Kārtika Māsa

By Shrī Krishṇānand Maṅkīkar

We have just celebrated Dīpāvali, the great festival of lights that marks hope, worships brightness, celebrates the dispersal of darkness and spreads cheer all around. It is said that when Rām returned from Laṅkā with a victory over Rāvaṇa, this festival was celebrated. This beautiful festival of Dīpāvali, lasting for five days, begins with Āshwija Kṛs̲h̲ṇa dwādashī, on the twelfth day of the waning moon in the seventh month of the Pañchāṅga (Hindū calendar and almanac). This is followed by Dhanatrayodashī, Naraka Chaturdashī and the Amāvāsyā. The last two days of Dīpāvali festival fall in the month of Kārtika.

Let us have a look at this month of Kārtika filled with festive days. But before that, a brief note on the Pañchāṅga and how it relates with the Gregorian Calendar.

The Pañchāṅga

The “dates” in the Pañchāṅga are serially numbered representing the phases of the moon and are called “tithi-s”. The first tithi, “prathamā” (also termed pratipadā) is followed by “dwitīyā” meaning the “second” and so on, till the fifteenth tithi, pūrṇimā (full moon) in the shukla paks̲h̲a (bright half) of the month, where the moon waxes to its full glory over a fortnight. Kṛs̲h̲ṇa paks̲h̲a, the dark half of the month, in which the moon wanes again starts with prathamā (pratipadā) but ends with amāvāsyā (New moon), the fifteenth tithi.

Day of Fortnight

Shukla Paksha

(Bright Half of the month)

Tithi Name

Kṛshṇa Paksha

(Dark Half of the month) Tithi Name

First Pratipadā

Pratipadā

Second Dwitīyā

Dwitīyā

Third Tṛtīyā

Fourth Chaturthī

Fifth Pañchamī

Sixth Shashthī

Seventh Saptamī

Eighth Ashṭamī

Ninth Navamī

Tenth Dashamī

Eleventh Ekādashī

Twelfth Dwādashī

Thirteenth Trayodashī

Fourteenth Chaturdashī

Fifteenth Pūrņimā

Amāvāsyā

Thus, we have thirty tithi-s (days) - 15 of bright half and 15 of dark, which would make it 360 in 12 months, wouldn’t it? However, the Pañchāṅga based on the movement of the Moon, has 354 days because at times, a tithi extends to more than a day and sometimes, there maybe a missing tithi. The purely Lunar cycle based Pañchāṅga is thus, 11 days shorter than the Gregorian calendar (the calendar based on the Solar movement, with months from January to December). To keep up with the solar cycle of 365 days and six hours in one year, every 32 or 33 months an Adhika Māsa (additional month) is added. The extra month which normally comes before the month of same name is called अधिक मास, and the original is called निज मास. Thus, if we have Adhika श्रावण मास, in one year, it will be followed by निज श्रावण मास. Also, over a long period there may even be a lost month (क्षय मास). The calculations are complex, but have helped keep the months across both calendars (Solar and Lunar) fairly in synchronisation. Therefore, our calendar can be called “Lunisolar.”

The names of the months are associated with the Naks̲h̲atra-s (Star configurations), which are 27 in number. As the Moon traverses the sky, it is near one of these Naks̲h̲atra-s on a given full moon night. The Naks̲h̲atra near which the moon is on a full moon night, is used to name the month. Thus, the first month Chaitra, is associated with Chitrā Naks̲h̲atra and Vaishākha the second month with Vishākhā Naks̲h̲atra and so on.

Table below gives the details of the 12 months and the associated seasons in our calendar

SR NO

LUNAR MONTH

SEASON IN

INDIAN CAL.

APPROXIMATE

ENGLISH CAL.

