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“Holi – The Festival of Colours”

Also known as the Festival of Colours, **Holi** is one of the oldest and major festivals of India. It is also referred to as the festival of love and compassion. The festival signifies the victory of good over evil, the arrival of spring, end of winter and is also celebrated as a thanksgiving for a good harvest. But, above all, it is a festival of joy. It is said that Holi existed several centuries before Christ. However, the meaning of the festival is believed to have changed over the years.

Holi falls on a full moon day, in the month of 'Phalgun', which falls in the month of March, as per the Gregorian calendar. It lasts for two days. The first day is known as **Holika Dahan or Choti Holi**, where people gather, do religious rituals in front of the bonfire, and pray that their internal evil should be destroyed as the bonfire starts. The second day is **Rangwali Holi**, when people sprinkle colored water on another & smear each other's faces with colored powders. The frolic and 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. People visit family, friends and foes to throw coloured powders on each other and share Holi delicacies, food and drinks. Some customary drinks such as those that

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include bhang (marijuana) are intoxicating.

Holi is celebrated across the country with the same enthusiasm and joy. However, each region has its own flavor and variations to it. Different states have a different way of celebrating it according to their own cultural traditions.

Holi, like all other Indian festivals, also has its fair share of mythological significance. One of the main legends is that of the Demon King Hiranyakashyap, who demanded he be respected by all his subjects. Every one worshipped him out of fear, but it was Prahlad, the king's son, who refused to venerate his father and worshipped the Hindu deity, Lord Vishnu instead. The evil king demanded his son to be killed and ordered his sister, Holika, to carry Prahlad in her lap and enter a blazing fire as Holika had a boon, which protected her from fire. Legend has it, that Prahlad was saved by Lord Vishnu due to his extreme devotion, and the evil-minded Holika was burnt to ashes, for her boon worked only when she entered the fire unaccompanied. Since then, people light a bonfire on the eve of the Holi festival every year and celebrate the triumph of good over evil.

In Vrindavan and Mathura, Holi is celebrated in memory of the divine love of Radha and Krishna.

Holi has some evils. Many people get drunk on this occasion. They indulge in rowdy behavior and apply colors that are dangerous for health.

Holi Festival is widely celebrated in India, Nepal and other places with Hindu population. In recent times, this festival has also gained acceptance among Non-Hindus as a spring festival of love and colors. Though Holi is purely an Indian festival, it is gradually appealing to the international populace as well. Holi festival is celebrated with ardor in the countries like USA, UK & South Africa.

"If the mind is intensely eager, everything can be accomplished - mountains can be crumbled into atoms"

- Swami Vivekananda, Indian Hindu Monk (1863 – 1902)

INDOLINK Consulting
indolink@indolinkconsulting.com

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