

Vaisakhi

A celebration for new beginnings.

For many Hindus, April 13th and 14th marks the celebration of *Vaisakhi* (va-SAH-kee) or *Baisakhi*. This festival is held almost every year on the same day and is known as the solar new year for some Hindu communities. This is not universal for all Hindus, as some consider *Diwali*, *Ugadi*, and *Gudi Padwa* as the start of the new year, leading to several different origins as to the significance of why Vaisakhi is celebrated.

The first day of *Vaisakhi* recognizes the traditional solar new year for many and is celebrated in diverse ways to mark the spring harvest and the sacredness of rivers in Hindu culture. Some believe that *Vaisakhi* originated several thousand years ago as Goddess Ganga came to Earth to help rid humanity of its sins and many Hindus will take pilgrimages to seek a blessing by bathing in the sacred Ganga river. The sacredness of rivers in Hindu communities as well as the honoring of the past year crops make *Vaisakhi* a long established ancient harvest festival to celebrate the agricultural year and to pray for an abundant crop for the next season. All throughout India, *Vaisakhi* has various regional names and significant celebrations to honor the rich traditions of this holiday.

Uttrakhand

The *Bikhoti* Festival rings in the new year and observers will take dips in the holy river and beat stones that represent demons with sticks to help usher out any negative energy while welcoming new blessings.

Kerala

Residents of Kerala celebrate *Vishu* by spending time with family and preparing auspicious prayer offerings such as golden flowers, rice, and money or silver to Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna. After prayer services, either at home or at the temple, people of all ages enjoy fireworks and sparklers, wear new clothes and *sadya* (a special meal made with a mix of sour, sweet, salty and bitter food items) is served.

Assam

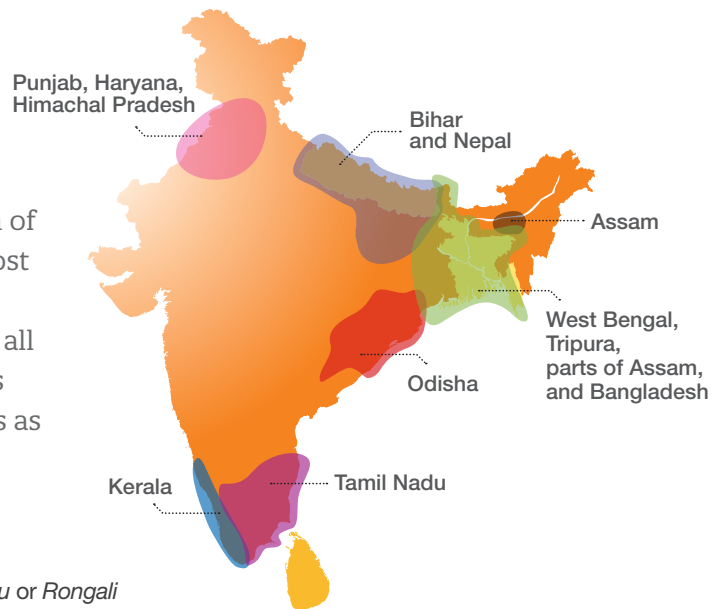
Referred to as *Bohag Bihu* or *Rongali Bihu*, celebrations lasting seven days mark the beginning of the Assamese New Year, which usually takes place during the second week of April. Each day holds a particular significance in honoring the harvest crops and tends to be a unifying celebration for all the different communities in Assam regardless of background or religious affiliation. Assamese celebrate with feasts, music and dancing and hang brass, copper or silver pots on poles in front of their house.

Odisha

Referred to as *Maha Vishuva Sankranti* or *Pana Sankranti*, this is the Odia new year in Odisha and celebrated on April 14th every year. It is customary to visit Shiva, Hanuman, or Shakti/Devi temples as some believe this is the day that Lord Hanuman was born. Festivities include walking over hot coals (symbolizing liberation from physical pain), serving the speciality drink *Pana* (a mixture of mango, yogurt, coconut and other ingredients), and classical and folk dancing performances. Many homes will hang *Neem* or *Tulsi* branches at the front of their home as they are said to have health benefits.

West Bengal, Tripura, parts of Assam, and Bangladesh

The new year is celebrated as *Pahela Baishakh* on April 14th by people of Bengali heritage, regardless of religious faith. Singing, fairs, parades and family time are ways that Bengalis celebrate as well as wearing new



clothes, visiting temples, and starting the new fiscal year for accounting and locally owned businesses. Rangolis will be drawn and decorated at the entrances of homes and temples.