APPROXIMATE NAKSHATRA

ON PŪRṆIMĀ

1 CHAITRA

VASANTA

SPRING

CHITRA

2

VAISHĀKHĀ

VASANTA

SPRING

VISHĀKHĀ

3

JYESHTHA

GRĪSHMA

SUMMER

JYESHTHĀ

4

ĀSHĀDHA

GRĪSHMA

SUMMER

PŪRVĀSHĀDHA

UTTARĀSHĀDHA

5

SHRĀVAṆA

VARSHĀ

RAINY

SHRAVAṆA

6

BHĀDRAPADA

VARSHĀ

RAINY

PŪRVĀBHADRĀ

UTTARĀBHĀDRĀ

7

ĀSHWIJA (ĀSHWINA/ASHVĀYUJA)

SHARAD

AUTUMN

ASHWINĪ

8

KĀRTIKA

SHARAD

AUTUMN

KṚTTIKĀ

9

MĀRGASHIRA

HEMANTA

AUTUMN

MṚGASHIRĀ

10

PUSHYA

HEMANTA

AUTUMN

PUSHYA

11

MĀGHA

SHISHIRA

WINTER

MAGHĀ

12

PHĀLGUNA

SHISHIRA

WINTER

PHĀLGUNĪ

We then have six seasons, starting with Vasanta-ṛtu, and ending with Shishira-ṛtu, each season spreading over two months, as seen in the table above.

Kārtika-māsa

Let us now talk about the eighth month of our calendar, Kārtika, which is a specially auspicious month.

Āshwin (also known as Āshwija) and Kārtika constitute Sharad-ṛtu, the fourth season in our calendar. The celebrated Marāt̲h̲ī poet Keshav Sut heralds the advent of Sharad-ṛtu, by saying, “The Lord has become very Karuṇāmaya and has unleashed the weapon of the Rains (parjanyāstra) on the demon of famine (dus̲h̲kāla-daitya), to drive away the misery, and now, the auspicious days of Dīpāvali have arrived.”

Sharad-Ṛtu is known for the bright skies, as the clouds have gone away and the rains have brought a good harvest, hence there is cheer all around.

Auspicious days in Kārtika

Bali Pratipadā

The month of Kārtika sets in with the first day of the bright fortnight celebrated as Bali-Pratipadā. Balī was an Asura King-benevolent and good. However due to his incessant wars with the Sura-s i.e. Deva-s, Shrī Vis̲h̲ṇu in the form of Vāmana (a dwarf brāhmaṇa) banished him to Pātāla loka. As per the legend, Balī returns each year on this day of Bali-Pratipadā to the Earth, where he is worshipped. (In Kerala, during the Oṇam festival, Balī is worshipped with great fanfare and pomp.) Balī is associated with agriculture and good harvest. In Mahārās̲h̲ṭra, the farmer is known as Balīrājā. In Mahārās̲h̲ṭra, this day is called “Pāḍva” and is celebrated by the married women doing “Āratī” of their husbands, who in turn treat them with gifts.

Yama-Dwitīyā or Bhāi-Dūj/ Bhāu-Bīj

The next day, which is the last (fifth) day of Dīpāvali is the eagerly awaited “bhāi-dūj” in the north or “bhāu-bīj” in Mahārās̲h̲ṭra, when the brother visits the home of his sister. She treats him with sweets and he in turn gives her gifts. This day is also called yama-dwitīyā after the famous sibling pair of Yama (The Lord of death) and his sister Yamī. It is said that Yama visited his sister Yamī on this day. She treated him with his favourite food and he in turn showered gifts on her. He declared then that on this day, any sister who treats her brother like this, will be bestowed with good fortune. So goes the legend. (You may recall that on the rākhī-pūrṇimā, the sister visits the house of the brother to tie Rākhī)

Thus begins this month of Kārtika, with two important and eagerly awaited festivals.

Kārtika Shukla Navamī

This is a very important tithi for us, Chitrāpur Sāraswats, as our Mat̲h̲ādhipati Parama Pūjya Sadyojāt Shaṅkarāshram Swāmījī was born on this Day.

Kārtika Ekādashī, Utthāna Dwādashī

Ekādashī is very important in Hindū religion. It is the day of fasting and observing austerities. For Vais̲h̲ṇava-s (followers of Shrī Vis̲h̲ṇu and Kṛs̲h̲ṇa) Kārtika-māsa has one of the most important ekādashī-s. On Kārtikī-ekādashī, in Mahārās̲h̲tra, the Vārakarī Sampradāya – the devotees of Vit̲h̲t̲h̲al of Paṇd͟harpur-- walk from Paṇd͟harpur (Vit̲h̲t̲h̲al’s place) to ĀĪandī, where Saint Jñāneshwara’s samād͟hi is situated. In Ās̲h̲ād͟ha, the fourth month of our calendar, on Ekādashī the devotees walk from ĀĪandī to Paṇd͟harpur, while on Kārtikī-ekādashī, the devotees leave Paṇd͟harpur with their pālakī-s to their respective locations.

