

Festivals, Carnivals and Celebrations

and

Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month.

March, 2023.

It was a bright spring morning in the village of Nako, in the Hangrang Valley of the Indian Province of Himechel Pradesh as Dipak and Marsha made their way to the open ground near the centre of the village for the annual Holi Festival, the celebration of the passing of winter when the temperature can fall as low as 2 degrees centigrade, and the beginning of spring, that most comfortable time of year in the Subcontinent.

This is one of the most popular of the Hindu festivals, not just in India, but wherever Hindu Indians have taken up residence, and is far more than a celebration of renewal, re-birth, and new growth. The festival of Holi celebrates the arrival of spring, the blossoming of love and for many, it is a day to meet others, play and laugh, forget, and forgive, and repair broken friendships. The festival is also an invocation for a good spring harvest season. It lasts for a night and a day, starting on the evening of the Purnima (Full Moon Day) in the Hind calendar month of Phalguna, which falls around the middle of March in the Gregorian calendar.

Holi is primarily the celebration of the eternal and divine love of the god Radha Krishna and is also significant of the triumph of good over evil. The festival commemorates the victory of the god Vishnu as Narasimha Narayana over Hiranyakashipu, the god of evil.

The Holi celebrations are also known as the Festival of Colours, the Festival of Spring, and the Festival of Love. The celebrations start on the night before Holi with a Holika Dahan where people gather, perform religious rituals before a bonfire, and pray that their internal evil be destroyed the way Holika, the sister of the demon king Hiranyakashipu, was killed in the fire. The next morning is celebrated as Rangwali Holi when people smear and drench each other with colours. Water guns and water-filled balloons are often used to play and colour each other, with anyone and anyplace being considered fair game to colour. Groups often carry drums and other musical instruments going from place-to-place singing and dancing. Throughout the day people visit family, and friends and foes come together to chat, enjoy food and drink, and partake in Holi delicacies.

On the second day the young married couple Dipak and Marsha met Dipak's uncle Sashi who immediately informed them that he had completely forgotten the loan he had made to them of 20,000 rupees the year before; all in the spirit of Holi.



Holika bonfire in front of Jagdish Temple in Udalipur, Rajputana (now Rajasthan) in 2010.



Radha Krishna playing Holi.

Holi is an ancient Hindu festival with its cultural rituals. It is mentioned in the Puranas, Dasakumara Charita, and by the poet Kalidasa in the 4th century during the reign of Chandragupta II and is also mentioned in the 7th-century Sanskrit drama Ratnavali. The festival intrigued European traders and our colonial staff from the 17th century, and it was far from unknown for European sahibs and their memsahibs to participate in the celebrations during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Rather in the way that the Olympic religion incorporates variations according to the beliefs of different city states, e.g., Athens, Sparta etc, so there are regional variations of Holi. In the Braj region of India, where the Hindu deities Radha and Krishna grew up, the festival is celebrated until Rang Panchmi in commemoration of their divine love for each other. In the tradition of Shaivism and Shaktism Holi is associated with Shiva, the four-armed god who is usually depicted as dancing and who bestowed the gift of fire to humanity. This variation is mainly practiced in southern India.



The Mughal emperor Jahangir celebrating Holi with ladies of the zenana.

It is interesting to note that whilst the suni and shi'ite versions of Islam strictly forbid representation of human form (dressed or undressed) the Mohamedan Mughal dynasty imposed no such restriction as demonstrated by the picture above; and they embraced some Hindu beliefs and practices. Thus, the festival of Holi has been observed by non-Hindus, such as the Jains of Nepal.

In the Sikhs territory of northwest India throughout the early part of the 19th century Holi was extended by three days to allow for military exercises with mock battles and competitions of archery, athletics, and horsemanship.



Radha and the Gopis celebrating Holi, with accompaniment of music instruments.

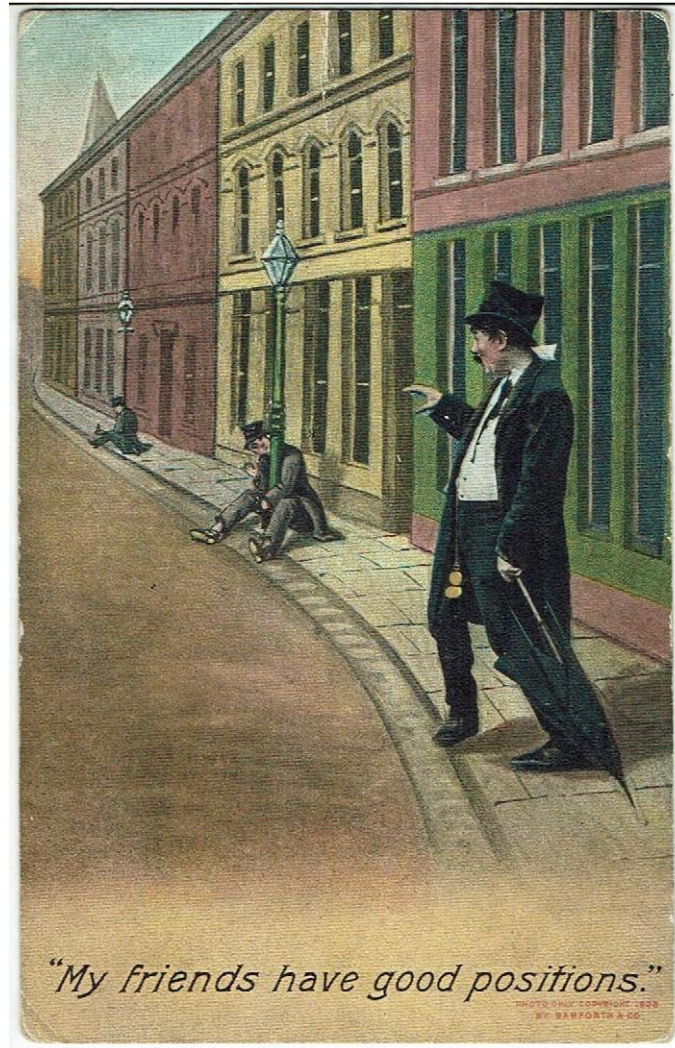
In southern India, some worship and make offerings to Kamadeva, the god of love in Indian mythology. During the weeks leading up to the festival of Holi an array of dry powder colours are available in street markets throughout India traditionally made from plants with health benefits to ward off viral fever and colds prevalent in the winter months and early spring. The plants used include neem, kumkum, haldi and bilva, plus flowers from the palash or tesu tree, red sandalwood, hibiscus, madder tree, radish, pomegranate and others.

Beyond the frontiers of India and Nepal, Holi is celebrated in most of the countries where the peoples of the sub-continent of Hindu faith have settled including Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Fiji, Great Britain, Guyana, Malaysia, Mauritius, Pakistan, South Africa, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States of America.



Colours for Holi on sale at a market in Mysore.

Saucy Sophia's Snippets



Post Card posted to Kangaroo Point in Queensland with a Queensland postage stamp carrying Queen Victoria's portrait.

A postcard in the Author's private collection.

Trailer for next month.

Easter, 1915 on the Eastern Front, a brief truce and celebration that is not so well known.

Dorian Osborne

1st March, 2023.