ISSN:2828-6235
Impact factor:13.77

International Journal of Literature and Language Studies(IJLLS)

SPRING FESTIVALS OF INDIA AND UZBEKISTAN: A COMPARATIVE LINGUOCULTURAL STUDY OF HOLI AND NAVRUZ

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Doi: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24504506

Abstrac: This article compares the spring festivals of India and Uzbekistan, focusing on Holi and Navruz as the two most widely celebrated seasonal festivals in each country. Both festivals mark the victory of light and warmth over winter, and both renew social ties through shared food, music, play and acts of reconciliation. The study uses a comparative-descriptive and linguocultural method. It draws on ethnographic literature, classical written sources, UNESCO and United Nations documents, and an analysis of festival vocabulary in Uzbek and Hindi. The results show three layers of similarity. First, both festivals rest on an ancient agrarian calendar linked to the spring equinox or the full moon of the last winter month. Second, both carry a moral narrative of good defeating evil and of nature being reborn. Third, both have a rich lexical field of their own, including shared Persian loanwords such as *bahor/bahār* ('spring') and *Navro'z/Nauroz*. The study also finds clear differences: Holi is centred on colour and carnival play, while Navruz is centred on communal cooking, especially *sumalak*, and on the start of the new year. The historical link between the two traditions runs through Central Asian figures such as Abu Rayhan Beruni and Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, whose dynasty brought Nauroz celebrations to the Mughal court in India. The article argues that spring festivals are an effective resource for intercultural education and for teaching culture-specific vocabulary in language classrooms.

Keywords: Navruz, Holi, spring festivals, linguoculture, intangible cultural heritage, festival lexicon, Uzbekistan, India, intercultural communication

1. Introduction

Festivals are among the most expressive forms of a nation's culture. They preserve old beliefs, ritual language, songs, food traditions and rules of social behaviour, and they pass these on from one generation to the next. Spring festivals hold a special place in this system. In agrarian societies, the end of winter meant survival, a new harvest cycle and the return of life to the fields. For this reason, many peoples of Eurasia created festivals that greet the sun, celebrate fertility and invite people to forgive one another.

Uzbekistan and India offer a rich case for comparison. In Uzbekistan, the main spring festival is Navruz, celebrated on 21 March, at the spring equinox. In India, the best-known spring festival is Holi, celebrated on the full moon of the month of Phalguna, usually in March. India also has several regional spring new-year festivals, such as Ugadi, Gudi Padwa and Baisakhi, as well as Jamshedi Navroz, observed by the Parsi community. The two countries are also linked by long history. Scholars from Central Asia wrote about Indian culture, and the Mughal dynasty, founded by Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur from Andijan, brought Central Asian court customs to India.

The relevance of this topic is supported by international recognition. Navruz was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009 and extended

in 2016 to a shared file of twelve countries, including both India and Uzbekistan (UNESCO, 2016). In 2010, the UN General Assembly recognised 21 March as the International Day of Nowruz (United Nations, 2010). These facts show that spring festivals are valued not only as national traditions but also as a bridge for dialogue between cultures.

The aim of this article is to compare Holi and Navruz as cultural and linguistic phenomena and to identify their common roots and distinctive features. The study addresses three research questions:

1. What are the historical and mythological foundations of Holi and Navruz?
2. Which rituals, foods and oral traditions are central to each festival, and how do they compare?
3. How is each festival reflected in the vocabulary of the Uzbek and Hindi languages, and what does this lexicon reveal about the national worldview?

2. Literature Review

The study of seasonal festivals has a long tradition in anthropology. Arnold van Gennep (1960) described rites of passage as moving through separation, transition and incorporation, and this model fits calendar festivals that mark the passage from winter to spring. Victor Turner (1969) introduced the idea of *communitas*, a temporary state in which social ranks are suspended and people meet as equals. This idea is often used to explain the carnival behaviour of Holi, when caste, age and gender boundaries are relaxed for a day. Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) theory of carnival, with its laughter, role reversal and "world turned upside down", has also been applied to Holi.

In Indian studies, McKim Marriott's (1966) essay "The Feast of Love" remains a classic ethnographic account of Holi in a north Indian village. Marriott showed how the festival reverses everyday hierarchies and turns social tension into play. Later scholars, such as Kinsley (1993) and Flood (1996), placed Holi within the wider framework of Hindu religious practice, linking it to the legends of Prahlada and Holika and to the cult of Krishna and Radha in the Braj region.