While we have Ās̲h̲ād͟ha ekādashī as “shayanī-ekādashī” (shayanī means sleeping), Kārtika-ekādashī is called prabodhinī-ekādashī when Shrī Vis̲h̲ṇu is awakened and the tithi coming after prabodhinī-ekādashī is called utthāna dwādashī i.e. dwādashī of getting up. Shrī Vis̲h̲ṇu gets up to resume his work of looking after the Universe, so say our Purāṇa-s.

The end of Chāturmāsa

The four months beginning from Ās̲h̲ād͟ha ekādashī to Kārtika ekādashī constitute the Chāturmāsa or the auspicious four-month period. It is the Hindū belief that during these four months, Shrī Vis̲h̲ṇu takes rest. Sanyāsin-s who are supposed to incessantly tour the country to spread Dharma, (not staying for more than three nights in one place), remain in one place during this period. Our Parama Pūjya Swāmījī observes the Chāturmāsa for two months from Ās̲h̲ād͟ha Pūrṇimā to Bhādrapada Pūrṇimā. This period is spent in sādhanā, religious discourse and observance of austerities.

Do refer to the significance of Chāturmāsa in our Mat̲h̲ publication, “From Pāda Praks̲h̲ālana to Phalamantrāks̲h̲ata”; Read more about Chāturmāsa in our article here: From Pāda Prakshālana to Phalamantrākshata; Also, read our articles on Chāturmāsa, Guru Pūrṇimā, and Sīmollaṅghana.

Tulasī Vivāha

On any one day from Kārtika ekādashī to Kārtika pūrṇimā, (but especially on the ekādashī or the dwādashī day) “Tulasī vivāha” is celebrated to commemorate the marriage of Tulasī with Shrī Vis̲h̲ṇu. Traditionally, the marriage season would start only after Tulasī vivāha.

Legend has it that Vṛndā was the virtuous wife of demon Jālandhara who waged continuous wars with the gods. She was a great devotee of Shrī Vis̲h̲ṇu. However, Vṛndā was deceived by Shrī Vis̲h̲ṇu, making Jālandhara lose his special power and consequently lose the battle with the Deva-s. When Vṛndā realized that she was tricked, she immolated herself in fire.

At that time, Shrī Vis̲h̲ṇu promised that she will be reincarnated as Tulasī, and he would marry her in her new Avatāra. Thus, Tulasī Vivāha is celebrated with Tulasī as the bride and Kṛs̲h̲ņa (Shrī Vis̲h̲ṇu) as the bridegroom. Shāligrāma the holy stone found in the river Narmadā represents Shrī Vis̲h̲ṇu, in this marriage. Tulasī is also known as Haripriyā as she was a great devotee of Shrī Vis̲h̲ṇu and therefore, Tulasī leaves are an essential part of Shrī Vis̲h̲ṇu -Pūjana or while worshipping Kṛs̲h̲ņa.

Kārtika Pūrṇimā

The pūrṇimā (fifteenth day of the bright half of this month) is important to Hindū-s, Sikhs and Jains. It was on this day that Guru Nānak Dev who established Sikhism and became the first Guru of Sikhs, was born. For the Jains this day is important, as it also is the day when Bhagawān Mahāvīra the Jain Tīrthaṅkara attained Nirvāṇa – became one with the Eternal Supreme Being.

In the southern part of India, this Pūrṇimā is celebrated as the day of the birth of Kārtikeya.

This Pūrṇimā is called Tripurī Pūrṇimā. It is believed by the Hindū-s that on this day, Lord Shiva destroyed the invincible fortress of Tripurāsura. Lord Shiva used only a single arrow to destroy the fortress, fulfilling the conditions of the boon given to Tripurāsura, that his three palaces could be destroyed only if one single arrow pierced them. Thus, Shiva freed the Deva-s from the tyranny of Tripurāsura, and is known as Tripurāri. This day is also known as “deva-diwālī”.

In Southern India, there is a tradition of lighting rows of lamps. This is known as Kārthigai Dīpam. In many places they light 360 lamps (signifying 360 days of the year) or 720 (Includes the nights too) or 365 lamps (Solar year), on pūrṇimā night.

