

KARTIK MONTH IN VRINDAVAN DHAAM - SPIRITUALITY AND CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS

By

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Abstract

This conceptual paper focuses on the religious and spiritual significance of Kartik month in Vrindavan. This paper would also cover the significance of religious activities in Vrindavan and a few cultural aspects of Vrindavan during Kartik month. This holy place is famous for its temples, ghats, forests, Tulsi (Vrinda), devotees and their day-night chanting of Hari naam, positive energy and air, Radha Naam Japa, circumambulation (parikrama), tapa and penance. Vrindavan and the Kartik month hold special significance in Hinduism, particularly in the context of Lord Krishna's life and mythology. Several Krishna devotees from all across the globe visit Vrindavan and stay for months and years performing devotional activities and getting inner peace, solace, Bhakti and Moksha. Vrindavan, located near Mathura, is an important pilgrimage hub in the Braj region that attracts thousands of pilgrims believing that Lord Krishna spent his childhood with Radha Rani and Gopis. The name of Vrindavan comes from the words 'Vrinda', which means Tulsi (basil), and 'van', meaning forest. Devotees are seen smearing dust (Vrajraj) on their foreheads due to its sacredness. The barks of trees in Vrindavan are hollow, and the Braj Bhoomi is dry, but the tree remains loaded with green leaves throughout the year. The research has proposed a conceptual framework on Kartik Month in Vrindavan Dhaam and Spirituality & Cultural Celebrations in Vrindavan during Kartik month. Data has been collected from few sources available on the related theme and based on observations and experiences of the researcher in Vrindavan Dhaam during Kartik month and few visits to Vrindavan

Keywords: *vrindavan, kartik month, chanting, religious, spiritual.*

Introduction

Vrindavan, also known as Brij Mandal, has a special importance among the various pilgrimage sites of India and is

very famous for dozens of temples, sacredness and purity, devotion and bhakti, solace, divinity and Urja (positive energy) with an essence of

spirituality. Vrindavan is a town located in the Mathura district of Uttar Pradesh, India, known for its deep association with Lord Krishna and Radha Rani. It is believed that Lord Krishna spent his early childhood playing his enchanting flute and engaging all the Gopis, cows and Gwalas living in Vrindavan to relish the enchanting sound of his flute emanating from Krishna, making it a manifestation of purity, divinity and solace. When Krishna used to play his flute, having all the powers to attract all living beings, both human and animal, Gopi's Gwala's specially filled them with a sense of peace, joy and serenity, finally leading them to fall in love with Krishna, leading to a state of ecstasy. Radha Rani was the most favorable Gopi of Shri Krishna, and he used to love her deeply. Vrindavan is a place where the love story of Lord Krishna and Goddess Radha Rani bloomed, along with all the notorious sides of Krishna. Vrindavan is a well-known divine place for tranquility and serenity, witnessing a myriad of pilgrims visiting throughout the year, especially in Kartik month, to perform their religious rituals and parikrama with utmost zeal and zest. Vrindavan is

well known for its numerous temples, ghats, and sacred sites associated with Krishna's life. Few places are linked with Lord Krishna Leela's as he wandered in the forest of Vraj along with his companions and performed Maharas with Gopis. Celebrating Kartik month in Vrindavan holds special significance in Hinduism. Kartik, also known as Damodara or Urja month in the name of Urjeswari Radha Rani, one divine couple that has specifically captured the imaginations of Hindu devotees for centuries is Shri Krishna and Radha Rani. Their divine love story is elaborated on in the Gita Govinda, authored by Jayadeva. Krishna is considered the incarnation of the deity Vishnu, who took human birth to set the world back on the right course, and after a certain period of time, Krishna had to leave Vrindavan to play a key role in killing several asuras and also to play a very significant role in the Mahabharata.

