



The Festival of Holi (Book)

Holi was originally a spring festival of fertility and harvest. Now it also marks some Hindu legends, which provide some of the ingredients for the celebrations. Holi is an ancient festival which is referred to in the 7th century Sanskrit drama, Ratnavali.

The Legend of Prahalad and Holika - This is the main Holi legend. Holika was a female demon, and the sister of Hiranyakashyap, the demon king. Hiranyakashyap considered himself ruler of the Universe, and higher than all the gods. Prahalad was the king's son. His father hated him because Prahalad was a faithful devotee of the god Vishnu. One day the king asked him "Who is the greatest, God or I?" "God is," said the son, "you are only a king." The king was furious and decided to murder his son.

But the king's attempts at murder didn't work too well. Prahalad survived being thrown over a cliff, being trampled by elephants, bitten by snakes, and attacked by soldiers. So the king asked his sister, Holika, to kill the boy. Holika seized Prahalad and sat in the middle of a fire with the boy on her lap. Holika had been given a magic power by the gods that made her immune to fire, so she thought this was a pretty good plan, and Prahalad would burn to death while she remained cool. But it's never wise to take gods' gifts for granted! Because Holika was using her gift to do something evil, her power vanished and she was burned to ashes. Prahalad stayed true to his God, Vishnu, and sat praying in the lap of his demon aunt. Vishnu protected him, and Prahalad survived.

Shortly afterwards, Vishnu killed King Hiranyakashyap and Prahalad ruled as a wise king in his father's place.

Moral - The moral of the story is that good always wins over evil, and those who seek to torment the faithful will be destroyed. To celebrate the story, large bonfires are burned during Holi. In many parts of India, a dummy of Holika is burned on the fire.

