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### Vasant Panchami



As 'Diwali' - the festival of light - is to Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and prosperity, and 'Navaratri' is to Durga, goddess of power and valor, Vasant Panchami is to Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and arts. This festival is celebrated every year on the 5th day or 'Panchami' of the bright fortnight of the lunar month of Magha, which falls during January-February. 'Vasant' comes from the word 'spring' as this festival heralds the beginning of the spring season.

#### Birthday of Goddess Saraswati

It is believed that on this day goddess Saraswati was born. Hindus celebrate Vasant Panchami with great fervor in temples, homes and even schools and colleges. Saraswati's favorite color white assumes special significance on this day. Statues of the goddess are dressed in white clothes and are worshiped by devotees adorning white garments. Saraswati is offered sweets which are given away as 'prasad' to all people attending the ritual worship. There is also a custom of ancestor worship, known as 'Pitri-Tarpan' in many parts of India during Vasant Panchami.

#### The Foundation of Education

The most significant aspect of Vasant Panchami is that it is also the most auspicious day to begin laying one's foundations of education - of how to read and write. Pre-school children are given their first lesson in reading and writing on this day. All Hindu educational institutions conduct special prayer for Saraswati on this day. It is also a great day to inaugurate training institutes and new schools - a trend made famous by the renowned Indian educationist Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861-1946), who founded the Banaras Hindu University on Vasant Panchami day in 1916.

#### A Springtime Celebration



During Vasant Panchami, the advent of spring is felt in the air as the season undergoes change. New leaves and blossoms appear in the trees with the promise of new life and hope. Vasant Panchami also announces the arrival of another big springtime event in the Hindu calendar - Holi, the festival of colors.

Yellow color, representative of spiritual knowledge, is given importance on this day. People, too, wear yellow garments on this day. On this day, special worship is also offered to the Sun deity (Surya dev), to the deities (divine energies) associated with Ganga (the sacred river Ganges in North India) and the Earth. This is done to pay obeisance and gratitude to these deities, for providing us the means of acquiring food and all that we need to keep alive. Such acknowledgment helps remind one of the attitude of service and giving

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that is present in all creation, thus facilitating the spiritual emotion (bhav) that like nature, one is here to imbibe a giving attitude and of remaining in service to The Lord.