According to Vaishnavas, the divine true love of Radha Rani for Lord Krishna is how individuals should love God. For centuries, the eternal love of Krishna and Radha Rani has been an inspiration for human love for God and an exemplary example of the union of

an individual soul with the divine supreme soul. The reason behind not getting married to each other is their divine life's purpose to establish righteousness, uphold dharma, spread goodwill and well-being in society and the universe, and guide humanity towards righteousness and spiritual enlightenment to fulfil their divine missions.

Objectives

1. To give an insight on Vrindavan as a prominent pilgrimage site associated with Lord Krishna and Radha Rani.
2. Exploring the religious significance of Kartik month and Vrindavan.
3. To describe how Kartik month is celebrated in Vrindavan by devotees.
4. Examine the few specific rituals & practices observed in Vrindavan during Kartik month, like the circumambulation of Vrindavan, Barsana and Govardhan, offering Ghee Deeps (Deepdaan) to all the deities and performing austerities.

Literature Review

Kartik Month is also known as Damodara or Urja Month in the name

of Radha Rani. This month is full of Vatsalya Bhakti Ras. People all across the globe visit Vrindavan and perform religious rituals to get Krishna blessings. Sanatana Goswami's Hari Bhakti Vilasa and Srila Rupa Goswami's Mathura Mahatmya gave a lot of insight and significance to this glorious Kartik month in Vrindavan. The event when Krishna taking mortar and crawled to the Yamalarjun trees growing in the courtyard of Nanda Maharaj and delivered the two sons of Kuber, namely Nalakuvara and Manigriva, took place in Kartik month. The significance of visiting Vrindavan is mentioned, and one who visits Vrindavan attains immortal Krishna and his bhakti. (Mathura Mahatmya, shloka220). It is believed that by offering a lamp to Lord Krishna Damodara during Kartik month, one is relieved of all the sins committed in thousands and millions of births and attains the eternal spiritual world. Performing any rituals in the name of Lord Krishna Damodara & Radha Rani during Kartik month lasts for one hundred lifetimes, deepening the spirituality (Aadhyatma) of devotees. The last five days of Kartik month are

known as Bhishma Panchak, as those who are unable to perform Kartik month daily rituals and fasting may perform all the rituals in these last five days of Kartik, giving them the benefits of the whole Kartik month. Deepawali celebration, Govardhan puja, Ahoi Ashtami, Rama Ekadashi, Ras Leela performances, Lakshmi Pujan, Bhaiya Dooj, Chhath Puja, and Tulasi-Vivah are the cultural festivals celebrated during Kartik month. During Kartik, Vrindavan remains full of devotion through continued chanting, devotees' ecstasy in Bhakti, traditional arts, a massive influx of people in this religious place, and enduring social, cultural and religious significance. During this month, devotees sing Damodarashatakam during evening Aarti timings, glorifying the Lord's pastimes. Devotees keep fasting and performing austerities during Kartik, especially on Ekadashi and on some significant days.

Kartik month is the transition from Sadhna to Kaivalya. There is an event when Bhishma Pitamah was on the bed of arrows and asked to leave his body in the Kaivalya pada, as that's the time to harvest the fruits of life. The lamp of lightning is an indication of knowledge,

wisdom, awareness, self-exploration, self-introspection, enlightenment, and ultimate liberation, which means unification with God.

During bustling Kartik, it reaches its enthusiastic peak. The temple room becomes crowded, and a platform is built for the musicians, extending out into the courtyard. During this month, devotees rise daily at 4:00 a.m. and chant congregationally on their Japa beads. The pilgrimage visits Sapt-devalaya, in the forests of Madhuvan and Talavan, and the sacred lakes like Radha Kunda and Kusum Sarovar, as well as Ter Kadamba and several temple visits offering Ghee lamps. Tatiya Sthaan, where thousands of saints reside and perform Bhakti, sacrificed their social and material lives to attain Krishna Bhakti. Govardhan Parikrama, where devotees walk around Govardhan Hill, is a significant ritual during Kartik. Temples are adorned with flowers and decorations, along with cultural events, devotional music, and dance performances. Rasa Lila Performances—various cultural and artistic performances—are organized during Kartik. Thus, Kartik month in

