

What does Holashtak or Holi mean?

The eight days of HOLASHTAK [Holi-ashtak], commencing March 12th and ending March 19th, 2011, commemorate Holikas' eight days. During Holashtak, we Hindus' do not perform any mangal works or mangal karyas. Furthermore, none of the sola or sixteen rites and rituals of Hinduism or Vedic Sanatana dharmic kriya's 'samnskaras' are conducted. If cremation is necessary, then peace mantra and peace oblations are done prior to and after the cremation. Holashtak is referred to as "inauspicious" by our Hindu scriptures and Vedas.

Holashtak stays from the Phagun Shukal Ashthami to Holika Dahan, that is, Purnima. In these days, the season start showing changes. Winters seem to say goodbye, with the arrival of spring. In addition, the coming of spring is indicated with the fragrance of flowers in the nature. It is believed that, Holashtak began when Lord Shiva got angry on Kaam dev and killed him. The assumption regarding Holashtak is believed only in some parts of India. The belief of these ideas are basically seen in Punjab. As the colors of Holi, its celebration style is also diverse. Holi is celebrated in different ways in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Orissa, Goa etc. In all the region of India which don't believe in Holashtak, don't stop doing any good work between the period of Holashtak to Holika Dahan. Similar to Holashtak, a tradition of Holi is celebrated in Bikaner of Rajasthan. Like Punjab, here also, Holi celebration is started eight days before Holi. The festival of Holi starts from Saptami Tithi of Phagun Mas which lasts up to Dulhandi. Holi of Rajasthan's Bikaner also contains enjoyment together with unique styles. This Holi also has its starting with praying of a pole, similar to that of Holashtak in which a stick is established at the crossroad. On the first day of Holashtak, place for Holika Dahan is chosen. On this day, the chosen place is cleaned with Holy water(Ganga Jal). At this place, the work of gathering of woods is done. This day dried wood is collected, especially the ones which on drying fall themselves from the tree are gathered, by going to different places and are brought to crossroad where stick is placed. On the full moon of holi, purnima when the nakshattara is UttaraPhallgun, we commemorate Holi with prayers and peace. The Purnima day is observed as Holika Dahan in many regions. For many communities, Holashtak starts with the decoration of the branch of a tree with colorful pieces of clothes. Everyone ties a piece and eventually this is buried underground.

From the day of Holashtak to the day of Holika Dahan, everyday, some small sticks or woods are added. In this way, on the day of Holika Dahan, the collection turns into a huge stack of woods. We observe festivity and celebration on the purnima, or the full moon.

And from this day, the colors of Holi start scattering in the atmosphere, symbolising the beginning of Holi. Children and adults, start playing a little bit of with colors on this day.

The day is considered ideal for performing Dhahan – alms giving. It is believed that when we give up our utmost desires during the holashtaka, and give up things we like the most, our desires are sacredly given up for good cause. Also, when we give charity during the eight days of the Holashtaka, we reach the Goddess Paravati's mercy. Especially we give donation to low life, down trodden and broken.

My understanding of why Holi is inauspicious is that it is a commemoration of the virtue of repentance of the demon "Holika" sister of the evil Hiranyakashyapa King. It is only upon Prahlad's pardon, that the Holika was released to heavens peacefully. Prahlad was the divine devotee of VishnuBHagavan and the son of evil Hiranyakashyapa.

We do not conduct homman during the eight days because we say that we get entrapped in the karmic crux of "Holika" the demon and loss our proliferations. In this context, we are supposed to cleanse our homes, steam clean our home, and make our homes new with ganga water, sweeping and perfumes.

In the Vedic era this festival was also termed as 'Som Yagya' or 'Navanesthi Yagya'. As a symbol of worship and thanks giving to the God Almighty the grains of new harvest were offered to the holy pyre and then it was distributed amongst people. These grains were termed as 'Hol' and hence the term 'Holikotsav' came into being'.

On Monday 20th March 2011, on the hasta nakshattara, we scatter grains in our gardens and we pray to MahaDeva Mrutyunjaya Hara Shiva and Surya Narayana because it is the day Sun enters Mesha Rashi and it is also dhuleti, the symbolic commencement of spring. Spring means hope, proliferation and joy! Grains bring all three and scattering of grains bring health, wealth and happiness to the three worlds.

I hope that this article was useful, Raju. Loving regards Tingooram.

Aum Tat Sat.