

May Day

May Day is a holiday celebrated on the first day of May which has its roots from an ancient spring festival. In countries like the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, and Romania, it is observed with dancing,



singing, and festivities while in the U.S, May Day is associated with the Chicago's Haymarket Square protest.

Origin and Background

- During the Roman Republic era, May Day was first celebrated along with Floralia or the festival of flowers in honor of Flora, a Roman goddess. It became a traditional summer holiday for many pagan cultures in Europe. The day was originally called Beltane which means Day of Fire and was often celebrated with bonfires.
- Roman Catholics in the 18th century observed the coming of May with rituals and devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Traditions During May Day

- During the Medieval era, maypole dance was popularized in parts of Europe. Unmarried young women used to walk around the decorated pole while holding colored ribbons. In the 1600s, the Catholic Church banned such practice due to sexual connotations.
- In countries like Germany, Sweden, and the Czech Republic, people celebrate the eve before May Day as Walpurgis Night in honor of Saint Walpurga, an English missionary.
- Crowning a May Queen was also popular during this day. Women used leaves and flowers for hair garlands.



- In the late 20th century, giving of May baskets filled with sweets and flowers started to fade. Traditionally, these baskets would be left to someone's doorstep.
- In 1928, Hawaii embraced May Day as Lei Day to celebrate their own



culture.

- On this day, farmers plant corn, turnips, and cucumbers. Moreover, people in villages do theatrical battles between summer and winter.
- Today, May Day is one of the most recognized bank holiday in Europe. Maypole dancing is a choreographed dance and participated by children.

May Day and Labour Day

An incident in Chicago in May, 1886, prompted workers to set up a new holiday called International Workers Day. This never became an official holiday, however. Workers gathered in the streets to protest long working days and to ask for 8-hour days. At first, they were peaceful until a bomb was thrown at a policeman who was killed. The police fired into the crowd and several people were killed. After that event, union leaders called May 1 International Workers Day. It has never become official in America. Eighty countries do celebrate that day.