Vrindavan is a time of heightened spirituality, devotion, and cultural celebrations. Aadhyatm Ras (spiritual essence) is the profound spiritual experience and realization that devotees seek through their devotion and love for Lord Krishna, which is the essence of spirituality. Devotees seek to attain a higher state of consciousness, oneness with the divine Krishna and an experience of God's presence via meditation and contemplation on Lord Krishna's divine form and pastimes, intense longing and yearning for the divine, and ecstatic experiences, such as tears of joy, spiritual visions, and divine presence. Krishna devotees understand the truth of life: the material world is temporary and illusory, while the spiritual connection with Lord Krishna is eternal and real.

Vrindavan Mahatmya, also known as the Vrindavan Dham Mahatmya, is a sacred scripture in the Hindu tradition acclaiming the divine significance and sanctity of Vrindavan, a part of the Skanda Purana, one of the 18 Maha puranas in Hinduism, and specifically, it is considered a portion of the

Vrindavan Kanda (section) of the Skanda Purana.

Conclusion

Vrindavan holds immense spiritual significance and is a sacred land of Lord Krishna, where he performed many of his divine Leela's and did maharas with Gopis. Devotees visit Vrindavan to connect with the divine presence of Lord Krishna and deepen their spiritual practice.

Vrindavan is dotted with numerous temples and shrines dedicated to Lord Krishna and Radha, his eternal consort. The most famous temples are Saptdevalaya, Banke Bihari Temple, ISKCON Temple, Radha Raman Temple, Govind Dev temple and Yamuna River (Yamuna Maharani). These temples are famous all over the world for their exquisite architecture and vibrant devotional activities. The Saptdevalaya in Vrindavan refers to a group of seven ancient and significant temples dedicated to various deities that are closely associated with the life and legends of Lord Krishna. These temples are considered highly sacred by devotees and pilgrims on religious pilgrimages. The Sapt Devalaya

temples are Madan Mohan Temple, Govind Dev Temple, Gopinath Temple renowned for its architectural beauty and intricate carvings, Radha Raman temple dedicated to Lord Krishna in his form as Radha Raman believed to be self-manifested (Swayambhu) and originally worshipped by Gopala Bhatta Goswami, Radha Damodar temple of Damodar known for having a unique neck ornament (kanthi) and is associated with the legendary story of young Krishna being bound by Mother Yashoda, Radha Shyam Sundar temple dedicated to Lord Krishna and Radha and known for its devotion to the divine couple and their eternal love, Radha Gokul Ananda temple dedicated to Radha and Krishna in their childhood forms. The Sapt Devalaya temples are an integral part of Vrindavan's religious and cultural heritage.

The Yamuna River holds great significance in Vrindavan. The river is considered sacred in Hinduism and plays a central role in the town's religious and spiritual life. The Yamuna River is revered as one of the holiest rivers in Hinduism, along with the Ganges (Ganga), and personified as a

goddess having purified and sanctifying properties. The Yamuna River is intimately linked to the life and leelas (pastimes) of Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna performed several divine activities and Leela's along the banks of the Yamuna during his childhood in Vrindavan as an integral part of his daily life. The Yamuna River is associated with the legendary Raas Leela. Krishna played his flute by the Yamuna, and the river's waters danced to the melodious tunes. Devotees gather to participate in the daily Yamuna aarti by offering lamps and prayers to the Yamuna River, creating a spiritual and vibrant atmosphere. In Vrindavan, the Yamuna River is not only a physical entity but also a symbol of spiritual purity and divine connection. During Kartik, devotees and pilgrims flock to the banks of the Yamuna in Vrindavan to perform various rituals and observances to enhance their spiritual connection and accrue merits. In the Yamuna River, Lord Krishna defeated the venomous serpent, Kaliya, and danced on its multiple hoods. This Leela is a symbol of the triumph of good over evil.

