



# Devotional Musical Holi: An Exploration Of The Spiritual And Cultural Dimensions Of Braj.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Holi is a very important festival of the whole of India. It is celebrated as a very big festival for forty days in Braj Mandal. This forty-day Holi starts from Vasant Panchami, after that Phalera Dooj, Barsana ki Holi, Laddu Maar Holi, Lathmar Holi, Nandgaon ki Holi, Rang Bharni Ekadashi, Holika Dahan, Dolot sav (Dhulendi), Dauji ki Holi and this Hora festival of Braj continues till Holi Purnima. With the onset of Dhandra on Vasant Panchami, the festival of Holi also begins in the temples here. Holi is celebrated by different sects of Braj in different temples here according to different seva methods. Samaj-Gayan goes on continuously every day in the temples. Holi Dhamar are sung with the accompaniment of many types of instruments. Meanwhile, the visitors who come to the temple cannot stop themselves from dancing, lost in this devotional music. Samaj Gayan is also organized on a very large scale in Barsana Holi, in which many Rasiya are sung along with Holi Dhamar. People from all over the country and abroad come to see these amazing scenes. Holi of Braj is completely related to Radha Krishna and the verses and songs of Holi are also related to Radha Krishna. This devotional Holi of Braj has a deep connection with music. Braj Holi is incomplete without Samaj Gayan, the sweet sound of various instruments and the dance of Gop-Gopis.

**key words-**Braj, Holi, Music, Dandha, Samaj Gayan, Dhamar, Huranga, Rasiya.

## **Introduction:**

The festival of Holi is celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm in every city, village, locality and street of India, but the Holi of Braj has an important place in the whole world. The Holi of Braj is famous not only in India but all over the world. The splendour of Holi can be seen in the temples of Braj a month in advance. These lines related to the Holi of Braj seem absolutely correct-

**Kaiso Ye Des Nigora**

**Jagat Mai Horii Yaa Braj Horaa**

**Ek buudhe kaa log lugaa**

**Ek ten ek thithoraa**

That is, Holi is celebrated all over India but in Braj, Hora i.e. Holi is celebrated in a grand and divine form. Music has a very high place in Braj. Music is an integral part of the religious and cultural life of people here. Holi and music have an unbreakable relationship with each other in Braj. Holi cannot be imagined without music here. Here, all three forms of music, i.e. singing, playing and dancing, are fully visible on Holi. Samaj singing is very important here, along with the accompaniment of instruments is also done. The main instruments of Holi here are Bamba, Dhap, Manjira etc. The Bamba instrument is mainly played on the occasion of Holi. The entire area of Braj, whether it is Mathura, Barsana, Nandgaon or Vrindavan, can hear songs and music everywhere on Holi.

“Music is that art which evokes joy in the developed heart. It is this music which has been present in the temples of Braj since ancient times. Colours help in expressing the emotions of the mind and music is the means of living and the example of the coordination of these two is the unique festival of Holi. Holi of Braj has an important place in the entire world. Foreigners also come to Braj to celebrate this festival and see its wonderful beauty.

## Mythological beliefs and importance of Holi festival

In **Bhavishyottar Purana**, it is mentioned that to calm the nuisance caused by a demoness named Budha, at the end of winter, during the Pradosh period of the full moon of the month of Phalgun, all people should fearlessly laugh and play, wear colourful clothes, apply sandalwood, Gulaal and Abeer and after eating paan, everyone should sprinkle colours on each other from water guns, abuse each other and joke around and women should dance. Then everyone should create a ruckus freely and fearlessly. By speaking in this manner, the fear of that demoness is dispelled and all sins are destroyed.

**“Holike” Cha” Namastubhyandundaa TejoVimardinii  
Sarvopadray shaantaparth grhaanaardhy namaste...”**

Before burning Holika, through the above verse, a prayer is offered to the name of the demon named Dhundha and to appease all her mischiefs. Holi is a very ancient mythological festival. Mention of this festival can be seen in various Puranas and texts. In Sanskrit literature, “Kamasutra” written by “Vatsayayan” and “Ratnavali” written by Harsha are such texts in which a very lively description of Holi festival can be seen. Apart from “Kamasutra” and “Ratnavali”, there is also evidence of Holi being celebrated in “Malti Madhava” written by Bhavabhuti, a court poet of description of glory. From the mentions of these famous texts of Sanskrit, it is known that from the beginning of Vikram Samvat to the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Holi is generally celebrated in this way in North India.

