

the all-embracing powers of tranquility and spirituality is also an integral part of it, This is reflected through the concept of Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Bengal as mentioned above and thus, mention must be made of a similar concept of spiritualism propagated over the last century by Nobel Laureate Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore through his university in West Bengal. Even in present times thus, the celebrations of Holi through music and dance at Vishwa Bharati University in Shantiniketan in West Bengal (Bolpur) draws audience from far off places from all over the world to witness the spiritual powers of the spring festival- conveying a message of love and peace. From history to spiritualism as Holi reflects a vibrant history in its present ethos- it has also reached far and wide through the effects of the present popular culture- especially music and films in modern

times. Through these new touches of a global representation, each colour holds thus, a special place of mention and finds a new meaning. Today, thus, Holi stands with a global interpretation opening the doors to a bigger worldwide audience to welcome the quintessential essence of life and it is time to open our doors to welcome the awakening spirit of rejuvenation- as Tagore rightly has put it-

“Ore grihobashi, khol daar khol, laaglo je dol, stholey, joley, bonotoley laaglo je dol, daar khol daar khol”- My dear, open your doors and welcome the spring, for it has arrived across the land and water and trees of the forest, welcome the spring.

Author: Dr. Lopamudra Maitra Bajpai

Visual Anthropologist, Culture Specialist - SAARC Cultural Centre, Colombo

Photo credit: Award Winning Indian Photographer Jayati Saha



Cultural Calendar - March 2017

2
Thursday
6.00 pm

Sitar Recital

by Mr K.G.West, Swedish Sitar Player
trained under the guidance of Pandit Rabindra Narayan Goswami
from Varanasi, India
Venue: ICC Auditorium

11
Saturday
10.30 am

Holi Celebrations

Venue: ICC Lawns

24
Friday
6.30 pm

Palette of Colours

A joint exhibition of paintings

by eminent artists of Sri Lanka Mr R.Kouwshigan and his disciples Ms. G.Kowsiga, Dr. Jaya Thakur, Mrs. Ananya Bagchi & Mrs. Senthamarai Jeyaruban
Inauguration on 24th March at 6.30 p.m.
(by invitation only)
Exhibition will remain open for public on 25th & 26th March 10am onwards
Venue: Lionel Wendt Memorial Art Centre
#18, Guidford Crescent, Colombo 07

10
Friday
6.00 pm

Bharatha Natyam Recital

by Neha Khaitan,
Bharatanatyam Dancer from India
disciple of Guru Smt. Hemamalini Vijayraghavan Arni
Venue: ICC Auditorium

17
Friday
3.00 pm

Friday Matinee Kahaani

Screenplay & Directed by Sujoy Ghosh
Cast: Vidya Balan, Parambratta Chatterjee
& Nawazuddin Siddiqui
Venue: ICC Auditorium



Indian Council for Cultural Relations
भारतीय सांस्कृतिक संबंध आयोग

Sanskarika

Newsletter of the Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo

March 2017



P.C. Jayati Saha

Programmes subject to change

Admission to all programmes are on first come first serve basis. Except 24th March

All are cordially invited

Cultural Tapestry

HOLI- MULTIFARIOUS REFLECTIONS

Spring has an enchanting and overwhelming touch to announce its arrival after the winter slumber across the globe. As the early morning dewdrops gradually recede into the glorious sunrise of spring- life finds a way to renew itself. Old replaces the new as the empty boughs of trees witness the first rays of life through the nascent green leaves or kishalaya-giving way to the flowers and fruits to replenish the branches. Thus, even in the most barren of lands, the burst of colours are evident through the deft brushstrokes of nature as verdant shades of green and myriad flowers almost transform the landscape like a vibrant dream. Celebrating this glorious epoch of the gift of life- different festivals are celebrated around the world to mark the beginning of yet another year of agriculture and harvest and prosperous life. Amidst the festivals of India- Holi is one such festival that upholds the spirit of the new beginning.



The spring festival- Holi- occurs during the full-moon of the Indian agricultural month of Phalguna or February-March. As a harbinger of spring, the festival is spread across a couple of days and is celebrated across the nation of India through much fanfare, revelry as well as adulations and sacrosanct worships. Marking the beginning of an agricultural season, however, different stories, myths and historical legends have also come to associate the festival in different local colours- rendering a special regional perspective. Following a medieval mythology a ceremonial fire commemorates the festival by announcing the elimination of the old and welcoming the new through the auspicious occasion of Holika Dahan (Burning of Holika). A ceremonial pile of wooden logs, dry twigs and branches are burned the night before - denoting the end of the winter staleness and invoking the spirit of life through fire. The popular mythological story preceding the occasion centres around the worship of Lord Vishnu-

