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TODAY'S HARIYALI TEEJ IS A MAJOR FESTIVAL

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Today, large parts of northern and western India will observe Haryali Teej (Green Tritiya) which is the third day of the bright half of the month of Shraavana.

This mid-monsoon festival that celebrates green, the symbol of fertility and regeneration, is called by different names. It is Singhara Teej in Rajasthan, Teeyan in Punjab and also as Sawan Teej, Choti Teej or Madhusrava Teej by others. Though regional celebrations may differ slightly, the spirit of the festival remains similar. Some states like Haryana have even declared Hariyali Teej an official or restricted holiday.

The festival is dedicated to Goddess Parvati and her union with Lord Shiva — the day that Shiva accepted Parvati as his wife — which is why Parvati is called 'Teej Mata.' Its significance is similar to Karwa Chauth for married Hindu women of India's northwest.

The Teej tradition is for married women to receive gifts like traditional clothing, bangles, henna, sindoor, and sweets from their in-laws. Women come out in their resplendent best — in green lehengas or saris, as these items symbolise marriage and are, hence, considered auspicious. Many believe that if a woman wears all the 16 mandated adornments, this would protect her husband from evil.

Women adorn their hands and feet with henna and this is an important part of the celebration. In fact, the depth of affection from husbands is believed to be reflected in the darkness of the Mehendi, as the deeper colour of mehendi signifies greater love. In some regions, women inscribe their beloved's or husband's names using henna.

If their parent's house is nearby or not too time-taking, women visit their parental home to celebrate Hariyali Teej — for which delicious food items are prepared. Everyone celebrates the daughter's home-coming with a lot of festivities. It reminds Bengalis of the joy with which they welcome Durga as the daughter who visits her parents' home for four days during the autumnal pujas.

In Rajasthan, the images of Goddess Parvati or Teej Mata are taken out on the streets. Some worship Shiva along with Parvati — to the accompaniment of devotional songs. Women perform Gidda in Punjab while in Chandigarh, cultural events and plays are presented by students. Haryana bursts out in colours on this day.

During Hariyali Teej, women observe rigorous 'Nirjala Vrats' by abstaining from food and water all day. This fast is kept both by married and unmarried women, and it ends with the sighting and worship of the moon — when the fast is broken.

The tradition of Vat Vriksha is important in 'Shravani teej' and swings are hung from the branches of Banyan trees. Women spend the day swinging, dancing, and singing with others, enjoying full liberty for merrymaking. So much like the Rajo festival for the women of Odisha which occurs in the previous month of Aashar. Banyan is a sacred tree in Hindu mythology, symbolising knowledge, and worshipping it on Hariyali Teej is considered auspicious. It is also a symbol of fertility and growth.

Teej is also similar to other swing festivals like Raja (pronounced Raw-Jo) in Odisha which is celebrated on the first day of the preceding month, ie, Ashadh — when monsoons hit Odisha, long before rains reach western India. It is also similar to the Jhulan Jatra of Rajasthan and Vrindavan, there are elaborate celebrations in Krishna Mandirs — just a few days later. Basically, Teej and Jhulan celebrate the monsoons, the movement or swing of the earth and the seasons and, as festivals of women, there are odes to fertility and abundance.