World Journal of
Pharmacy and Medical Science

ISSN: 3049-3501
Impact Factor: 5.157
CODEN (USA): WJPMAA

Editorial Article
2026 Volume 2, Issue 11
Page No.: 43-47

BHAI PHONTA IS AN INDIAN RITUAL CELEBRATED BY HINDUS ON THE SECOND LUNAR DAY OF THE SHUKLA PAKSHA (BRIGHT FORTNIGHT) OF KARTIKA FOR BROTHERS

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Article Received: 01 October 2026 Article Review: 22 October 2026 Article Accepted: 12 November 2026

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24395681

How to cite this Article: Dr. Dhrubo Jyoti Sen (2026). BHAI PHONTA IS AN INDIAN RITUAL CELEBRATED BY HINDUS ON THE SECOND LUNAR DAY OF THE SHUKLA PAKSHA (BRIGHT FORTNIGHT) OF KARTIKA FOR BROTHERS. World Journal of Pharmacy and Medical Science, 2(11): 43-47.

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ABSTRACT
Bhai Phota (also known as Bhai Phonta or Bhai Dooj) is celebrated to honour and strengthen the sacred, lifelong bond of love, protection, and duty between brothers and sisters.

Key Reasons and Legends behind the Celebration:

1. The Legend of Yama and Yamuna: The primary mythological root of the festival (also called Yama Dwitiya) is the story of Lord Yama, the god of death, and his twin sister, Yamuna. After a long time apart, Yamuna invited Yama to her home, welcomed him with an aarti, applied a sacred tilak (phota) on his forehead, and served him a grand feast. Deeply moved by her affection, Yama granted her a boon that any brother who receives a tilak and heartfelt blessings from his sister on this day will be protected from untimely death and harm.
2. The Legend of Lord Krishna and Subhadra: Another popular tradition connects the day to Lord Krishna visiting his sister Subhadra after defeating the demon Narkasura. Subhadra warmly welcomed him with sweets, flowers, and a ceremonial tilak on his forehead to celebrate his victory.
3. Sisters' Prayers for Longevity: In Bengal, sisters often fast in the morning until the phota ritual is completed. They apply a sandalwood, curd, and kajal paste mark (the phota) onto their brother's forehead using their finger while chanting mantras and offering prayers for his long life, good health, and success.
4. Gifts and Mutual Care: After the ritual, brothers are showered with traditional sweets, homemade dishes, and blessings (such as rice grains and durba grass). In return, brothers pamper their sisters with gifts, tokens of appreciation, and a lifelong promise to protect and support them.

KEYWORDS: brother, tilak, bhai dooj, aarti, sandalwood, curd, kajal, durba grass, rice grains.

INTRODUCTION

Bhai Dooj, Bhai Tika, Bhaubeej, Bhai Beej, Bhai Phonta, Bhai Phota or Bhratri Dwitiya is a festival celebrated by Hindus on the second lunar day of the Shukla Paksha (bright fortnight) of Kartika, the eighth month of the Vikram Samvat Hindu calendar or the Shalivahana Shaka calendar. It is celebrated during the Diwali or Tihar festival and Holi festival. Bhai Dooj is a Hindu festival celebrating the relationship between brothers and sisters. The celebrations of this day are similar to the festival of Raksha Bandhan. A traditional Newari painting about Kija puja's legend.



Figure 1: Bhai phonta.

In the southern part of India, the day is celebrated as Yama Dwitiya. In the Kayastha community, two Bhai Doojs are celebrated. The more famous one occurs on the second day after Diwali. But the lesser-known one is celebrated a day or two after Diwali. In Haryana and Uttar Pradesh a ritual is also followed, a dry coconut (named gola in regional language) with klewa tied along its width for worshipping is also used at the time of doing aarti of a brother. In Bengal the day is celebrated as Bhai Phota, which comes one day after Kali Puja.

Regional Variations

The festival is known as:

Bhai Dooj (Hindi: भाई दूज) in the entire Northern part of India, observed during the Diwali festival. In Awadh and Purvanchal regions of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, it is also known as Bhaiya Dooj. It is widely celebrated by Maithils in Nepal and Bihar as Bhardutiya and people from various other ethnic groups. The first day of this New Year is observed as Govardhan Pūja.

