

# Celebrating The Spring Festival Phagwa, or Holi Caribbean Style

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**The reason for the season of spring** is the celebration of VICTORY OF GOOD OVER EVIL. We have witnessed several despotic leaders, around the world being deposed by their people because they ignored the wishes of their subjects while trying to impose their own tyrannical rule upon them. The Middle East is the best example of how leaders can tumble.

The festival of Phagwa or Holi will be celebrated around the world on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> of March 2013 and the Caribbean is no exception.

This festival which is the most colourful in India observed for more than 5,000 years was brought to the Caribbean, by Indentured Labourers, during the month of May 1838 and spread throughout the region with new arrivals until the end of indenturship 1917. Phawga was originally celebrated by East Indians. Now the festival is celebrated by all races, nationalities or religious background, similar to the festival of Jouvert in Trinidad and Tobago with mud, water, different colouring and music.

Spring is for everyone. It is the time when the rich mingle with the poor, the ugly with the pretty, and the weak with strong, all seeking happiness after the night of the full moon when a holika, bond fire, planted forty days before is burnt and the cruel winter is coming to an end.

The burning of Holika symbolizes the destruction of our greed, lust, hatred and evil. It is the beginning of new life like the springing up of flowers and new creation.

The different colours, of powder or abir also symbolizes the defeat of a wicked King as told in this old story.

In Sat Yuga of the Golden Age, King Kashyap and Queen Aditi had two sons named Hiranyakashipu and Hiranyaksh, and an only daughter called Dhundhulie (Holi).

Hiranyakashipu performed meditation and penance at the feet of Brahma, the creator of the universe. Consequently, Brahma appeared before Hiranyakashipu and requested him to ask for a boon. Hiranyakashipu requested from Brahma the boon that he should be killed by neither the devtas, man, god, or animals, neither should he be killed during the day nor the night; nor should he be killed in a building nor outside of it; and neither should he be killed by any weapon.

Without hesitation, Brahma granted this difficult boon upon Hiranyakashipu. Obtaining such a boon and filled with pride, Hiranyakashipu returned to his kingdom.

During the absence of Hiranyakashipu his wife remained under the protection of the sage Narad who imparted to her the Kathas (teachings) of Vishnu Bhagwan.

Prahalad, the unborn child of Hiranyakashipu learnt everything about Lord Vishnu in his mother's womb.

On the other hand, Hiranyakashipu, endowed with that mighty boon, began to terrorise the devtas, and instead, asked that he be adored as Vishnu.

When Prahalad grew up he refused to accept that his father, Hiranyakashipu, was God but he projected in the minds of friends that Lord Vishnu was God.

For this Prahalad underwent many cruel forms of torture and punishments, most outstanding of which was his aunt Dhundhulie (Holi) taking him and sitting on a lighted pyre thinking that, because of her boon, he would be burnt to ashes and she would be saved. This resulted in the reverse where she was burnt to ashes and Prahalad was saved.

The incarnation of Lord Vishnu in his Narsingh (half man and half lion) form destroyed Hiranyakashipu. After Dhundhulie (Holi) was burnt to ashes Prahalad remained there playing with the ashes and glorifying Lord Vishnu. From then on Dhundhulie was known as Holika. Phagwa is declared when an image of Holika is made and burnt on full moon night in the month of Phagoon (March/April) with the rising of the full moon.

When Lord Vishnu appeared as Narsingh Bhagwan he held Hiranyakashipu on his lap and took him under the eave of the building. It was twilight and he ripped open the chest of Hiranyakashipu with his claws.

Thus, Phagwa or Holi has its origin from Sat Yuga. The coloured powder used represents the ashes of the burnt body of Holika and the abir represents the blood that flowed from the body of Hiranyakashipu.

It is now sprinkled upon relatives and friends to promote the colour of life, joy and happiness. When the Holika is being burnt it is a custom especially in the Caribbean to roast corn, breadfruit, and other vegetables which are distributed to the congregation at the burning. From the planting of the Holika to the burning there are singing and celebrating with CHOWTALS- songs of liberation culture and promotion of spirituality.

Phagwa or Holi is public holiday in some Caribbean territories especially Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad. There is a Chowtal Competition among students of several Secondary Schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

The significance of Phagwa or Holi is threefold. Firstly, it commemorates the beginning of the Hindu New Year. Secondly, It ushers in the spring season. This is the time when every one looks forward to the enjoyment of outdoor life when the fields are cleaned – the old leaves and shrubs are burnt in preparation for a bountiful harvest.

Prayers are therefore offered to Lord Vishu for good health for the farmers and fertility of the soil.

We pray for the good health for all throughout the world and especially those in hospitals. We must move on remembering that you can only fall if you stand

On Sunday 31, 2013 the Hindu Community in Barbados will be having their usual open air celebration on the lawns of the Hindu Temple at Roberts Complex, Welches, St. Michael Barbados from 2:00 pm.

All visitors and citizens of the island are invited, as in previous years, to partake in the festival and enjoy a lovely complimentary East Indian vegetarian meal including sweets but no alcohol will be tolerated.

It is advisable to register your attendance by contacting Pandit Thakoor Prasad at telephone number (246) 434-4638