Tamil Nadu

Puthandu, also known as *Puthuvarusham* or Tamil New Year, is the first day of the month on the Tamil calendar. Observations on this day include cleaning up homes and visits to the temple or family prayers with fruits, flowers and auspicious items. People wear new clothes and families get together and enjoy a celebratory meal.

Bihar and Nepal

In the Mithal region of Bihar and Nepal, the new year is celebrated as *Jurshita*. It is traditional to use lotus leaves to serve *sattu* (a powdered meal derived from grains of red gram and other ingredients) to family members.

Vaisakhi & the Sikh Community

In addition to the many Hindus that celebrate Vaisakhi, the Sikh community hold Vaisakhi in high regard as it commemorates the establishment of the Khalsa (collective family of all initiated Sikhs) in 1699. Vaisakhi is considered the traditional Sikh new year and is celebrated by Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab and other neighboring states.



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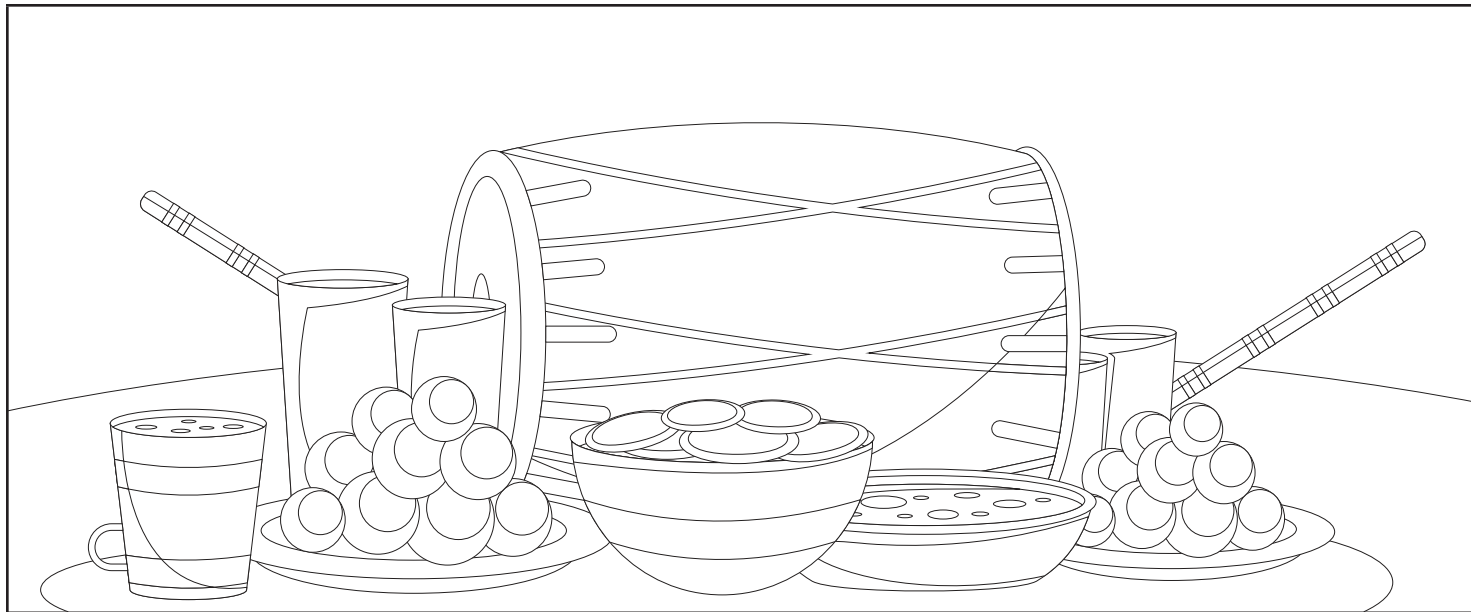
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Vaisakhi

ART ACTIVITY

Share your coloring activities with us on Instagram! Just use the hashtag **#vaisakhiwithhaf** in your post for a chance to be featured on our Instagram account: **@hinduamerican**.

COLOR THE SCENE



FREE DRAW!

Use your imagination and show us how you celebrate *Vaisakhi*!



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