The historical study of Navruz rests on classical sources. Abu Rayhan Beruni (973–1048), born in Khorezm, described Navruz and the calendar systems of many peoples in *The Chronology of Ancient Nations* (al-Biruni, 1879). He also wrote *India* (*Tahqiq ma li-l-Hind*), one of the earliest systematic descriptions of Indian festivals and beliefs (Sachau, 1910). Beruni is therefore a unique figure for this comparison: a scholar from the territory of present-day Uzbekistan who documented the festival cultures of both regions. The Persian treatise *Navruznoma*, traditionally attributed to Omar Khayyam, gives a legendary history of the festival and its link to King Jamshid.

In Uzbek scholarship, Navruz has been studied mainly by ethnographers and folklorists. Researchers have described the ritual songs, the *sumalak* ceremony and the regional variants of the holiday, as well as its revival after independence. The festival was restricted during the late Soviet period and was officially restored as a public holiday in 1990–1991. Linguistic studies in Uzbekistan have examined the lexical field of national holidays, ritual terms and festive folklore genres.

At the same time, the literature review shows a gap. Most works study Holi or Navruz separately. Comparative studies that look at both festivals together, especially from a linguocultural point of view, are rare. The present article seeks to fill part of this gap by comparing the two festivals through their history, rituals and vocabulary.

3. Methodology

The study is qualitative and uses four complementary methods:

- **Comparative-historical method** — to trace the origins of both festivals and their meeting points in history, including the works of Beruni and the Mughal period.
- **Descriptive-ethnographic method** — to describe rituals, foods, games and the order of celebration, based on published ethnographic studies and observation of Navruz celebrations in Tashkent.
- **Linguocultural analysis** — to identify the key festival vocabulary in Uzbek and Hindi, to classify it by thematic groups and to explain the cultural meanings behind the words.
- **Etymological analysis** — to trace the origin of key terms, including the shared Indo-Iranian and Persian layers in both languages.

The sources include classical texts (Beruni, the *Baburnama*), modern ethnographic and religious studies, UNESCO and United Nations documents, and dictionaries of the Uzbek and Hindi languages. The festival terms were selected on the basis of frequency in descriptions of the festivals and their cultural significance. Hindi words are given in standard Latin transliteration.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Origins and calendar

Navruz is a solar festival. It is fixed to the spring equinox, when day and night become equal and the sun begins to dominate. Its roots go back to the ancient agricultural and Zoroastrian traditions of the Iranian-speaking peoples of Central Asia, including the Sogdians and Khorezmians. In legend, the festival is linked to the mythical king Jamshid. Beruni wrote that Navruz was the day on which the world was renewed and the first day of the year (al-Biruni, 1879). In Uzbekistan today, Navruz is a public holiday on 21 March, and celebrations usually last several days.

Holi is a lunar festival. It falls on the full moon (*Purnima*) of the month of Phalguna, the last month of winter in the Hindu calendar, so its date moves each year, usually within March. The festival has two parts. On the first evening, people light a bonfire called *Holika Dahan*. On the next day, called *Dhulandi* or *Rangwali Holi*, people throw coloured powder and water at each other. The main legend tells of the devout prince Prahlada, whom his demon father Hiranyakashipu tried to kill with the help of his sister Holika. Holika entered a fire with Prahlada, believing she could not burn, but she died while the boy survived. The second legend links Holi to the playful love of Krishna and Radha, which is why the festival is especially famous in Mathura, Vrindavan and Barsana.

The two festivals therefore use different calendars, solar and lunar, but they mark the same natural turning point: the end of winter and the start of the spring cycle of work and fertility.

4.2. Rituals and social meaning

Both festivals use fire as a symbol of purification. On the eve of Navruz, in some regions of Uzbekistan people traditionally jumped over small fires to leave the illnesses and troubles of the old year behind. In Holi, the bonfire of *Holika Dahan* burns away evil and the remains of winter. In both cases, fire separates the old year from the new.

The second shared function is reconciliation. During Navruz, people visit relatives and elders, ask forgiveness, settle quarrels and help those in need. Communal work, known as *hashar*, is common: people clean streets and courtyards and plant trees. During Holi, the phrase *"Bura na mano, Holi hai"* ('Don't be offended, it's Holi') allows people to tease each other, and old enemies often embrace. Both festivals thus serve as a social "reset".

