap. As the flames rose, Vishnu protected the boy and Holika perished in the fire.

This story is widely celebrated in Holi. The bonfire that is built on the first night represents the bonfire on which Holika perished and an effigy of her is frequently tossed into the fire.

What theme is expressed in the story of Prahlada and Holika?

KRISHNA AND PUTANA



Baby Krishna vanquishing the demon Putana

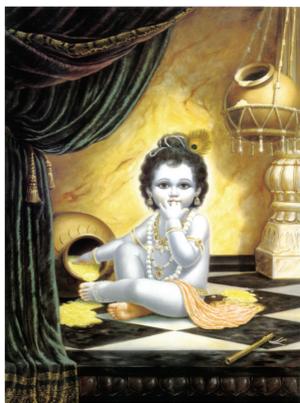
Once, when the Earth was upset at the sin being committed in the world, she petitioned Lord Vishnu, the Hindu deity who maintains order, to intervene. Vishnu agreed and descended to earth as Lord Krishna.

Krishna grew up in Vrindavan Forest in the Mathura region of north India with his foster parents, Nanda and Yashoda. By all accounts, he was mischievous and frequently played with the other boys in the forest. Before Krishna was born, a prophecy foretold the demise of Kamsa, his wicked uncle and king of Mathura, at the hands of Krishna. The evil king tried unsuccessfully to dispose of him by sending a variety of demons to Gokula, Krishna's village. One such demon was Putana, who arrived disguised as a wet nurse to help care for baby Krishna. She offered him poisonous milk and as he drank, he drank the life out of her. The villagers were happy and burned an effigy of Putana in a bonfire.

Burning an effigy of Putana in the bonfire occurs in some regions on the first night of Holi.

What theme is expressed in the story of Krishna and Putana?

BABY KRISHNA, THE BUTTER THIEF



Baby Krishna stealing butter

When Lord Krishna was a toddler, he was very mischievous and naughty. His brother, Balarama, and he would play pranks on their foster mother, Yashoda, and other *gopis* (cow-herding women) in Vrindavan Forest. They would release the village cows so they could drink the daily milk, feed monkeys with yogurt, and break pots containing buttermilk. One of the most famous stories is of

the brothers stealing butter from the *gopis*. Krishna and Balarama would sneak into the houses in the village when the women were not paying attention and steal their butter. The *gopis* started to hide their butter pots in dark places or hang them from the ceiling. The boys could always find them in the dark and would pile wood to stand on so they could reach the hanging pots. If the pots were too high, they would drill holes in the bottom of them. The *gopis* would get angry and complain to Yashoda, but when she looked at Krishna to scold him, her love prevented her from doing so. The *gopis*, too, were unable to stay angry with Krishna and developed a tenderness and love for him because of his playfulness.

What Holi theme is present in this tale of Krishna as the Butter Thief?

KRISHNA AND THE *GOPIS*



Krishna playing his flute for Gopis and cows



Radha dancing with Krishna

The time Krishna spent in Vrindavan Forest is marked by play and enjoyment without concern for purpose (*lila*). As a young man, he spent his days tending to the village cows and playing pranks on and dancing with the *Gopis* (“cow-herding women”). Krishna would play his flute to summon them to the banks of the Yamuna River to dance and to sing. Out of their deep love for him, the *Gopis* would immediately come to experience *Ras-lila* or the Dance of Divine Love. Hearing Krishna’s flute and experiencing his dance produced states of love that many Hindus describe as perfection. In some accounts, Krishna had a favorite *Gopi* named Radha.

In certain regions, Holi celebrates *lila*, the joyful playfulness of Krishna, Radha, and the Gopis.

What themes are being expressed? What activities in the *Holi* celebration are used to represent this playfulness?

SHIVA AND KAMA

As spring arrived, Lord Shiva, the Hindu deity of transformations, was in deep meditation and unaware of the world around him. After withdrawing into himself, demons (*asuras*) decided to take advantage of this and wreak havoc in the universe. The other gods grew fearful because it had been foretold that only Shiva's son could overcome the *asuras*, but Shiva was not married, had no son, and could not be roused from his meditation. Lord Indra, the Hindu deity of war, hatched an idea to have Kama, the deity of love, shoot Shiva with a flower-tipped arrow while Parvati, daughter of the Himalayan Mountains, was in his presence. Shiva was not aware that either Parvati or Kama had approached. When Kama shot his arrow, Shiva opened the third eye in his forehead and Kama was burned to ash. When he saw Parvati he fell instantly in love. Parvati then asked Shiva to bring Kama back to life, which he did but without a physical body.