a fact which highlights the association of the festival with the worship of Lord Vishnu across India even in present times. According to popular mythology, a young prince by the name of Prahlad

was a devout worshipper of Lord Vishnu- much to the dislike of his father- Hiranyakashipu- a Shaivite or worshipper of Shiva. However, in spite of several objections as Prahlad's devotion continued unfettered- Hiranyakashipu tried to eliminate his own son using myriad ways and each time Prahlad was rescued miraculously by Lord Vishnu himself. On one such occasion as a punishment, little Prahlad was forced to sit on the lap of his aunt (father's sister)- Holika in the middle of a pyre. Holika had a special boon bestowed to her by the Gods which prevented her from any harm from fire. However miraculously, the boon failed and little Prahlad was saved, while Holika burnt to ashes much to the astonishment of everybody, including Hiranyakashipu. The later is killed eventually by the reincarnated and ferocious form of Lord Vishnu- Narsimha (Half lion and half man). As the oral tradition celebrates the ending of evil and the start of a pure beginning- the celebration of the festival on the following day also maintains the rhythm. Through bursts of cheer, singing, music, distribution of sweets and fanfare, multifarious dry and wet colours celebrate an atmosphere of bonhomie. As is evident from the story, the celebration of Holi often is marked with a sacrosanct revelry by worshipping Lord Vishnu- especially through his re-incarnated avatar of Krishna. In connection to this, special mention may be made about places like Mathura, Vrindavan and Braj regions of the state of Uttar Pradesh- where different mythological stories associate a young Krishna to have

resided and thus celebrated many a Holi- along with his male and female friends- especially his lady love- Radha. Even in present times, Holi in these regions is a sacrosanct affair and is seen through the worship of Lord Krishna.

Historically speaking Vedic literature speaks about the existence of a dual agricultural season- corresponding to the beginning of spring and the autumn seasons in India. The existence of the festival of Holi can actually be traced back to the hoary past across the Indian sub-continent thus. Still later, several mainstream literary and architectural evidences provide ample suggestion of the existence of the festival across different periods of Indian history. However, away from the pages of mainstream historical evidences, the festival seems to have survived across centuries and under different royal dynasties without a skirmish. Mainstream historical evidences however render a helpful timeline about the significance of the festival through different periods of Indian history. Literary account of the festival can be found in ancient Indian history through the Sanskrit play's- Ratnavali by Shri Harsha and Dashakumaracharita by Dandin. Still much later various miniature paintings from Medieval Indian history provide vivid examples of the celebration of colours in the royal palaces. Still much later and across 17th century India onwards, the different and fascinating mention by the many European travelers and administrators stand till today as important examples.

With a vivid history to share, being reflected through many mythological stories and folklore, the present festival has its multiple representations in different corners of India- connected through the history of the respective regions.



The festival is popularly celebrated with an associated identity of the worship of Lord Krishna in some parts of northern and eastern parts of India- including Uttar Pradesh, Parts of Bihar, West Bengal, Odisha and Assam. It is known as Phakuwa or Dol-Jatra in Assam, Phagua in Bihar and Dol-Jatra in Bengal and Odisha. The full-moon day of Dol-Purnima in Bengal and Odisha holds a special place of mention pertaining to following the celebrations of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and his worship of Lord Krishna which helped to cut across the narrow streamlines of caste and religion and began to include people from various castes and creeds to be a part of the celebration. The region still has an all-encompassing note with reference to Holi and its celebrations across all socio-cultural strata.

In other parts of northern India, the association of the festival with a vivid historical past is also prominent, like the celebration of Ganga-mela in the state of Kanpur during Holi- in an action to pay respect to the martyr soldiers who fought at the First War of

Indian Independence in 1857 against the British East India Company sepoys under the leadership of Nana Sahib. Further up the Himalayan slopes of the Kumaon region, Holi is marked by Dhulandi and is observed across fourteen days of celebrations. In other places and away from the traces of the Vaishnava reflections of Holi- the festival is observed as a spring festival. In western parts of India like the Konkan region, Goa and Maharashtra- the festival is celebrated as Shimga. In Goa, the festival is referred to as Shigmo. In various southern states of India, the festival is also variously known as Manjalkuli or Turmeric Bath (Kerala), Kama-dahana (Karnataka and Telengana), Vasant Panchami (Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh). However, Holi is not only confined to India alone. Thus, across the South-east Asian countries, including Sri Lanka, Nepal and others including Trinidad-Tobago, Guyana, Fiji, Mauritius- amongst other places, Indians celebrate the spring festival with much gaiety and fervour. As history has leisurely moulded and remoulded the various parameters of this spring festival to give a local ethos,