



Holi

A Cultural Kaleidoscope

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books like *Narada Purana*, *Bhavishya Purana*, *Purva Mimansa Sutra*. In Sanskrit literature, the spring season and the spring festivals have been the favourite subjects of many writers. The famous Muslim tourist Alberuni has also described Holi in his travel memoir *Tarikh- i - Hind*. Pictures of this festival are found on ancient paintings, frescoes and on the walls of the temples. Many sculptures in temples depict Holi.

This festival boosts the economy, trade and commerce. Preparation of Holi foods and drinks like *gujiya*, *mathri*, *malpua*, *bhanga*, *thandai* and other regional delicacies makes the festival more charming and exotic. Singing and dancing on Holi folk songs, visiting relatives, family and friends, makes the festival vibrant.

Holi which is considered as the most celebrated festival of India is not only observed by people living in the country but is equally famous among those residing outside the country who celebrates Holi in their own customized or moulded form. In many nations of the world similar festivals are celebrated like 'Easter' in Hungary, 'Arsina' in Poland, 'Bolia Konese' in Czech and Slovak, 'Temonji Okuribi' in Japan, 'Chawje' in China, 'Songkaran' in Thailand, 'Pyami' in Laos, 'Chow Chanam Them' in Cambodia, 'Omena Vonga' in Africa, etc.

To bring out the various facets of Holi in India and abroad, International Virtual Conference was organized by the Department of History, Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur, in association with the Indus International Research Foundation, New Delhi, on 11th and 12th June, 2021.

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Hola Mohallah : A Unique Form of Holi in Punjab

Peeyush Bhadviya

Festivals remind us about our history and civilization. Our age-old traditions have gifted us with various festivals and fairs. Among them is Holi which is celebrated irrespective of religion and caste in the country, bringing people closer and creating a strong bond of humanity.

Holi carries many stories, events, customs and traditions which provide us with rare historical information of the past. It helps us to know and understand the anthropological evolution of mankind.

Holi gets the joyful name *Hola Mohalla* in the state of Punjab. The festival is celebrated in an entirely different manner, its meaning and significance shifts a little here. *Hola Mohalla* is a Sikh festival that takes place on the first of the lunar month of *Chet* which usually falls in March. This by tradition established by Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of Sikhs, follows the Hindu festival of Holi by one day. Holi is the masculine form of the feminine sounding Holi and the word *Mohalla* is derived from the Arabic root *hal* and is a Punjabi word that implies an organised procession in the form of an army column. Together the words *Hola Mohalla* stands for "mock fight". During the festival processions are organised in the form of army type columns accompanied by war drums and standard bearers proceeding to a given sport or moving in state from one Gurudwara to another. The custom originated in the time of Guru



Fig. 1: Panj Pyare leading the procession



Fig. 2: Holy Procession

Gobind Singh who held the first such mock fight event at Anandpur Sahib in February 1701. The foothills of the Shivaliks in Ropar district and Kiratpur Sahib have since 1701 C.E., been playing host to *Hola Mohalla*. The military exercise which was personally supervised by the Guru was carried out on the bed of the river Charan Ganga with the famous Hindu temple of Mata Naina Devi in the Shivaliks as the backdrop.

Guru Govind Singh decided to revive the spirit of Holi and weave its essence into a festival created in the Khalsa tradition. Early morning prayers at the Gurudwara mark the beginning of the festival. The Guru Granth Sahib is brought out with ceremony and placed on the dais. It is given a symbolic bath with milk and water. Colourful processions are organised on the occasion of *Hola Mohalla* particularly in Anandpur Sahib and Muktsar. The festival is celebrated for 6 days. 3 days at Sri Kiratpur Sahib and other 3 days at Anandpur Sahib. When the procession is being carried out the colour is being thrown on the participants. The event started by Guru Govind Singh at Holagarh place where he gave a task to two teams. The task was to capture the Holagarh without hurting each other. The two parties were wearing uniforms, one white and other saffron. At the end the team wearing saffron colour clothes was able to capture Holagarh and after that every year this event is being celebrated at Anandpur Sahib which carries on the tradition being developed by Guru Govind Singh.



Fig. 3: Nihang Riding the Horses

On this grand festival mock battles, exhibitions, display of weapons, etc., are held followed by Kirtan, music and poetry competitions. The participants perform daring feats such as gatka, tent pegging, bareback horse riding, standing erect on to speeding horses and various other fields of bravery. On the last day along procession starts from Takhat Keshgarh Sahib, one of the five sikh religious seats and passes through various important Gurudwaras like Qila Anandgarh, Lohgarh Sahib, Mata Jitoji and terminates at the starting place.