Holi festival is mentioned in many texts of Sanskrit and Prakrit languages. On the basis of which it can be said with certainty that Holi is a very ancient festival. Holi has been a religious festival since ancient times. In this regard, Dr. Hazari prasad Dwivedi has written something like this “In the beginning in ancient times, this festival was celebrated as a religious Yagya. Not only in ancient times but even in the present times, some religious activities are prevalent in the process of burning Holika. New crops are also sacrificed in Holika so that the crops are good throughout the year. Regarding this tradition, Dr. Prabhu Dayal Mittal has also written something like this, “When the new crop of wheat and barley was ready in the fields, everyone used to complete that Yagya by offering the first sacrifice of “Nawal”. This type of Yagya is called “Yavagrahan” or Navannosti.”

Holi is a festival which is celebrated with great joy not only by Hindus and Muslims but also by every community and person of the country. This fact is also confirmed in the book ‘Mathura ka Itihaas’ – “During the reign of the Mughal emperor, Holi was celebrated with great pomp and show. The emperor himself used to participate in it along with his queens.”

### Beginning of forty-day Holi

“In the temple of Pushti Marg sect Dwarkadhish, Holi’s Rasiya is sung during the Rajbhog Darshan. The head of the temple feeds Holi to Dwarkadhish with Abir, gulal and sandalwood and this tradition continues for forty days. Samaj singing starts in the Ladli temple of Barsana and Nand Baba temple of Nandgaon.””

“Holi of Braj has a different specialty. On Holi, people from every section of society sing songs, folk songs, Rasiya, Chanchar Lavni, Khayal, Chaubola, Taan, Sapri Nautanki, Bahratveel, Rasiya from villages to cities, along with this, they play Dhap, Dhol, Mridang, Chang, Dholak, Nagada, Been, Sitar, Pakhavaj, Turai, etc. And dance and music programs are organized in the villages. In Braj, the Holi of different villages is famous and is called “Huranga”.”

### Huranga

“The fairs of some places of Braj called Huranga are very famous. Some of them are Huranga of Anyaur Jatipura, Huranga of Baldev (Dauji), Huranga of Madhu-van, Huranga of Jav Bathain, Huranga of Phalen village.””

In Anyaur village, both men and women sing folk songs and dance. In Dauji’s Huranga, there is Samaj Gayan in the temple in the morning, in which Holi related Kirtans are presented. Folk singers sing folk songs and Rasiya with musical instruments.

Charkula dance is performed at night in Huranga of Madhuvan, in which women dance by keeping thousands of Diya's decorated with pitchers on their heads and men support them by playing khadtal, cymbals, manjiras etc. Folk songs are sung by men, whose blessings are called-

**Jug Jug Jiyo Gopi nachan Haarii  
Naachan Haarii Ke dvai Hai Huujo**

Huranga of Jav Bathain is especially known for its folk music. Men and women here sing ancient folk songs, Holi and Phaags in a loud voice together in one rhythm and beat. In this traditional folk festival of Braj, all kinds of modern and ancient folk songs, Rasiya and Holi songs are sung. Some of the Rasiya sung during this time are as follows-

**“Machii Horii re machii Hori Rajaa vali Ke davaaraa machii I  
“Ek or Khelen Kunvar Kanhaiyya ijii lang Raadhaa Gorii..”  
Aaj Biraj men Horii re rasiyaa Hori re rasiyaa barajori re Rasiya’**

### **Phulera Dooj**

The second day of Falgun Shukla Paksha is known as Phulera Dooj. On this day, Shri Krishna performed Basanti Maharas with Raseshwari Radha among the gopis. This incident is also mentioned in Shrimad Bhagwat. As a symbol of this, this festival is celebrated in the temples of Braj. On this day, Shriji ties a sari around his waist and gears up to play Holi with his friends and Dhamar singing especially starts in the society. Holi is not only played or sung in Braj, but its traditions of literary creation have given it international recognition. ‘Gaari Gayan’ during Holi is a specialty of this tradition.

### **Barsana Holi**

Holi of Barsana is celebrated on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Falgun Shukla. Samaj Gayan takes place in the temple of Barsana in which Holi songs are sung and played. The Panda of Nandgaon dances there singing Holi songs and on the second day, a group of Huriya's from Nandgaon, dressed up as Krishna and his friends, singing and playing music, reach the temple of Shreeji in Barsana to play Holi with Radha's friends. The group of Huriya's sings Rasiya while addressing the Gopis of Barsana in the symbolic information of Shri Krishna's arrival there.

**Bhar Bhar Jhori Gulal, Udavat Kare Makhan Kare Rasiya**

### **Laddumar Holi**

Jag Hori Braj Hora begins with the Laddu mar Holi of Barsana. On the occasion of this Laddumar Holi, many community singers sit in different groups in the Radha Rani temple of Barsana and sing Holi songs. On this occasion, men wear women's clothes and dance during community singing and also play instruments like Daf, Mridang, Jhanj, Majira, Upang etc.