The main difference lies in the style of celebration. Holi is a carnival: people of different castes, ages and social positions play together, cover each other in colour and sing loudly in the streets. In Turner's (1969) terms, it creates *communitas* through the temporary removal of hierarchy. Navruz, by contrast, keeps and even strengthens the social order. Respect for elders, hospitality and family unity are at its centre. Its public side includes folk games such as *kurash* (wrestling), *ko'pkari* or *uloq* (a horseback game) and swinging on *arg'imchoq* (swings), as well as fairs called *sayil*.

4.3. Festive food

Food is central to both festivals. The symbol of Navruz in Uzbekistan is *sumalak*, a sweet dish made from sprouted wheat, flour and oil. It is cooked overnight in a large cauldron, and women take turns stirring it while singing special *sumalak* songs and making wishes. Small pebbles are placed in the cauldron, and the person who finds one in their portion is believed to have good luck. Other Navruz dishes include *halim* (wheat and meat porridge), *ko'k somsa* and *ko'k chuchvara*, made with fresh spring greens.

The typical foods of Holi are *gujiya* (sweet dumplings filled with milk solids and dried fruit), *malpua* (sweet pancakes) and the cold drink *thandai*, made from milk, almonds and spices. Both traditions therefore use food to express abundance. The difference is in the symbolism: *sumalak* is made from sprouted grain and directly represents the rebirth of nature, while Holi sweets stress joy and hospitality.

4.4. Folklore and oral literature

Each festival has its own genre of songs. In Uzbek folklore, Navruz songs include *"Boychechak"*, sung by children who go from house to house holding the first spring snowdrops and receiving gifts, and the *sumalak* songs sung by women around the cauldron. The motif of awakening nature also appears in classical Uzbek poetry. Alisher Navoi often used the images of Navruz and spring (*bahor*) as symbols of renewal and beauty.

In north India, Holi has its own song genres, known as *hori*, *phag* and *chaiti*. They are sung in the Braj and Awadhi dialects and describe the play of Krishna with the *gopis* (cowherd girls). These songs are part of both folk and classical music traditions. The festival is also described in early Sanskrit literature; the seventh-century drama *Ratnavali*, attributed to King Harsha, depicts a spring festival with coloured water.

The Mughal period connects the two traditions directly. Babur, a native of the Fergana Valley, founded the Mughal Empire in 1526. His descendants celebrated Nauroz at court with great splendour, and later Mughal rulers also took part in Holi, which is said to have been called at court *Eid-e-Gulabi* ('festival of rose colours'). In this way, the Central Asian Navruz and the Indian Holi coexisted for centuries in one cultural space.

4.5. The festival lexicon in Uzbek and Hindi

A linguocultural analysis shows that each festival has a developed lexical field. Table 1 groups the key terms by theme.

Table 1. Festival vocabulary of Navruz (Uzbek) and Holi (Hindi) by thematic group

Thematic group	**Uzbek (Navruz)**	**Hindi (Holi)**
Name of the festival	*Navro'z*, *Navro'z ayyomi*	*Holi*, *Holikā Dahan*, *Dhulandi*, *Phagwā*

Thematic group	Uzbek (Navruz)	Hindi (Holi)
Season and nature	*bahor*, *boychechak* (snowdrop), *ko'klam* (early spring)	*basant* / *vasant* (spring), *phāgun* (month)
Ritual objects	*gulxan* (bonfire), *qozon* (cauldron)	*rang* (colour), *gulāl*, *abir* (coloured powders), *pichkārī* (water squirter)
Food	*sumalak*, *halim*, *ko'k somsa*, *ko'k chuchvara*	*gujiyā*, *mālpuā*, *thandāī*
Social practice	*hashar*, *sayil*, *mehr-oqibat*	*milan* (meeting), *gale milna* (embracing)
Games and arts	*kurash*, *ko'pkari*, *arg'imchoq*	*hori* and *phag* songs, *Lathmār Holi*
Wishes	*Navro'z muborak!*	*Holi mubārak!*, *Burā na māno, Holi hai!*

The table shows that Uzbek vocabulary is concentrated around nature, cooking and community work, while Hindi vocabulary is concentrated around colour and play. This reflects the different emphasis of each festival: renewal through shared labour and food in Uzbekistan, and renewal through joyful play in India.