Sikhs in large number still assemble at Anandpur Sahib on this day and an impressive and colourful procession is taken out in which the nihangs in the traditional panoply form the vanguard while parading their skill in the use of arms, horsemanship, tent pegging and other warlike sports. The Nihang singhs are designated as Guru's beloved. They still carry the military ambience and heroic style that was cultivated during the life time of Guru Gobind Singh. Nihangs constitute a distinctive order among the sikhs and are readily recognised by their dark blue bana and the ample dumallas. The most spectacular event at *Hola Mohalla* is the magnificent procession of Nihang on horses and elephants and on foot carrying a variety of traditional and modern weapons and demonstrating their skill in using them. In the night, songs of balladeers ring through the narrow, white-painted, streets of Anandpur Sahib. The *taadi jatha*, soulful folk songs and tales of bravery from the times of the Sikh Gurus, are set to the beats of the *dhadd*, the hour-glass-shaped drum.

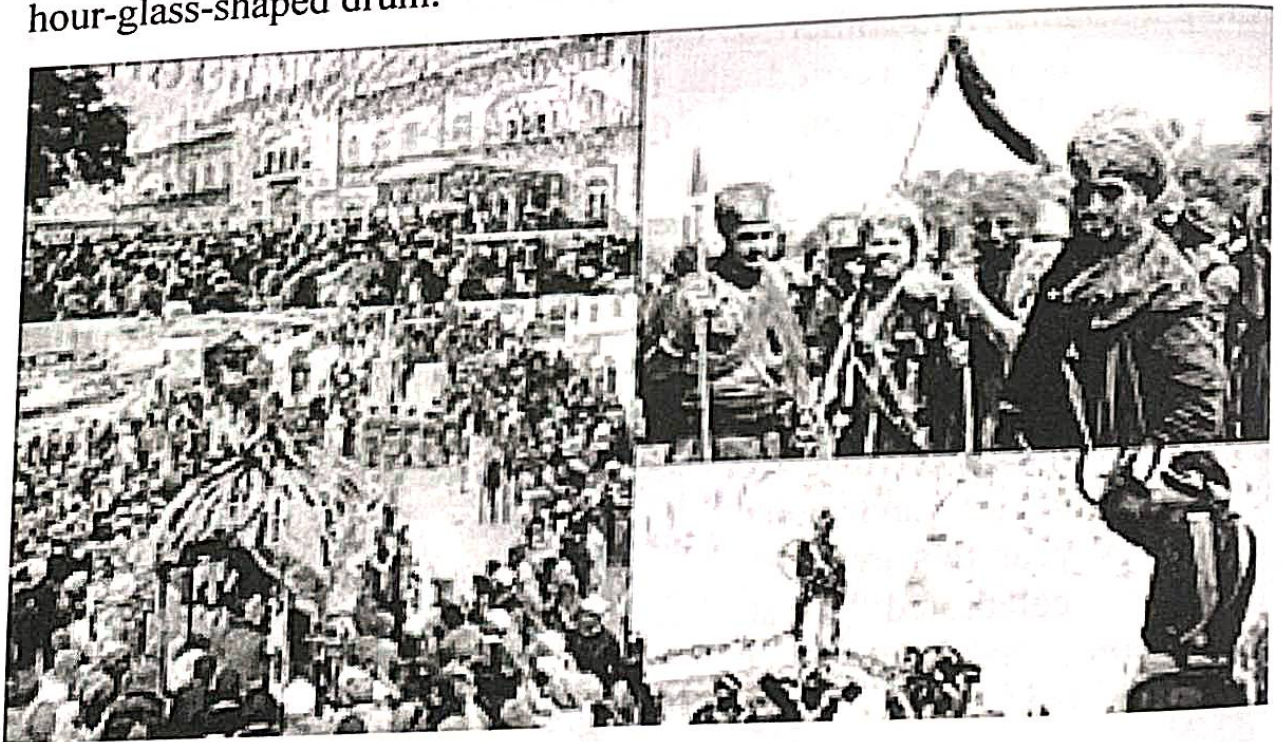


Fig. 4: *Hola Mohalla* in Anandpur Sahib

For people visiting Anandpur Sahib, langars house (voluntary community kitchens) are organised by the local people as a part of *seva* (community service). Raw materials like wheat flour, rice, vegetables, milk and sugar are provided by the villagers living nearby. Women volunteer to cook and others take part in cleaning utensil and other manual tasks that need to be carried out. Traditional cuisine is served to the pilgrims to eat while sitting in rows on the ground. It reminds the people of valour and defence preparedness, concepts dear to the tenth

guru, who was at that time battling the Mughal Empire. Presently the Indian Government accorded the *Hola Mohalla* festival , the status of a 'National Festival'.

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