Magha Mhaino- A Month of Varied Festivities

An auspicious month, the Magha Masa has festivals that range from the austere to the celebratory writes Smt. Beena Savkur

The sun starting its sojourn towards the Northern Hemisphere marks the beginning of the Magha Masa, the eleventh month of the Hindu calendar year. It corresponds to January/February in the Gregorian calendar.

Magha Masa is considered an auspicious time for performing major ceremonies like weddings, Brahmopadesham (thread ceremony), house warmings, etc. Just like the lighting of lamps is considered auspicious during Kartika Masa, Magha Snanam (dip in holy rivers) is the major ritual of Magha Masa. During this period, people bathe before sunrise, preferably during Arunodaya kala in a river, lake or tirthakshetra. A special arghya is given to Lord Madhava and Sun God after this Magha Snanam.

Significance of Magha Snanam

The cold weather that precedes the Magha Masa may have affected some people, adversely causing weakness, body aches, etc. Since the sun’s rays are more intense during Magha Masa and sea water contains common salt which is a cleanser, our sages probably prescribed that one should perform Samudra Snanam for a period of one Ghadiya (48 minutes). This would bring the benefit of cleansing and re-energising our body.

Religious events during Magha Masa

There are many religious events during this month, some austere, others celebratory.

• Ganesha Jayanti

Literally "Ganesha's birthday", Ganesha Jayanti is also known as Tilakunda Chaturthi and Varada Chaturthi. This occasion celebrates the birthday of Ganesha, the lord of wisdom and is a popular festival particularly in the states of Maharashtra and Goa. It is celebrated on Shukla Paksha Chaturthi in the month of Magha.

During this festival, devotees make an idol of Ganesha with turmeric (haldi) or vermillion (sindur). This idol is later submerged in water. Devotees perform puja-s and observe fasts. It is believed that when one prays to Lord Ganesha on this day, all prayers are answered and the year ahead will be filled with peace and prosperity.

• Maghi Navaratri

Apart from the popular Sharadiya and Chaitra Navaratri, people across the country also celebrate two Gupta Navaratri-s - the Magha Gupta Navaratri and Αshadha Gupta Navaratri - with great zeal and pomp. During these two Navaratri-s, those interested in “Tantrik Sadhana” used to worship the Dasha Mahavidya-s of Devi, with emphasis on secret rituals, hence they are called ‘Gupta Navaratri-s'. Magha Gupta Navaratri, celebrated from Pratipada till Navami in the Shukla Paksha of Magha Masa, is a nine-day festival honouring the nine manifestations honouring the Dasha Mahavidya-s of Shakti, the mother Goddess.

If for some reason a family is not able to offer their annual Puja as per the Sankalpa to the Devi on ghatasthapana during Sharadiya Navaratri, this vrata can be performed during Magha Navaratri. Similarly, if any Suvasini was unable to offer Vaina puja to Gowri during Tayi on Bhadrapada Trtiya it can be offered during Magha Navaratri.

• Magha Shukla Trtiya

Magha Shukla Trtiya is observed in Shri Chitrapur Math as the Samaradhana Divasa of H.H. Shrimat Shankarashram Swamiji II. The Divine Sannidhi of Pujya Swamiji is at Gurumath, Mallapur.

• Vasanta Panchami

Vasanta Panchami or Shri Panchami is celebrated on the fifth day of the Shukla Paksha in Magha Masa, and marks the first day of spring. Goddess Saraswati, the presiding deity of Akshara Jnana, the female Divine energy of Learning, Knowledge and Wisdom is said to have been born on this sacred day.

Dedicated to Vak Devi (Goddess Saraswati), this day is considered to be auspicious especially for Aksharabhyasa (initiating a child into education).

Goddess Saraswati is worshipped on this day to rid ourselves of sluggishness, lethargy and ignorance. Traditionally, Brahmin-s are honoured by inviting them to the homes of the Yajamana and are offered food specially cooked for the festival.

Pitr-tarpan (Ancestor worship) is performed, the God of love- Kamadeva - is worshipped and many educational institutions organise special prayers for Saraswati.

Wherever prayers are thus organised, the colour yellow is prominent in use as it symbolizes knowledge, understanding, prosperity, optimism, energy and positivity. Idols of Saraswati are adorned in yellow, people usually wear yellow clothes, and yellow-food is offered to the deity.

• Ratha Saptami

Ratha means chariot. Saptami is a tithi in a lunar month corresponding to the seventh day of both Shukla and Krshna paksha-s. It is considered to be the birth anniversary of Surya Deva, who was born to sage Kashyapa and Aditi.

On this day of Ratha Saptami, the movement of the Sun towards the Northern hemisphere is believed to take definite effect, entering Makara Rashi on Makara Sankramana Day. Traditionally, it is regarded as the day on which the chariot of the Sun God drawn by seven horses, is diverted towards the north-east direction by his charioteer Aruna, thus heralding spring.

The characteristic of the Chariot of Surya Deva is said to be that it has only one wheel, representing the kala-chakra (wheel of time) and seven horses represent the seven colours of light (VIBGYOR). It is also believed that the seven horses represent the seven days of a week. The wheel is known as Samvatsara - Surya Deva stays one month in each Rashi (Zodiac sign) and takes 365 days or 12 months to complete a round of the 12 Rashi-s.

On this day, people take a traditional bath with seven Arka leaves, placing one leaf on the head, two on the shoulders, two on the knees and two on the feet. Arka is commonly called as Jilledu in Telugu, Ekka in Kannada, Erukku in Tamil, and Calotrope (bowstring hemp) in English.