Lord Shiva and Parvati

In certain regions, particularly in south India, Holi celebrates Shiva burning Kama and people celebrate Kama.

What elements of Holi are represented in this story? What theme is important?

CHAITANYA MAHAPRABU



Chaitanya dancing, singing, and chanting with his followers

Chaitanya Mahaprabu (1486-1533 CE) is revered as a saint in India and around the world. He is known for his devotion to Lord Krishna and for leading groups of men through the streets singing and chanting

Krishna's name. This singing and chanting is called *kirtana* and continues to be practiced today. Chaitanya's intense love for Krishna led his followers to regard him as the embodiment of the love between Krishna and the *Gopi Radha*. Tradition holds that Chaitanya was born on the last full moon in the month of Phalguna, the day on which Holi is celebrated. Chaitanya's love and devotion for Krishna make him an important religious figure even today.

What themes and events in Chaitanya's life are relevant to the Holi celebrations?

MATCH THE LEGENDS

Match the legend to its picture.

_____ Lord Shiva burning Kama, the god of love, with his third eye.

_____ Lord Vishnu protecting Prahlada from his demon-aunt, Holika.

_____ Lord Krishna dancing with Gopis (cow-herding women) in Vrindavan Forest.

_____ The birthday of Chaitanya Mahaprabu (1486-1533 CE), an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna.

_____ Lord Krishna as a child vanquishing the demon Putana.

_____ Lord Krishna as a child stealing butter.

A



B



C



D



E



F



COLORING PAGE



HOLI AND THE ENVIRONMENT

While many people enjoy Holi celebrations, some believe that modern practices are harmful to humans and the environment.

Traditionally, the colored powder used to throw at others had medical significance and was made from trees that blossomed in the spring. Some ingredients included: *neem*, turmeric, saffron, *bilva* (“Bengal quince”), beetroot, hibiscus, dried tea leaves, and varieties of grapes. The colored powder manufactured today is synthetic and contains toxins and chemicals that can irritate the skin and pollute the soil and water.

The bonfires that are central to the Holi festivities contribute to deforestation and air pollution.

There are many people in India who want eco-friendly Holi celebrations. These practices would include avoiding chemical colors and burning waste materials in the bonfire rather than wood.



MAKE YOUR OWN COLORED POWDER!

Here is a recipe to make your own eco-friendly colored powder for Holi!

Supplies:

- 1 cup corn starch
- 1/3 - 1/2 cup water
- icing color (1 ounce)—but any food dye can work well.
- mixing bowl
- latex gloves
- blender or food processor

Directions:

Step One: In the mixing bowl, stir together the corn starch and water until it is thick paste. Put on latex gloves. Next, mix in the food dye.

Step Two: Allow the mixture to dry out for a day or two. The mixture has dried when there are cracks in the surface.

Step Three: Place the cracked powder on a baking sheet. Heat oven to 350°. Turn oven off and place baking sheet inside with oven door slightly cracked for 30 minutes to dry powder further.

Step Four: Pulse the dried-out powder in the blender or food processor until all the clumps are gone. This makes a super fine and lightweight powder. Store in a ziplock bag until you are ready to use it.

(We found this easy recipe at <http://www.abeautifulmess.com/2014/07/homemade-non-toxic-colored-powder.html>)

HOLI COLORED WATER RECIPE

Here is a recipe to make your own eco-friendly colored water for Holi!

Supplies:

- 4 cups of chopped red cabbage
- 3 tablespoons turmeric
- 4 cups of chopped beets
- 4 cups of onion skins (from about 8 large yellow onions)

Directions

Place each in a separate pot. Add 1 quart of water to each of the pots, bring to a boil, simmer for 30 minutes, and strain.

Add water to colored liquid to make it last longer!



SHRAMAN

SOUTH ASIAN MUSEUM

The purpose of the Shraman South Asian Museum and Learning Center Foundation is to collect, preserve, display, interpret, and facilitate the study and discussion of South Asian culture and history.

This mission will be fulfilled through the creation of a museum, learning center, and library, and through ongoing collaboration with members of academic, artistic, and cultural communities.

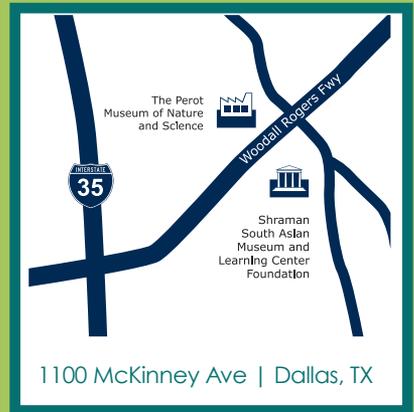
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