Bhai Teeka (Nepali: भाइटीका) in Nepal, where it is the most important festival after Dashain (Vijaya Dashmi / Dussehra). Observed on the fifth day of Tihar festival, it is widely celebrated by Maithils in Nepal as Bhardutiya Bhai Tika followed by the people of various other ethnic groups among Madhesis. While, the Newaris celebrate it as Kija Puja. The sisters put a vertical Tika of seven colours known as Saptarangi Tika in their brother's forehead.

Bhai Phonta (Bengali: ভাই ফোঁটা) or Bhai Phota in Bengal and it takes place every year on the second day after Kali Puja. It is mainly observed in West Bengal, Tripura, Bangladesh.



Figure 2: Bhai Phonta Lunch.

Bhai Jiuntia (Odia: ଭାଇ ଜିଉନ୍ତିଆ) only in western Odisha.

Bhau Beej, or Bhav Bij (Marathi: भाऊ बीज) or Bhai Beej amongst the Marathi, Gujarati and Konkani-speaking communities in the states of Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat and Karnataka.

Another name for the day is Yamadwitheya or Yamadvitiya, after a legendary meeting between Yama the god of Death and his sister Yamuna (the famous river) on Dwitheya (the second day after new moon). Other names include Bhatru Dviteeya, or Bhatri Ditya or Bhaghini Hastha Bhojanamu in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Bhai Dooj is the general pan-Indian Hindu festival celebrating the love between brothers and sisters, observed on the second lunar day (Dooj) of Shukla Paksha in the month of Kartik. Bhai Phota (or Bhai Panta) is the specific Bengali name for the exact same festival, celebrated primarily in West Bengal, Tripura, and Bangladesh.

Key Similarities

Core meaning: Both honour the sacred bond and love between brothers and sisters, similar in spirit to Raksha Bandhan.

The ritual: In both traditions, sisters apply a ceremonial mark (tilak or phota) on their brother's forehead, offer prayers for his long life and well-being, and share a festive meal and gifts.

The timing: Both fall on the same day—the second day after Diwali/Kali Puja (Yama Dwitiya).
According to Hindu religion, after slaying the evil demon Narakasura, Lord Krishna visited his sister Subhadra who gave him a warm welcome with sweets and flowers. She also affectionately applied tilaka on Krishna's forehead. Some believe this to be the origin of the festival. The little finger (pinky) of the left hand is traditionally used to apply the Bhai Phonta mark in Bengal.

Left Little Finger (Kanishtha Angul): Most commonly used by sisters to place the sandalwood paste, curd, or vermilion dot on the brother's forehead. In tradition, the little finger represents Byom (space or the element of the sky), symbolizing infinite and boundless sibling love. Family Custom Variations: Some regional or familial customs specify that elder sisters use the little finger of the left hand, while younger sisters may use their right hand.

Bhai Phota (also known as Bhai Phonta) is a traditional Bengali festival celebrated on the second lunar day of the bright fortnight (Dwitiya) in the Kartik month, right after Kali Puja. It honours the sacred bond between brothers and sisters.

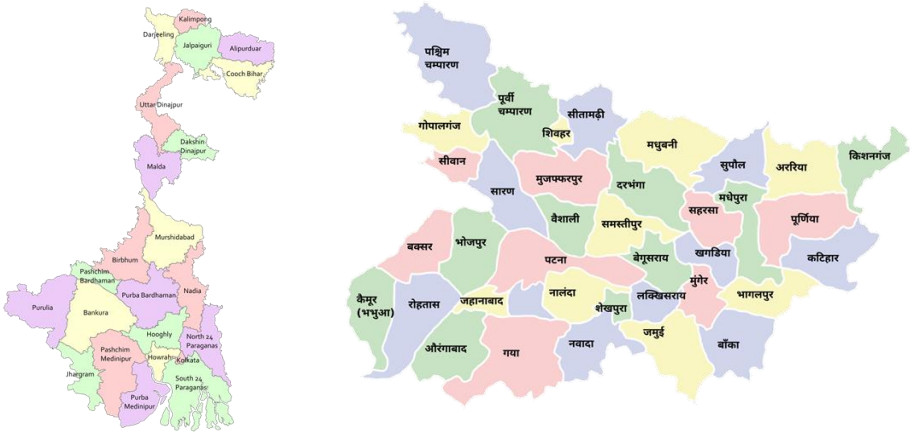


Figure 3: Bhai Phonta Lunch & Sweets.