In the traditional homes of Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmin-s, a lamp is made out of poinya (stem of arecanut leaf) and a dipa is lit in it near the Tulasi katto. Also, a dipa is lit on an Arka leaf and Arka tarpana is done in a lake or pond by placing it in the water.

Ratha Saptami holds a special significance for the Chitrapur Saraswat Samaja as it is also our Guru Prapti Diwasa - the day that H.H. Shrimat Parijnanashram Swamiji I arrived at Kotitirtha, Gokarna after intense tapascharya and prayers by our ancestors. On this day, vishesha seva/puja is offered at Shirali Math.

• Bhishmashtami

Magha Masa has numerous days dedicated to Bhishma in various regions of India. Some of the important ones are Bhishma Ashtami, Bhishma Dwadashi and Bhishma Ekadashi. Bhishmashtami as the name signifies is also associated with Bhishma Pitamaha, the most revered character of the great Epic, Mahabharata. It was on this day that Bhishma breathed his last and is commemorated as the day of his Nirvana. Bhishmashtami occurs on the eighth day (Ashtami) of the bright fortnight (Shukla Paksha) in Magha Masa, the day after Ratha Saptami.

• Bhishma Ekadashi

The popular belief is that the Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram (thousand names dedicated to Lord Vishnu) was revealed to the Pandava-s on this day by Bhishma, while lying on a bed of arrows after the Great War in the Mahabharata and in the presence of Lord Krshna, who is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

• Vardhantyutsava - Magha Shukla Navami is also the day we celebrate the Vardhanti-s of Shrivalli Bhuvaneshwari Sannidhi, Shri Mahaganapti Sannidhi, Shrimat Αdya Shankaracharya Sannidhi, Shri Gurupaduka Sannidhi, Shri Ramanjaneya Sannidhi, and Kshetrapala Sannidhi at Shri Chitrapur Math Shirali. On this auspicious occasion, a five-coconut Ganahoma is offered at Shri Mahaganapti Sannidhi. Dwadasha Kalasha Kalabhivrddhi is offered at Shrivalli Bhuvaneshwari Sannidhi, Shri Mahaganapti Sannidhi, Shrimat Αdya Shankaracharya Sannidhi, H.H. Shrimat Parijnanashram Swamiji III Paduka Sannidhi and Shri Ramanjaneya Sannidhi. Sadhaka-s from all-over participate in these celebrations with love and devotion.

• Magha Shukla Trayodashi

Vardhanti of Shri Subrahmanya Sannidhi at Umamaheshwara Devasthana, Mangaluru is celebrated on Magha Shukla Trayodashi.

• Magha Purnima

The full moon day in Magha masa is celebrated as Maha Maghi. This day marks the end of Magha Snana vratam. It is believed that any divine worship, prayer, charity or rites performed on this day is highly meritorious and gives significant spiritual results. Taking a bath in the sea on this day is considered especially beneficial.

• Magha Krshna Trtiya

Vardhanti of Shri Venugopal Sannidhi at Shri Chitrapur Math, Mangaluru is celebrated on Magha Krshna Trtiya.

• Magha Krshna Panchami

An extremely significant and special day for the Chitrapur Saraswat Samaja, Magha Krshna Panchami is celebrated as the Pattabhisheka Vardhanti – The Ordination Day of H.H. Shrimat Sadyojat Shankarashram Swamiji. On this day (27th February) in the year 1997, in the presence of Yativara Jagadguru Shankaracharya of the Sringeri Pitha and Parama Pujya Narayanashram Swamiji, H.H. Sadyojat Shankarashram Swamiji ascended the sacred Pitha as the 11th Mathadhipati of Shri Chitrapur Math. Sadhaka-s celebrate this momentous occasion by offering Paduka pujana and Bhiksha Seva to our revered Guru, and eagerly look forward to Pujya Swamiji’s Amrtvani – Ashirvachana.

• Magha Krshna Shashthi

Vardhanti-s of H.H. Shankarashram I Swamiji Sannidhi and H.H. Keshavashram Swamiji Sannidhi are observed at Shri Chitrapur Math, Shirali on the sixth day of the Krshna Paksha of Magha Masa.

• Maha Shivaratri

Dedicated to Lord Shiva, Mahashivaratri is observed from nightfall of the 13th day to the dawn of the 14th day of the Krshna Paksha in Magha Masa. Worshipping Lord Shiva on this day of Maha Shivaratri is considered especially beneficial for spiritual progress.

Special celebrations are held at Shiva Kshetra-s where lakhs of people gather to offer their obeisance and salutations to Lord Shiva, the great destroyer of sins and the most benevolent God. We, Chitrapur Saraswat-s look forward to participating in the Char Yama Pujana performed by H.H. Swamiji on Mahashivaratri.

At Shirali, Lord Bhavanishankar is brought out at night in the Sabhagrha, for offering the Char Yama Pujana. The Char Yama Pujana lasts the whole night, beginning from around 10 p.m. and concluding around 6 a.m. the next morning, after Teerth Vitarana by Parama Pujya Swamiji

In addition to being a religiously significant month, Magha masa marks the beginning of the spring season when nature starts blooming once again with the growth of fresh, new leaves and flowers all around-a time of the year that many people enjoy and look forward to.

Resources:

Shri Keshav Sorab; Wikipedia; inidanmandirs.blogspot.com, hindupad.com; Utsava - Parijna Publication; Shri Chitrapur Math Calendar.)

Photos and illustrations: https://commons.wikimedia.org licensed under CC BY-SA, CC BY, CC BY-ND, CC BY-SA