

Happy Holi Festival Of 2018
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The entire hill region of Nepal is celebrating the Holi festival on March 1, 2018; people in the southern flatland called Tarai celebrate one day later. However, the main theme of celebrating the festival is the same means courting the female partner in the spring season. People sing amorous songs elsewhere, and play with colors and smear vermillion on each other's faces of friends, relatives and everybody willing to enjoy the festival. Several myths have been to explain the origin of the festival.

Probably, the first and foremost Holi festival in Nepal must be the one celebrated in Bhaktapur even today but rarely noticed by the folks other than the locals in certain areas of the Bhaktapur town.

On the first day of the festival, the wooden phallus believed to be of Lord Bhimsen passed through a piece of red linen is taken around the area to inform the folks that the Holi festival has started off. Devotees singing romantic Holi songs follow the decorated divine phallus penetrated through a piece of red linen; musical bands precede it. Then, the revelers of the festival bring back the holy phallus and suspend it from a ceiling for displaying at the temple to Lord Bhimsen in Bhaktapur for the period of the festival, which starts on the eighth day of the bright fortnight of Falgun (February/March), and ends on the full moon day in the lunar calendar.



A wooden phallus supposed to be of Lord Bhimsen suspended from the ceiling at the temple to Lord Bhimsen in Bhaktapur, displayed during the Holi festival. (Picture: author)

This festival is entirely for demonstrating the fertility, and the spring season that has commenced and the folks need to engage in lovemaking for producing the potent and strong new generations of children. Folks have not much work to do, as they have sufficient food grains stored for a year for daily consumption and for making whatever they want for celebrating all sorts of festivals that come one after another every fortnight.

Most probably, the tradition of marking the Holi festival in the way the Bhaktapurians have been celebrating even today must have been set even before the Licchavi reign that had been from 400 A.D. to 800 A.D when the folks were very well off because of the fertile agricultural land in the Nepal Valley. They have sufficient foods for a year only working for three months or so in the field. Then, they used the free time for celebrating different festivals; and they engaged in other cultural activities. So, the valley folks have so many festivals to celebrate even today.

At that time, folks celebrated singing the Holi songs. Most of the Holi songs are address to a young glamorous woman. Such songs are duet; both men and women sing in turns. These songs are mostly in the form of question and answers. Men court women saying the Holi festival has come so let us play with colors, to make more beautiful than have been, don't get angry, the songs go on. Youths sing such songs and eventually get married in the past.

Then, the festival took a new turn. The Malla king introduced a new myth for celebrating the Holi festival planting a bush plant on the courtyard of the palace as the symbol of a tree called 'kadam sima' on which Lord Krishna suspended the clothing of women bathing and swimming naked.

Lord Krishna claimed to be the incarnation of Lord Vishnu that came to the mundane world to bring back the order in the human living style correcting the mess humans had apparently created knowingly or unknowingly. So, Krishna believed that the nude bathing for women needed to be forbidden. Thus, Lord Krishna took probably the first step toward curtailing the fundamental rights of women. He collected all the garments of the women bathing in nude, and hung them on the branches of a tree, and he sat on one of the branches and took out his favorite flute and began playing to draw the attention of the women.

On the last day of the eight-day Holi festival, the Malla king invited all high-ranking officials to the palace courtyard for playing with colors. Everybody came in the Holi attire means in white to take the different colors from the king and the queen and other royalties. All the officials got heavy dose of colors after enjoying the Holi festival.

Then, everybody washed off the colors and put on the festive attires and attended the Holi festival dinner the king and the queen hosted in the evening. They enjoyed the most lavish dinner up until the midnight. Drinking and dancing were the part of the festive dinner.

Even today, setting a bush plant on the Malla palace courtyard has been continued. Such a bush plant has a number of pieces of linen in different colors suspended from its branches symbolizing the attires of the women bathing in nude. Krishna must be somewhere sitting on one of the branches playing his regular flute to attract the attention of the naked women.

Women devotees go around the bush plant set on the Malla palace courtyard in Kathmandu, and make offerings to Lord Krishna supposed to be playing a flute sitting on a branch of the bush plant but not visible. The women go with a ball of cotton yarn winding the bush plant denoting to the naked women binding Lord Krishna with their attires and ensnaring the Lord, and then mocked Lord Krishna smearing him with different colors. Thus, the festival of

Holi started off as the myth goes on. Today's women are not laughing at the lord but they are doing it for a favor Lord Krishna doing them.



Women going around the bush plant with a ball of cotton yarn on the Kathmandu palace courtyard (Picture: author)

Then, the Malla kings went out of power forever. The Shah kings came in. They introduced a long bamboo pole with the circles at three-level each circle having pieces of linen of different colors suspended on the fringe of the circles that are attached to the top of the bamboo, which is set at the front of the new palace made in the western architecture at Basantapur in Kathmandu. It also symbolizes the tree called 'kadam sima' on the branches of which Lord Krishna hung the garments of women stripped off to bathe in a nearby river; and the myth is the same that Lord Krishna hanging the clothing of the naked women swimmers on its branches to teach them a lesson on never bathing naked.



A symbol of a tree Lord Krishna used for hanging the attires of the nude women swimmers on its branches. This is called 'chir.' (Picture: author)

Another myth about the origin of the Holi festival is the story about Prahalad and his father Hiranya Kashyapu. Prahalad was the devotee of Lord Vishnu whereas his father Hiranya

Kashyapu secured the boon of almost eternal life from Lord Shiva, as nobody would possibly be able to meet the criteria for assassinating Hiranya Kashyapu.

So, Hiranya Kashyapu became mad with the power he was endowed with. He did not recognize anybody superior to him including Lord Vishnu. However, a child was born to him whom he named as Prahald, who became the staunch devotee of Lord Vishnu.

Hiranya Kashyapu declared that nobody would be above him in his kingdom even the so-called Lord Vishnu. Every teacher had to teach the pupils that Hiranya Kashyapu was all in one and he was the supreme authority and a god. However, his son Prahald did not accept this notion of Hiranya Kashyapu being the supreme authority. For him, Lord Vishnu was the god and supreme authority.

Hiranya Kashyapu tried to convince his son Prahald of nobody in this world except for Hiranya Kashyapu was the supreme authority but he failed awfully. Then, Hiranya Kashyapu had no choice but to end the life of his own son, as the son went against his authority, and always invoked Lord Vishnu. He tried several trick to kill Prahald but none of them worked, as everywhere Lord Vishnu was there to save Prahald from any possible death.

Finally, Hiranya Kashyapu asked his own sister Holika to do a favor to Hiranya Kashyapu for ending the life of Prahald. Holika had the boon of not getting burned from fire. So, Hiranya Kashyapu proposed to have a large bonfire, and then Holika take Prahald on her lap and then they together jumped from the terrace to the bonfire so that Prahald would be burned to death whereas Holika would emerge unharmed.

However, just the opposite happened; Holika burned to death whereas Prahald emerged unhurt. This was the victory of Lord Vishnu over Hiranya Kashyapu; and the power of Lord Vishnu to cut off the powerful boon bestowed on Holika. Any divinity no matter how power ending the boon bestowed on somebody by another divinity had been rare but it happened with Holika. Again the myth has been for telling the battle between two sects: Saivists and Vaisnavists. Prahald represented Vaisnavists. This time Vaisnavists won the battle and Prahald remained alive.

So, the tradition of celebrating the defeat of Holika and his brother Hiranya Kashyapu was set in the form of playing with colors which is named as Holi: the name supposedly derived from Holika.

Happy Holi; and enjoy the spring festival.

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