The Vais̲h̲ṇava-s believe that Rādhā and Kṛs̲h̲ṇa performed Rāsa Līlā with the gopī-s on this day of pūrṇimā. This period is of great importance to Kṛs̲h̲ṇa followers, like the followers of Chaitanya Mahāprabhu.

Kārtika pūrṇimā is an important tithi for our Shrī Chitrāpur Mat̲h̲. On this day, Lord Bhavānīshaṅkar is taken in procession for “Vanabhojana” to partake of Naivedya in the woods. Here again, we note the significance of the nearness to Nature, behind this festivity.

Vanabhojana

“Vanabhojana”, or taking the idol of our deity to the “Vana” (forest), is an important element in the religious rituals of our temples. In this month of Kārtika, we have “Vanabhojana” with dīpotsava -lighting of lamps, at various sannidhi-s of our deities and guru-samadhi-s as follows:

1. On Kārtika Shukla Chaturdashi, (14th day of the bright half)

Shrīmad Ananteshwara Devasthāna , Viṭṭlā

Shrī Sacchidānand Dattātreya Sannidhi, Kundāpura,

2. On Kārtika Pūrṇimā at Shrī Chitrāpur Mat̲h̲, Shirālī, Vanabhojana is held

3. On Kārtika kṛs̲h̲ṇa dwitīya, at Shrī Umāmaheshwar Devasthāna, Maṅgal̄ūru

4. On Kārtika kṛs̲h̲ṇa navamī, at Shrī Bhanḍīkerī Mat̲h̲, Gokarṇa, and

5. On Kārtika kṛs̲h̲ṇa dashamī at the temple of Shrī Janārdan Dev of Maṅkī, “Vanabhojana” is celebrated.

Samārādhanā

Samārādhanā, is the day on which our respected Guruvarya-s have attained Mahāsamādhi. Kārtika Kṛs̲h̲ṇa Ashṭamī is observed as the Samārādhanā divasa of H.H. Shrīmad Vāmanāshram Swāmījī, at Maṅgal̄ūru Mat̲h̲.

Boita Bandanā (Boat festival) in Orissa

In Orissa, the festival of “Boita Bandanā”, is celebrated. During this festival, small boats made of banana stem and coconut sticks are floated in waters as a commemoration of the great maritime history of the State of Orissa which had maritime relations with foreign countries during the Kaliṅga reign. The Hindū people observe vegetarian food regime in this month.

Pus̲h̲kar Fair

In Rajasthan, near Ajmer, a fair is held from Kārtika ekādashī to Kārtika pūrṇimā, in Pus̲h̲kar Ks̲h̲etra. (We noted above that Tulasī Vivāha can be performed on any one day during this period). This is held in the honour of Lord Brahmā. This fair is home to the largest Camel bazaar in the world. A lot of merrymaking and fun takes place.

Conclusion

During the month of Kārtika, devout Hindū-s take ceremonial dips in the holy rivers. As you would have noted, our festivals center around worshipping and strengthening our bond with Nature. In Tulasī vivāha, we pay obeisance to the Tulasī plant. It is planted ceremoniously and worshipped daily in almost every household that affords a courtyard, specially in rural areas. On Bali pratipadā, the focus is on our agricultural heritage, and we worship Balīrājā who represents a bountiful harvest. We also care for family relationships through our festivals: on Kārtika pratipadā it’s the husband-wife pair, and on Bhāi-dūj it is the brother-sister pair in focus. Worshipping the deities is an inseparable element of these festivals, for instance, Laks̲h̲mī Pūjana is an integral part of Dīpāvali. Chāturmāsa vrata focuses on respecting nature, and observing religious austerities, as does fasting on ekādashī. The more we study our festivals, the more we become aware of how our ancestors had interwoven religion, nature, social customs, physical austerities and so on into our festivals. These ultimately pave the way towards harmonious living, making our spiritual journey smoother.

You would also notice that there is a common thread running through all these festivities and that is our Hindū Dharma, which binds the Nation together. If you are in the south, you would wholeheartedly participate in Kārtigai Dīpam, with your neighbours, or if in Orissa, in the Boitā Bandanā, with the people there. In Punjab you would joyously observe Guruparb. Unity in diversity is not only vividly demonstrated by our Dharma but actively promoted too. The festivals which we celebrate not only make us worship Nature, but also take us closer to Nature. Our religion is truly a great unifying force in making us a great nation, despite its diversity and shades of cultural differences.

Shubham Bhavatu