A significant Kartik ritual involves lighting lamps and diyas (oil lamps) near the Yamuna River and various temples premises in front of Lord Krishna and Tulsi during the evening. Devotees offer these lamps to all deities singing devotional songs damodarastakam.

During Kartik, Govardhan Puja is celebrated with great enthusiasm. Devotees prepare elaborate offerings and perform rituals on the banks of the Yamuna, commemorating Lord Krishna's lifting of the Govardhan Hill.

Deepdan refers to the act of offering ghee lamps to the river during Kartik. Vrindavan is intrinsically linked to the concept of Radha Naam. In Vrindavan, Radha is revered as the embodiment of divine love and devotion. She is often considered the personification of the ultimate love for Lord Krishna. Radha-Krishna devotion is a cornerstone of Bhakti Yoga, and Vrindavan is considered the primary place where the divine love of Radha and Krishna reached its pinnacle.

Chanting and meditation are seen to transcend the material world, purify the heart, and attain oneness with the

divine. It is believed that Radha's name has the power to transform a devotee's consciousness and lead them closer to Lord Krishna.

The Raas Purnima, celebrated on the night of the full moon in Kartik month, marks the re-enactment of Krishna's Rasa Lila.

Radha Kund and Shyam Kund, two sacred ponds in Vrindavan, are associated with Krishna's love for Radha and are visited by pilgrims seeking spiritual purification.

Keshi Ghat in Vrindavan is a place where Lord Krishna tamed the demon horse Keshi and freed the Yamuna River from its pollution. Keshi Ghat in Vrindavan commemorates this Leela.

Nidhivan, also known as Nidhivan Temple, is a famous and highly revered sacred site in Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh, India. Nidhivan holds a special place in the hearts of devotees and is known for its spiritual and mystical significance.

Recommendation

Temples and Krishna Leela in Vrindavan are not just collections of

places and stories; they but it is a living and breathing spiritual places where one attains real eternal joy, peace, peace and feels the divine love of Radha and Krishna. Devotees from all over the world visit Vrindavan to immerse themselves in the love and. The divine pastimes of Lord Krishna in Vrindavan inspire a deep spiritual connection, devotion, and love among his followers, re-enforcing divine love and one's surrender to God. The architectural beauty of the temple in Vrindavan is very famous all over the world. Vrindavan is also known for its serene and peaceful surroundings, beautiful garden, well-maintained pathways, and unique spiritual aura, which make it a must-visit destination for those seeking to experience the divine love and playfulness of Lord Krishna in Vrindavan, adding to the spiritual ambiance. Kartik is considered one of the holiest months in the Hindu lunar calendar, and it holds a special place in the hearts of the devotees in Vrindavan. Kartik month is famous for its heightened spirituality and devotion in Vrindavan, which propagates the rich spiritual traditions associated with Lord Krishna. Their dedication and love for

the divine are expressed through various rituals and acts of devotion during this sacred month to attain spiritual realization and oneness with the divine Lord Krishna, the divine love of Radha and Krishna. Radha is seen as the epitome of devotion, and her love for Krishna serves as a model for their own spiritual aspirations. Radha-Krishna devotion is central to their worship. Renunciation and simplicity and dedicating themselves to the service of Lord Krishna is also significant features of devotees. Devotees actively engage in seva and selfless service to the deities and the temple community. This service can include cooking, cleaning, singing, and assisting in various temple activities.

Vrindavan is a devotional place where devotees may come to immerse themselves in the spiritual atmosphere and participate in the daily rituals and festivals associated with Lord Krishna by outreaching their efforts to promote the practice of Bhakti Yoga through their unwavering dedication and love for Lord Krishna. Vrindavan is the abode of the Lord and a place where divine love and devotion reach their zenith.

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