1. Preparation before the Ritual
Fasting: Many sisters observe a fast in the morning until the ceremonial phota is completed.
Arranging the Thali (Dala): Prepare a sacred plate or tray containing:
Sandalwood paste (chandan), kajal (kohl), and curd (yogurt).
Rice grains (dhan) and durba grass (sacred grass).
A lighted lamp (pradeep or diya) and incense.
Sweets (mishti) and fruits.

2. The Phota Ceremony:
Seating: The brother is seated on a low wooden stool (asana).
Applying the Phota: Using the little finger of her left hand, the sister applies three spots (traditionally sandalwood, kajal, and curd) on the brother's forehead while chanting a traditional mantra or wish for his long life, health, and protection. She places a few grains of rice and durba grass on his head as a blessing.

Aarti: The sister waves a lighted aarti lamp around the brother's face and prays for his safety from all troubles and evil.



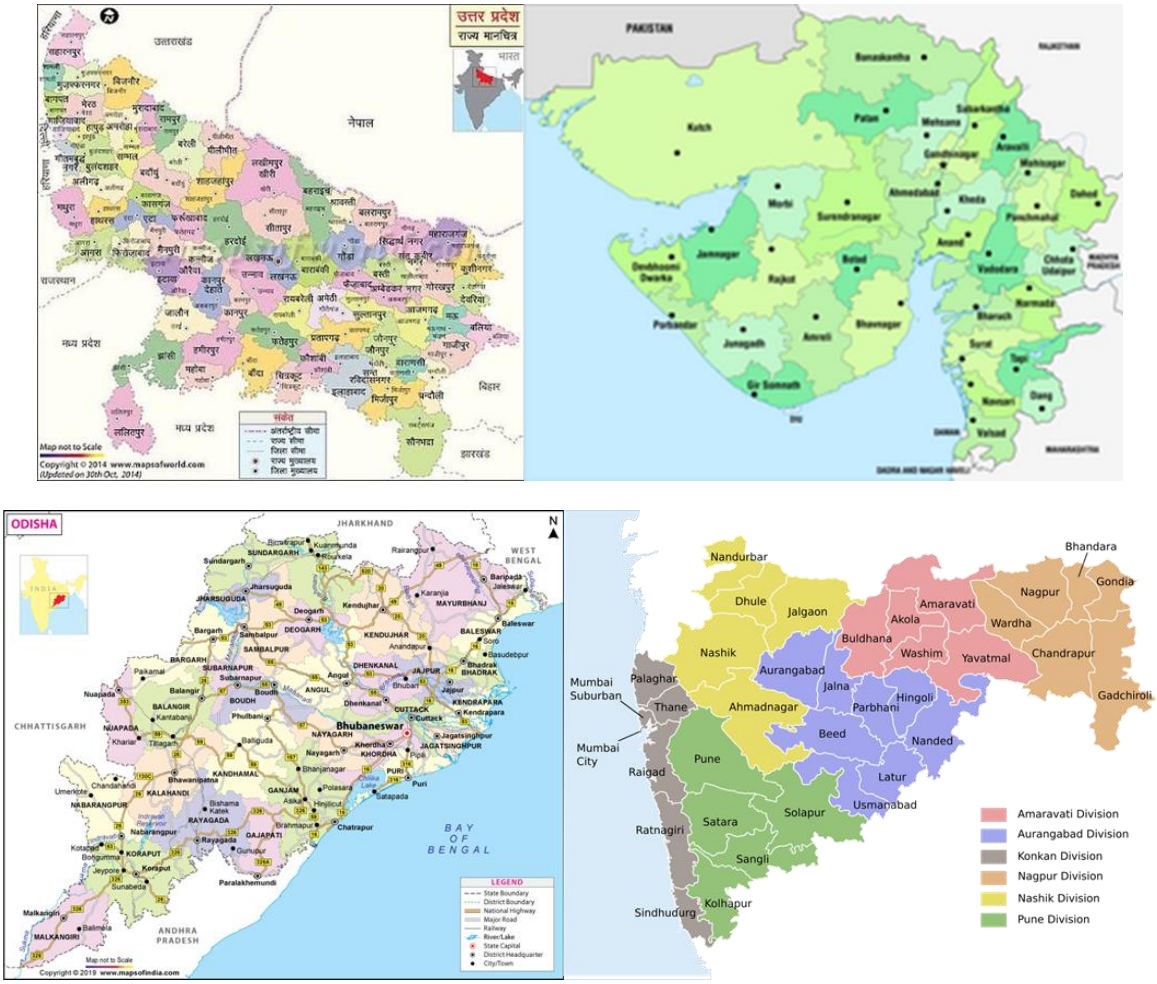


Figure 4: States which celebrates Bhai Phonta.

3. Gifts and Blessings

Feeding Sweets: The sister feeds her brother traditional Bengali sweets and water.

The Return Blessing: The brother touches his sister's feet to seek her blessings (especially if she is elder).

Exchanging Gifts: The brother presents his sister with gifts, clothes, or cash as a token of love and his promise to protect her.

4. The Feast and Family Time:

Special Meal: The celebration concludes with a grand traditional meal prepared by the family, which often includes items like rice, fish, mutton, or chicken curries, followed by heavy desserts.

Get-Togethers: Families spend the rest of the day sharing stories, laughing, and enjoying adda (casual conversation) together.

Mantra: ভাইয়রে কপালে দলিাম ফোঁটা। যম দুয়ারে পড়লো কাঁটা।। যমুনা দয়ে যমকে ফোঁটা। আমি দিই আমার ভাইকে ফোঁটা।। যমরে যমেন আয়ু বাড়ে। আমার ভাইয়রে তমেনি আয়ু বাড়ে।।

Bhai Dooj is a Hindu festival and is not part of traditional Islamic religious practice. However, in certain regions of India—such as Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh and parts of West Bengal—some Muslim families and individuals participate in the celebrations as a local tradition of communal harmony and neighbourhood friendship.