### **Lathmar Holi**

On the 9<sup>th</sup> day, Lathmar Holi is celebrated in Barsana in a very charming manner with great joy and frolic. First, rang ki Holi and Samaj Gayan are organized in Radha Rani Ji's temple and after that, Lathmar Holi is celebrated in Rangoli Gali between men and women of the Brahmin community of Nandgaon, Barsana. "The Holi of Braj is especially famous in the country and abroad. The Lathmar Holi of Barsana and Nandgaon is played on the day of Falgun Shukla Navami between the Huriya's of Nandgaon and the Gopika's of Barsana.



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“The next day of the Lathmar Holi of Barsana, i.e. on Falgun Shukla Dashami, a similar Lathmar Holi is played in Nandgaon. In this Lathmar Holi, there are Huri yare. The Gunsais of Barsana and the Gopika's of Nandgaon attack them with sticks.”

The songs sung before darshan in the temple are Hori Ke Rasiya, folk songs and Chanchar etc. By all the visitors and the padas sung during darshan in the temples are Damaras and Padas sung in all the ragas. All these padas are essayed in different talas, ancient pada Valis are sung in all the temples of Braj. Holi Rasiya songs are sung with daf, dhol, upag, jhanjh, Manjira, dhol, nagada, Tarai along with various padas and

dharmas. On the occasion of Holi, Charkula, the very famous folk dance of Braj can also be seen at many places.

Holi in Vrindavan begins from Phalgun Shukla Ekadashi, i.e. Rang Bharni Ekadashi. The festival of colours of Holi begins in Shri Banke Bihari Temple from the evening of Ekadashi. The singing of Holi Dhamar verses and Rasis is a great hit these days. On the same day, in the evening, wearing white clothes, sitting on a silver throne in Jagmohan, Sri Banke Bihari Ji Maharaj plays Holi with the devotees with a silver pichakaree. On this occasion, verses of Basant Raga are sung along with glimpses of colours and gulal. Abeer gulaal are flying like this, I have lost my beloved Samaru.

On this day, various cultural programs are organized at the birthplace of Lord Krishna, whose presentations keep happening one after the other throughout the day. On this occasion, attractive presentations of programs like Holi of flowers and Lathmar Holi and Charkula and Takht dance are done by the artists.

“In Phalen village, on the day of Holika Dahan on Falgun Shukla 15, Prahlad fair is organized near Prahlad-Kund. Here a Holi of two-two and a half feet height is made in a circle of 20-25 feet. When it is completely lit up and high flames start coming out of it, then it is burnt. When the fire starts burning, a priest comes out of the burning Holi with bare feet. Thousands of people from India and abroad reach there to see this thrilling scene. This Holi is organized in memory of the mythological story of how on Hiranyakashipu’s orders his sister Holika tried to kill Prahlad by burning him, but Prahlad survived. Holi festival is celebrated on Falgun Shukla Purnima. After burning Holika, there is a tradition of singing, playing and dancing in the night.

#### “Geet Vadyausthaan Nrityaah Raatriah Sa Niyyate janaih.

On the second day of Holika Dahan, in the evening, the Lord is seated in a swing and worshipped and swung and then after performing Aarti, he is seated at his original place. This festival is known as Dolotsav or Dhulandi which is celebrated on Chaitra Vadi Pratipada. There is a popular story regarding Holi or Dola Yatra that Lord Vishnu celebrated Holikotsav after killing Holika or Shankh Churna. The festival of Holika Dahan is considered a symbol of peace and remembrance in some places.

#### Dauji’s Holi

Dauji’s Holi begins from Magh Shukla Basant Panchami in the temple of Shri Dauji of Braj and continues till Chaitra Krishna Panchami. Along with the planting of the danda, the sound waves of the spring season start resonating.

#### “Khelen Basant Balbhadradev, Leela Anant Koi Lahai Na Bhed!!

The singing of such verses begins with traditional instruments like cymbals, drums, harmonium, mridanga etc. In the afternoon gathering, “Maito Jaipai Vasant Dharongi, Jin Vare Son Vahiya Gahi.” Composed in ragas like Sarang Rathi is sung. As soon as the month of Phalgun arrives, on the full moon day, again carrying on the tradition of Hori Dade, the singing of Holi ragas like Kaafi Dhamar begins.

In the month of Falgun, there are four traditional Samaj’s in the temples of Braj. Shringar Aarti, Rajbhog Aarti and Ratri Samaj have special importance. In which different pada Valis are sung every day in different ragas, along with which musical instruments like cymbals, if, mridang and nagada and harmonium etc. Are also played. The tradition of Dauji’s Samaj singing is unique in the whole of Braj.

