

## TEEJ

### A Time for Love & Celebration



In celebrating divine love, the festival of Teej also strengthens marital bonds & the joy of devotion & togetherness. Heralding the rainy season, the festival conspires with nature to offer devotees fecundity & bliss. Marking the advent of monsoon, the Teej, Rajasthan's premier festival, falls in the month of Shravan.

The festival originated from a Hindu legend. Goddess Parvati, it is said, went through severe penance & went through 107 births in order to get Lord Shiva as her husband. It was only in the 108<sup>TH</sup> Birth that Lord Shiva realized her devotion & accepted her as his wife. She declared that moment as exceptionally auspicious for womenfolk & said that whosoever invokes her on this day would be blessed with a long & happy married life. And so, in keeping with the essential spirit of the festival, many traditions & rituals have accordingly evolved. On this day, it is usual to see bejeweled girls & women in lively reds, greens & yellows, sitting on decorated swings that are elaborately decorated with fabric & flowers, singing traditional songs that celebrate the marriage of Shiva & Parvathi.

The festival blesses girls with a happy future while strengthening feelings of love & affection between married couples. Ghewar, a special sweet delicacy is prepared in homes, Grandmothers, Mothers, Sisters & Daughters all sit together to relish a lavish feast as they are about to begin their rigorous fast at midnight. Married women wear red & apply Mehndi [Henna] on their hands & feet. Often they hide the names of their husband in the complex Mehndi designs & their husbands are expected to spot them. When they find their names they give gifts to their wives. During this time, married women return to their parent's homes to receive Teej Gifts.

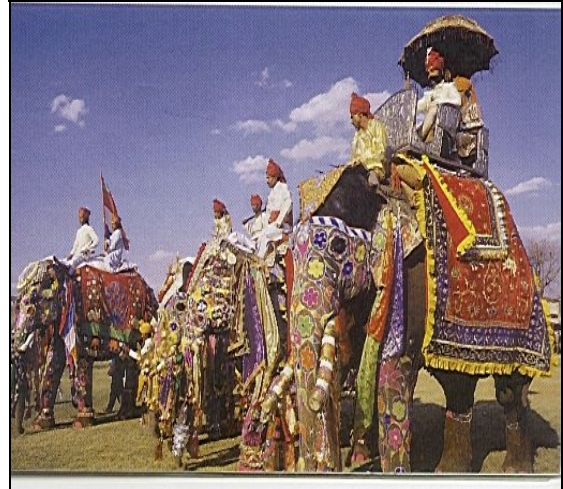


**Kajali Teej Idol at Bundi's Kajali Teej**



**Teej Mata being carries in a palanquin, Jaipur**

A significant part of the Teej Festival is Teej Puja for which scores of women assemble in temples & gardens. Flowers, sweets & coins constitute the main ingredients of the puja. The idol of Paravti is placed in the center of a semi circle & a single woman or all the women together narrate the Teej Katha, a story that commemorates the union of Shiva & Parvati. After the completion of the puja, women offer holy flowers & fruits and pay homage to the Goddess. In some areas, the women bathe with red mud found on the roots of the Datiwan bush. This ritual bath represents an act of purification & symbolizes the absolution of all their sins. In some regions, the women worship the sacred Nvagrotha Tree or Vata Vriksha as its hanging branches symbolize reflected knowledge, according to a popular belief. The festivities end with the exchange of gifts. Husbands visit their in-laws house & fetch their wives, who leave their parent's home like Parvati.



**Decorated Elephants participate in the Teej Procession**

Saawan Mela, a huge fair, is organized on this occasion. A number of shops selling crafts, handicrafts & tasty eatables spring up all over. Song, dance, drama & all sorts of entertainment bring the place alive. The whole city transforms into a hub of entertainment.

The dates of Teej are decided according to the presumed arrival of the monsoons & so keep changing every year. Though there are three different variations of the festival, their basic essence remains the same.



The first is Hariyali Teej [also called Teejen] that falls on the 3<sup>RD</sup> day of the new moon in the Shravan month. Hariyali means 'Green Grass'. This festival celebrated the abundance of greenery. During this time, women dress in green, wear green bangles & worship the Moon by offering milk, curd & flowers. Hariyali Teej is celebrated with lot of pomp & enthusiasm in Jaipur.



**Women enjoying Teej Festivities**

A day before Hariyali Teej, the newly wed brides celebrate Sindhara. This is a very special occasion. At this time, the mother-in-law presents a customary gift package called Shrinjhara [or Sindhare] to her daughter-in-law. This package consists of Ghewar [sweet], a Lehari [tie & dye] outfit, Mehndi [henna] & vibrant Lac bangles.

The second package, Baya, is presented to her by her mother. This is meant exclusively for fasting women because it contains dry fruits, new clothes, bangles & jewelry. She receives this on the festival day. Girls whose marriages have been arranged receive gifts from their future husband's parents.

