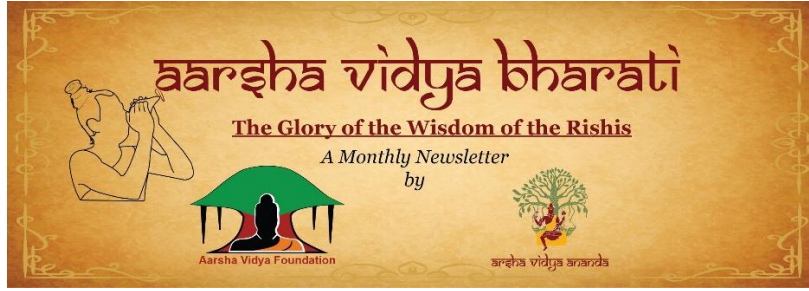


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# Aarsha Vidya Bharati - Feb 2022

## Magha-Phalguna 2078

A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



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## Living our Traditions

### Vasant Panchami

By Sraboni Chaudhuri, Mumbai

**Vasant Panchami**, also called **Saraswati Puja** in honor of the goddess Saraswati, is a festival that marks the preparation for the arrival of spring. Vasant Panchami also marks the start of preparation for Holi which takes place forty days later.

Every year on the fifth day of the bright half of the Hindu lunisolar calendar month of *Māgha*, which typically falls in late January or February. Spring is known as the "King of all Seasons", so the festival commences forty days in advance. It is generally winter-like in northern India, and more spring-like in central and western parts of India on Vasant Panchami, which gives credence to the idea that spring is actually in full bloom 40 days after the Vasant Panchami day.

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This year, **Vasant Panchami**,  
marking the arrival of spring,  
will be celebrated on **February 5**.

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It is said that Brahma ji created the universe and wanted to see it with his own eyes. Hence, he set out on a journey but was disappointed with the complete silence and loneliness of everyone on planet Earth. After giving it a lot of thought, he took some water in his Kamandalu and sprinkled it in the air. Devi appeared from a tree and was requested to play something so that the Earth was not silent. She blessed the people of the Earth with her voice, filling the planet with music. That Devi came to be known as Saraswati or Veena *Vādinī*.



Saraswati is the goddess of wisdom, intellect, and learning. Saraswati has four arms, representing the four aspects of human personality in learning – the mind, intellect, alertness, and ego. She has a book in her hand, a *mala* of crystal beads (poetry), the veena (music) and a pot of sacred water representing the purity of these three arts and their power to purify human thought. She is often pictured seated on a lotus or a peacock, wearing a white dress.

Yellow colour holds a special meaning on this festival. Several spring flowers are yellow in colour, hence making

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yellow the dominant colour of Vasant Panchami. Also, it is believed to be the favourite colour of Goddess Saraswati.

A day dedicated to Goddess Saraswati, Vasant Panchami is also known as Shri Panchami or Saraswati Panchami. This is also the day when little children are introduced to alphabets in a beautiful ceremony known as 'Akṣara-Abhyāsam' or 'Vidyārambham'. It is a big day for schools and colleges in different parts of the country. Later cultural programmes are held and people sing and dance, and make merry.

In the eastern part of the country, all educational institutions are expected to remain shut on the day, and families insist people stay away from textbooks and other books of knowledge just for this one day, so as to appease and respect the goddess and seek her blessings. Books and musical instruments are kept next to the deity to seek blessings of Ma Saraswati. As children we looked forward to this since we didn't have to study that day. A special fruit (kool in Bengali, ber in Hindi) is offered to the goddess and is eaten only after the puja in that season.



Another narrative connected to Vasant Panchami involves a time the god of love, *Kāmadeva*, tried to wake Shiva from his meditation. Vasant Panchami is hence remembered not only as the day *Kāmadeva* was asked to stir Shiva's desire for Parvati, but also as the time of year *Kāmadeva* stimulates the passions of both the earth and its people, as the lands come alive with new blossoms.

The founding of the Deo-Surya Temple (a shrine dedicated to the Sun God Surya in the Indian state of Bihar) is also celebrated by many on Vasant Panchami. The whole family usually comes together to celebrate the festival. A symbol of wisdom and spiritual light, Surya brings an end to winter, providing the sunlight needed for trees to grow new leaves, and flowers to blossom. After months of cold and short days, Surya's warmth invigorates and energizes people out of reclusion, inspiring them to make fruitful plans and take on new challenges.

In Karnataka, this day is celebrated by mainly honouring the Gods that have blessed them with good crops and a bountiful harvest. Different delicious dishes including payasam are quite common.

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