The etymological analysis reveals an interesting common layer. The word *Navruz* comes from Persian *nav* 'new' and *ruz* 'day'. Persian *nav* is related to Sanskrit *nava* 'new', as both go back to a common Indo-Iranian root. Persian *ruz* (Old Persian *rauca*) is also related to Sanskrit *rocas* 'light, brightness'. The Persian word *bahor* 'spring' entered Uzbek as *bahor* and Hindi-Urdu as *bahār*, so speakers of both languages use the same word for spring. The greeting *muborak/mubārak* 'blessed', of Arabic origin, is used in both *Navro'z muborak* and *Holi mubārak*. These shared words show the long contact between Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent through Persian as a common literary and court language.

4.6. Modern status and international recognition

In the twentieth century, Navruz in Uzbekistan went through a difficult period. Under Soviet rule it was seen as a religious and outdated custom and was restricted. After independence, it was restored as a national holiday and became a symbol of cultural revival. Today, the state celebration in Tashkent includes concerts, folk performances and *sumalak* cooking in every neighbourhood (*mahalla*).

Holi has become a global festival. It is celebrated by the Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom, the United States, Mauritius, Fiji, Guyana and Suriname, where it is often called *Phagwah*. "Festival of colours" events modelled on Holi are now organised in many countries.

International bodies have also recognised the shared value of Navruz. India and Uzbekistan are both among the twelve countries of the joint 2016 UNESCO inscription of Navruz (UNESCO, 2016), and India was among the co-sponsors of the 2010 UN resolution on the International Day of Nowruz. In India, Navroz is celebrated mainly by the Parsi community and in Jammu and Kashmir. This creates a direct cultural bridge: Navruz is not only an Uzbek festival but also part of India's own heritage.

4.7. Summary of the comparison

Table 2. Comparison of Navruz and Holi

Feature	**Navruz (Uzbekistan)**	**Holi (India)**
Calendar	Solar; spring equinox, 21 March	Lunar; full moon of Phalguna, usually March
Core meaning	New year, rebirth of nature	Victory of good over evil, arrival of spring
Main legend	King Jamshid; ancient agrarian beliefs	Prahlada and Holika; Krishna and Radha
Fire ritual	Jumping over small fires (regional)	*Holika Dahan* bonfire
Symbolic food	*Sumalak* (sprouted wheat)	*Gujiya*, *thandai*
Social style	Order, respect for elders, *hashar*	Carnival, temporary removal of hierarchy
Song genres	*Boychechak*, *sumalak* songs	*Hori*, *phag*, *chaiti*
International status	UNESCO ICH list (2009, 2016); UN day (2010)	Global diaspora festival

5. Conclusion

The comparison of Navruz and Holi shows that the spring festivals of Uzbekistan and India share a deep common basis despite differences in religion, calendar and style. Both festivals celebrate the end of winter and the rebirth of nature. Both use fire as a symbol of purification, both bring people together through shared food, and both offer a time for forgiveness and the renewal of social ties.

The differences are equally important. Navruz is a solar new-year festival centred on family, respect for elders, communal work and the ritual cooking of *sumalak*. Holi is a lunar festival centred on a moral legend and on carnival play with colour, in which social boundaries are temporarily lifted. These differences are clearly reflected in the vocabulary of each language: Uzbek festival terms gather around nature, food and community, while Hindi terms gather around colour, play and music.

The linguistic analysis also reveals a shared layer of vocabulary in Uzbek and Hindi, including *bahor/bahār*, *muborak/mubārak* and *Navro'z/Nauroz*. These words, together with the Indo-Iranian kinship of *nav* and *nava*, show centuries of contact between Central Asia and India. Figures such as Beruni and Babur, and the joint UNESCO inscription of Navruz, show that this contact continues to shape the cultural relations of both countries.

The results have practical value for language teaching and intercultural education. Festival vocabulary can be used in English, Uzbek and Hindi classes to teach culture-specific words, their etymology and their cultural meaning. Future research could expand the comparison to other Indian spring festivals, such as Baisakhi, Ugadi and Gudi Padwa, and could use field surveys to study how young people in both countries experience these festivals today.

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