

[This festival is now generally celebrated in the whole world.](#)

The main day, Holi, also known as Dhuli Vandana in Sanskrit, also Dhulheti, Dhulandi or Dhulendi, is celebrated by people throwing coloured powder and coloured water at each other. Bonfires are lit on the eve of the festival, also known as Holika Dahan (burning of Holika) or Chhoti Holi (little Holi). After doing holika dalhan we pray to it and offer prasad to it and others also. The bonfires are lit in memory of the miraculous escape that young Prahlad accomplished when Demoness Holika, sister of Hiranyakashipu, carried him into the fire. Holika was burnt but Prahlad, a staunch devotee of god Vishnu, escaped without any injuries due to his unshakable devotion. Holika Dahan is referred to as Kama Dahanam in South India.

Holi is celebrated at the end of the winter season on the last full moon day of the lunar month Phalguna (February/March), (Phalgun Purnima), which usually falls in the later part of February or March. In 2009, Holi (Dhulandi) was on March 11 and Holika Dahan was on March 10. In 2010, Holi was on March 1 and Holika Dahan was on February 28.

Rangapanchami occurs a few days later on a Panchami (fifth day of the full moon), marking the end of festivities involving colours.

Though there has been references to a festival like this in Sanskrit texts like ratnavali where people sprayed coloured waters using bamboo syringes, the origin of the modern Holi festival has been traced to ancient Bengal. It was a Gaudiya Vaishnav festival, in accordance to Vaishnaviya Tantra. People went to Krishna temples, applied red colour to the icon and then distributed the red coloured powder or Abir along with malpua prasad to family and friends. Red signified the colour of passion and Lord Krishna is the king of desires. The ritual signified that all our desires should be diverted for the attainment of Krishna and for the well being of society.

In Maharashtra, Holi is mainly associated with the burning of Holika. Holi Purnima is also celebrated as Shimga. A week before the festival, youngsters go around the community, collecting firewood and money. On the day of Holi, the firewood is arranged in a huge pile at a clearing in the locality. In the evening, the fire is lit. Every household makes an offering of a meal and dessert to the fire god. Puran Poli is the main delicacy and children shout "Holi re Holi puranachi poli". Shimga is associated with the elimination of all evil. The color celebrations here traditionally take place on the day of Rangapanchami, 5 days after Holi, unlike in North India where it is done on the second day itself. During this festival, people are supposed to forget about any rivalries and start new healthy relations with all.

One of the most prominent festivals of the Konkani community in Goa, and the Konkani diaspora in the state of Karnataka, Maharashtra and Kerala. Śigmo is also known as Śiśirotsava and lasts for about a month. The color festival or Holi is a part of entire spring festival celebrations.[5]

Holi festivities (but not Śigmo festivities) include: Holika Puja and Dahan, Dhulvad or Dhuli vandan, Haldune or offering yellow and saffron colour or Gulal to the deity.

As the spring-blossoming trees that once supplied the colors used to celebrate Holi have become more rare, chemically produced industrial dyes have been used to take their place in almost all of urban India. In 2001, a fact sheet was published by the groups Toxics link and Vatavaran based in Delhi on the chemical dyes used in the festival.[11] They found safety issues with all three forms in which the Holi colors are produced: pastes, dry colors and water colors.

Their investigation found some toxic chemicals with some potentially severe health impacts. The black powders were found to contain lead oxide which can result in renal failure. Two colors were found to be carcinogenic: silver, with aluminium bromide, and red, with mercury sulphide. The prussian blue used in the blue powder has been associated with contact dermatitis, while the copper sulphate in the green has been documented to cause eye allergies, puffiness of the eyes, or temporary blindness.[12]

A Natural Holi in Pune, an alternative to synthetic colors

The colorant used in the dry colors, also called gulals, was found to be toxic, with heavy metals causing asthma, skin diseases and temporary blindness. Both of the commonly used bases—asbestos or silica—are associated with health issues.[12]

They reported that the wet colors might lead to skin discolouration and dermatitis due to their use of color concentrate gentian violet.

Lack of control over the quality and content of these colours is a problem, as they are frequently sold by vendors who do not know their origin.

The report galvanized a number of groups into promoting more natural celebrations of Holi. Development Alternatives, Delhi and Kalpavriksh,[13] Pune, The CLEAN India campaign[14] and Society for Child Development, through its Avacayam Cooperative Campaign [1] have both launched campaigns to help children learn to make their own colours for Holi from safer, natural ingredients. Meanwhile, some commercial companies such as the National Botanical Research Institute have begun to market “herbal” dyes, though these are substantially more expensive than the dangerous alternatives. However, it may be noted that many parts of rural India have always resorted to natural colours (and other parts of festivities more than colours) due to availability reasons.