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CIR's Corner

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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: Holi

Holi, also called the "Festival of Colors" or the "Festival of Love," is one of the most vibrant and exciting holidays celebrated across the Indian subcontinent. It marks the beginning of spring, and celebrates the triumph of good over evil and the power of love. This lively festival has become popular internationally and is now celebrated by people all over the world.



Holi is celebrated on the day after the full moon in the Hindu month of Phalguna, which usually falls in March. In 2026, Holi will be celebrated on March 4.

Holi is an ancient Hindu tradition rooted in the legend of Prahlad and Holika. According to the legend, Hiranyakashipu, the demon king, demanded everyone to worship only him. However, his son, Prahlad, was a devoted follower of Vishnu, the protector and maintainer of the universe, and one of the most important Hindu deities. Hiranyakashipu punished his son in many cruel ways, but Prahlad's devotion to Vishnu never wavered. Finally,

Hiranyakashipu's sister, Holika, tried to kill Prahlad by tricking him into sitting on her lap in a bonfire. She had a magical cloak that protected her from the flames, but as the fire grew, her cloak flew onto Prahlad and saved him. Holika then burned to death.

This story symbolizes the victory of good over evil and is celebrated on the evening before Holi with a bonfire called *Holika Dahan*. Families and friends come together to sing and dance around the fire. They burn an effigy of Holika and throw offerings such as coconuts, popcorn, chickpeas, and grains into the fire. The fire is thought to cleanse negativity, so that one can welcome spring with a positive and fresh mindset.



The most internationally well-known part of Holi takes place on the main day, *Rangwali Holi*, and it is based on the Hindu legend of Krishna and Radha. Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, is said to have been a mischievous deity who enjoyed playing pranks on others. He had dark blue skin, so when he fell in love with the fair-skinned Radha, goddess of

love, he was worried that she would not accept him. His solution was to playfully color Radha's face so that they would match.

During the festival, people imitate this story by throwing brightly colored powders, called *gulal*, and spraying colored water on each other. Anyone is fair game, so the streets come alive with a rainbow of colors! The powders are traditionally made from natural ingredients, and each color has meaning:

- Red symbolizes love and fertility.
- Blue, a divine color, represents Krishna.
- Green means nature and new beginnings.
- Yellow, the color of turmeric, means health.
- Orange, the color of saffron, is forgiveness.
- Purple represents magic and mystery.
- Pink symbolizes friendship.



Coloring one another, or “playing Holi,” as the locals say, symbolizes Krishna's playfulness and his eternal love for Radha. It is also a way to break down barriers and bring people together, regardless of class or skin color. Everyone is welcome to participate.

In addition to playing Holi, traditional songs and dances are performed throughout the day. People also enjoy sweet dishes such as *gujhia*, which is a fried pastry filled with *khoa* (an Indian dairy product), sweetened coconut, dried fruits, and nuts. They also drink *thandai*, a cold milk-based beverage containing nuts and spices.



I asked Joseph Abonmai, an Ebetsu ALT who comes from India, about his experience with Holi. He said that he does not enjoy the celebrations because some men drink too much and use the color play as a cover for sexual harassment and assault. He said that many girls and women are afraid to go out during Holi.

I was sad to learn that there is a dark side to such a joyous festival, but Holi is not the problem; the problem is men who disrespect women. In recent years, efforts are being made to make Holi safe and inclusive for all participants. For example, the government and NGOs promote respectful behavior, and young people are using social media to raise awareness about consent. Police increase their presence during festivities, especially in crowded areas. There are also some women-only and family-friendly events. Celebrating freely and without fear is the true spirit of Holi.

Holi has gained international attention and is now celebrated in many countries around the world. The largest Holi festivals outside of South Asia are held in countries with a large Indian diaspora, such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Mauritius, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, and Guyana. There are even a few small Holi events held in Japan! These festivals introduce people to Indian culture and spread the message of fun, peace, and unity. If I ever get a chance, I would like to play Holi! ★



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