The festival reaches its peak from the day of Holi Purnima. On the day of Purnima, there is a lot of Shobha here. The Yatra starts, which completes the entire Parikrama route and reaches Holi. On the way, Aari Sakhi has come out to play Phaag in Braj, the sound of Phaag is heard.

On the day of Prati pada, the daily rituals of Holi and Seva Shringar are performed and in Maham Agha, Maharas is organized. Along with this, there is an important presentation of traditional musical instruments and drums. On the day of Chaitra Vadi Dwitiya, the world famous Huranga takes place. In which colours are prepared from Tesu flowers. Samaj Gayan takes place in the temple, then with the permission of Thakurji, the festival starts and colours are played with for 3 hours and after the completion of Huranga, Thakurji is circumambulated and songs are sung-

#### Haarii re Gori ghar chalii, ovr Jeet Chale Nandalal.

‘At the same time the Gopis too, while teasing the cowherds, depart in such a manner that ‘the loser Lal went home, the winner went to Banjar’. In the afternoon of Panchami Tithi, at the time of Rajbhog, community singing takes place and Thakurji is seated in the palanquin. The verse “Jaau Jeevaisau Khele Phag Hari Sang Jhumri Kheliye” is sung. In the evening, the groups of devotees of Dauji in the temple courtyard create a very beautiful gathering on the rhythm of many traditional instruments like bamb, daf, cymbals, khadtals. In this way, the Holi festival of Dauji and the 40-day festival held in Braj conclude

#### Holi in the temples of different sects of Braj

Holi is celebrated with great fanfare in the temples of many sects of Braj by serving Thakurji with songs and music. In the temples of the Pushti Marg sect, Holi songs and Damaras start from Basant Panchami. Every

temple reverberates with Holi songs. In the Radha Krishna temple of Vrindavan, Samaj Gaan takes place from 7-8 pm and before that Bhajans, Kirtans and folk songs are sung. Holi is celebrated with great enthusiasm in the temples of the Vallabh sect for the entire month. "In the Vallabh sect temples of Mathura, Holi darshan starts even before that. According to the service method of the Ballan sect, the entire month of Falgun is a month of Holi celebrations. There are daily tableaux, kirtans sing Dhamar and Holi Rasiya are sung with dhup taal and manjiras.""

In the temples of the Haridas sect, singing is done in front of the statue of Swami Haridas Ji. Here, Samaj Gayan takes place from 4 pm to 7 pm. This sect has its own style and tradition of singing the padas. The padas are very long which are sung for hours with the refrain of Eri Ho Ae Ho Eri. The Holi padas sung during Holi with harmonium, pakhavaj, mridang and Jhada and manjiras, Swami Haridas Ji's Dhrupad and Dhamar are sung as Kirtan on the pada of Hit Harivansh Ji and there is a tradition of singing old Holi padas from Rang Bhari Ekadashi to Dol. Colour gulal is also thrown in front of Swami Ji from Rang Bhari Ekadashi itself. Raga Rang do not have much importance in Nimbarka sect. Here, there is no celebration of colours on the occasion of Holi but Thakurji is definitely worshipped. If any outsider organises a Samaj by the local saints, then Samaj Gayan takes place here and Holi songs are sung in it.

In the Radha Ballam sect, Radha ji is considered the main singer and not Krishna ji. In the temples of this sect, various festivals and games are organized in the morning and colours are showered. Holi dhamars are sung in different ragas in the temples both in the morning and evening. The singing of each of these long dhamars lasts for 3 to 4 hours. In which the refrain of Eri ha ha is used many times in the middle and end of every line. In Ramanuja sect, unlike other sects, there is no organization of Rang and Samaj. As a part of Holi celebration, a Rath Mela is organized in their temples on the day of Chaitra Shukla Navami. People come from far and wide to see this grand fair and it continues for four days. Holi songs and kirtans are organized in the chariot during the darshan of Thakurji. Saints and Mahatmas spray water from the chariot itself and this fair is held in Rang ji temple on the occasion of Holi.

### Conclusion

Thus, this 40-day festival of Braj is celebrated with great enthusiasm and joy in every house, street, locality as well as in the temples of Braj. Certainly, this Holi of Braj is completely different from the Holi celebrated in any corner of the world. The love and exclusive devotion of the people here towards Radha Krishna gives a different dimension to the Holi here and makes it different. In the Holi of Braj, along with love and devotion, music is also inextricably linked. Due to which Holi here becomes even more interesting.

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