How the Participation Works

Cultural Harmony: In specific localities, Hindu and Muslim neighbours or friends take part in the sibling-bonding rituals together.

Exchanging Gestures: Hindu women sometimes apply a tilak (vermillion mark) and offer sweets to Muslim men or neighbours, and Muslim women similarly join in or host Hindu friends, reciprocating the warmth during Islamic festivals like Eid.

Local Traditions: Practices like these are rare, localized social customs rather than a religious obligation or standard practice in Islam. From a strictly religious standpoint, Islam does not observe Hindu festival rituals.
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Bhai Phota is applied using the little finger (pinky finger), depending on the age relation:

• **Elder sister:** Uses the little finger of her left hand to apply the mark on her brother's forehead, earlobes, and throat.

• **Younger sister:** Uses her right hand to apply the phota.

The little finger (pinky) of the left hand is traditionally used to apply the Bhai Phonta mark in Bengal.

Left Little Finger (Kanishtha Angul): Most commonly used by sisters to place the sandalwood paste, curd, or vermilion dot on the brother's forehead. In tradition, the little finger represents Byom (space or the element of the sky), symbolizing infinite and boundless sibling love.
Family Custom Variations: Some regional or familial customs specify that elder sisters use the little finger of the left hand, while younger sisters may use their right hand.

CONCLUSION

- The Tilak/Phota: Sisters apply a sacred paste made of chandan (sandalwood), kajol, and doi (yogurt) on their brother's forehead while chanting mantras and praying for his long life and protection.
- The Mantra: Sisters often chant the traditional verse: "Bhaier kopaley dilam phota, yomer durore porlo kanta" (Applying the mark on my brother's forehead, throwing thorns in the path of Yama/death).
- Feast and Gifts: Sisters treat their brothers to a grand homemade feast with sweets, and brothers give gifts to their sisters in return.

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