Jaipur has a long tradition of holding a vibrant Hariyali Teej pageant for the past many centuries. The whole city of Jaipur gets soaked in the colours of Teej, glows in colourful lights & reverberates with sounds of bhakti & devotion. The Teej idol is taken out from the holy place, many days in advance. Then it is freshly painted in bright colours & ornamented with fine jewellery.



**Folk Musicians & Dancers performing in Teej Festival**

A grand procession locally known as Teej Maata ki Sawaari is taken out. The Tripola Gate opens only twice in a year in Jaipur – once for the Teej Sawaari & on another occasion for the Gangaur procession. Thousand join the Teej Sawaari which is carried out on two consecutive days. The first day's procession is known as Bari Teej ki Sawaari & the second day's procession is known as Choti Teej ki Sawaari. The Teej Sawaari starts in late afternoon & follows the same route on both days. It passes by important landmarks like the Jaipur City Palace, Choti Chaupar & Gangauri bazaar & finally reaches Talkatora Stadium at around 7 PM; after covering a distance of about 2 Km. Eight men dressed in red carry the idol in a palanquin commonly known as Teej Maata Paalki or Takht – E – Rawan. The Palanquin is held up by wooden bars extended on both sides.

Prayers are recited & offerings of Fruits, Milk, Chapatti, Ghewar & pure Jal [pure water] are made to the idol and the Teej Prasad [holy food] is distributed to crowds of devotees. Dancers perform the Gair Dance, to the strains of traditional music as the procession moves along. Antique gild palanquins, bullock carts, pulling cannons, chariots, & elephants, camels & horses accompany the procession.



**Animals Rally in Teej Festival**

According to local legends, the Zanani Deodhi in City Palace is Teej Maata's home & Talkatora Stadium is her in-laws place. Just as newly – married girls go to their in-laws house so also, the Teej Maata moves from her parent's home to her in-laws house & devotees come in large numbers to attend this procession.

All along the way, devotees offer precious ornaments to Teej Maata & by the time her Palanquin reaches its destination, it is totally covered with gold & silver ornaments & precious jewellery, sometimes weighing upto 20 Kgs.

The second Teej is Kajri Teej or Kajali Teej which is observed on the third day after Shravan Purnima. Songs sung on the festival day welcome the monsoons & praise the love of Krishna & Radha. The women then perform Puja of the Neem Tree.

Interestingly, Bundi's Kajali Teej has got its name because it is celebrated on the third day after the full moon in the Krishna Paksha. It is one of those rare Hindu Festivals, which falls during the phase of the waning moon, & there is an interesting legend behind it. When Thakur Balwant Singh of Gothda was once sitting with his friends, one of them remarked that it would be good if Teej were to be celebrated in Gothda as it is celebrated in Jaipur. On hearing this Balwant Singh set off to Jaipur with 15 of his best friends. On that day, Teej was being celebrated in Jaipur.



Balwant Singh attacked the procession & carried off the idol of Teej to his village, Gothda. The journey must have taken 5 to 10 days, as Balwant Singh then took out a Teej procession in his village on the 3<sup>RD</sup> day after the full moon in the month of Bhadra [15 days after the Teej celebrations in Jaipur]

The Kajali Teej procession continued to be taken out in the village of Gothda for a few years. After the death of Thakur Balwant Singh in a battle, Rao Raja Ram Singh of Bundi brought the idol to Bundi & continued the tradition started by the Thakur by celebrating Teej in the month of Bhadra, 15 days after it is celebrated in Jaipur.

The entire town is alive with lights on this occasion. The Teej procession starts from Naval Sagar after dusk, & winds its way through the narrow lanes & by-lanes of Bundi. Gorgeously decorated elephants, camels & horses accompany the procession. Traditional folk artists sing & dance along the path of Goddess Teej. Carried in a decorated palanquin, the divine one is halted along the way to enable the waiting groups to offer prayers. Though the main function of Bundi Teej is held only on two days, the celebrations continue up to Janmashtami, which marks the birth of Lord Krishna.



**A colourfully decorated Artists in the Teej Procession**

The third festival variation is known as Hartalika Teej & is celebrated mainly by daughter-in-law on the third day of the first fortnight in the month of Bhadra. Married women return to their parent's home to celebrate the festival & receive gifts. On this occasion an idol of Goddess Parvati, clad in brightly coloured clothes is taken out in a procession. Women adorn themselves in green, wear a golden Bindi & apply a thick layer of Kaajal. Hartalika Teej of Marwar [Jodhpur, Pali & Nagaur region] is famous for its riot of colours.

Women observe Nirjala Vrat, a 24 hour long rigorous fast to ensure the wellbeing of their husbands which implies a long, healthy & happy married life. While fasting, even a drop of water is not allowed. Sometimes of course, newly weds & expectant mothers are allowed to observe a more relaxed regimen. Women have right to ask for anything from their husbands on this day & husbands are expected to respond in the spirit of the occasion.