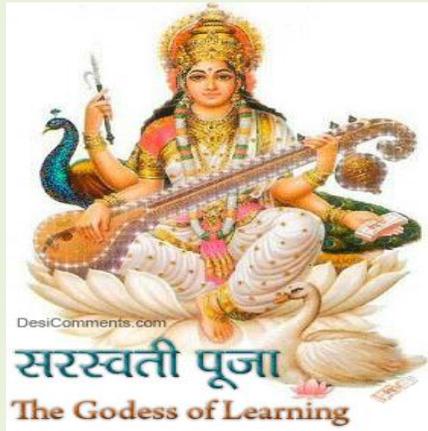


Saraswati: Goddess of Knowledge & Arts



Vasant Panchami (Devnagari:वसन्त पञ्चमी), sometimes referred to as Saraswati Puja or Shree Panchami (Devnagari:श्रीपञ्चमी), is a Hindu festival worshipping Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, music and art. It is celebrated every year on the fifth day (Panchami) of the Indian month Magh (January-February), the first day of spring. Traditionally during this festival children are taught to write their first words; brahmins are fed; ancestor worship (Pitr-tarpan) is performed; the god of love Kamadeva is worshipped; and most educational institutions organise special prayer for Saraswati. The color yellow also plays an important role in this festival, in that people usually wear yellow garments, Saraswati is worshipped dressed in yellow, and yellow sweets are consumed within the families. Children love flying kites. They enjoy the festival with great fun and enthusiasm.

Goddess Saraswati is represented as a graceful woman in white, a symbol of purity and peace. She is the Goddess who signifies knowledge, learning, arts and culture. She is seen as the serene Goddess wearing a crescent moon on

her brow riding a swan or seated on a lotus flower. Saraswati Puja is performed to pay allegiance to the Goddess of learning.

The Mythology

In the Vedas, Goddess Saraswati is referred as the water deity and is revered for her purifying and enriching powers. The Goddess of knowledge and learning is said to have invented Sanskrit, the language of the Brahmins, of scriptures and scholars.

It is also believed that it was Goddess Saraswati who discovered 'amrit' in the Himalayas and brought it to the other gods. She was said to be identical with Viraj being created out of the substance of Purusha or Prajapati and thus is the instrument of creation. As Brahma's wife, she provides the power to execute what Brahma conceives with his creative intelligence. She is the goddess of all the creative arts and in particular of poetry and music, learning and science.

The Celebration of Saraswati Puja

Saraswati puja is celebrated throughout the country. The Goddess of knowledge is revered among the students and learned who strictly follow all the rituals to worship her. The festivities that accompany Saraswati puja is a part of the social celebrations. Young girls are seen in yellow saaries. Pushpanjali (offering of flowers along with mantras) are offered. Bright palash flowers are offered that are a part of the worship. Young people enjoy the day with each other. Cultural programmes are staged at night. The Goddess who is the patron of music, culture and learning is revered by singers and musicians with great devotion.

The following popular 'pranam mantra' or Sanskrit prayer, Saraswati devotees utter with utmost devotion eulogizes the goddess of knowledge and arts:

*Om Saraswati Mahabhagey, Vidye Kamala Lochaney |
Viswarupey Vishalakshmi, Vidyam Dehi Namohastutey ||
Jaya Jaya Devi, Charachara Sharey, Kuchayuga Shobhita, Mukta Haarey |
Vina Ranjita, Pustaka Hastey, Bhagavati Bharati Devi Namohastutey ||*

The beautiful human form of Saraswati comes to the fore in this English translation of the Saraswati hymn:



*"May Goddess Saraswati,
who is fair like the jasmine-colored
moon, and whose pure white
garland is like frosty dew drops;
who is adorned in radiant white
attire, on whose beautiful arm
rests the veena, and whose throne
is a white lotus; who is surrounded
and respected by the Gods, protect
me. May you fully remove my
lethargy, sluggishness, and
ignorance."*

