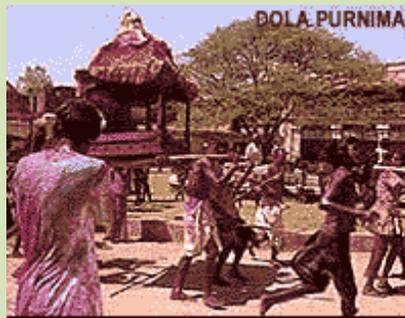


# DOLA PURNIMA (HOLI)

## **A Multihued Festival**

"Dola Purnima" or Holi is a popular festival in the coastal districts of Orissa. It is the full-moon day in the month of Falguna. Through the festival the spring is welcomed and enjoyed with mirth and merriment. This festival has been referred to in the puranical texts as "Basantotsaba" or the spring-festival.

Some scriptures testify that the "Madanotsaba", the festival held in honour of 'Madana' or the Cupid was later transformed as the "Dolatsaba" or swing-festival of Krishna. Therefore, Krishna is propitiated on this occasion as "Madanamohana". Description of the festival as Dolatsaba finds mention in a number of 'Puranas' and other Sanskrit texts. The 'Padma Purana' says, "One is expiated of all sins, who gets a vision of Krishna swaying in the swing."



## **Time For The Festivity**

Though the festival of Holi is observed for a day with mirth and merriment all over the country, the festival is celebrated for five days in Orissa. It starts from the tenth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Falguna known as "Fagu Dasami". Smearing the heads with 'Abira' (a violet coloured powder) the people take round the idols of Madanamohana in richly decorated palanquins known as "Veemana".

## **The Procession**

The procession is led by village drummers, pipers and the 'Sankirtana Mandalis'. The procession halts in front of each household and the deity is offered 'Bhog'. The daily rounds of the deity for the four days are called "Chachery". On the final day of the Purnima the celebration culminates in a swing-festival for the deities. The idols carried in Veemanas from a number of villages assemble in an important place where swings are fixed on a platform. They are made to swing to the accompaniment of devotional music sung in chorus.

In olden days the beginning of the New Year was calculated from the spring-season. After the swinging festival of the deities, the 'Ganaka' or 'Jyothisha' (astronomer-cum-fortune teller) reads out the new Oriya almanac and narrates the important events that are to take place during the year. For this reason, some are of opinion that this festival is purely to celebrate the New Year.

## **The Legend**

On the fourteenth day of the fortnight there is a function in which a straw-hut is set to fire amidst much amusement and excitement. This is known as "Holipoda" (burning of Holi). The legend about it is that, 'Holika' was the most beautiful sister of 'Hiranyakashyapu', the demon-king. As an ardent devotee of Shiva she got the boon that she would never die of drowning or burning.

In spite of all heinous attempts Hiranyakashyapu couldn't kill his son 'Prahlada', the devotee of Vishnu. Then he planned to burn him to ashes. As Holika would never get burnt she was asked to walk into the blazing fire with the child in her arms. Surprisingly the child came out unharmed but Holika was burnt to death. Enraged at this Hiranya asked Shiva about the inefficacy of his boon. Then Shiva replied, "I granted her the boon to protect herself, not to kill anybody."

As a remnant of this, the Holipoda is celebrated and the next day is the festival of colours 'Holi', in which people smear colour powders on each other's face and head and squirt coloured waters. There is much fun and merriment in the festival.

## **Mendhapodi**

In some places the burning of the straw hut is known as "Mendhapodi" or the burning of a ram. A legend attached to it says that a demon known as 'Mesha' was causing terror in the Heaven and Earth, Gods as well as human beings prayed Krishna to rescue them from his atrocities. Krishna killed and burnt him to ashes. It is, therefore, reminiscent of this event that a hut is burnt which represents the abode of the demon.

## **Holi Fairs**

In many places of the State big fairs are arranged where idols of the deity are assembled. These fairs are called "Melana". The Veemanas of the surrounding villages are placed in a row for public view. Keen competition is observed in the decoration of the Veemanas. When all the expected Veemanas reach the place, display of fire-works takes place and this is watched by thousands of an enthusiastic crowd.

In the fairs agricultural implements, commodities, household articles and furniture are bought and sold. Such Melanas or fairs continue till the month of Chaitra in different places of the district of Cuttack, Puri and Ganjam.