

English Prose

Author: Swati Singh

Spring – renewal of life

Spring is the time of renewal of life. Nature renews lives every spring without ever being lazy about it. Renewal of life is as much a part of the life cycle as death is! We humans, all over the world, recognize it, acknowledge it and herald it with as much delight as nature intends to.

In the Bengali culture there are festivities that declare the advent of spring. One such festival is Saraswati Puja. Saraswati is the Goddess of learning and wisdom. We begin our educational journey by learning how to write the letters of the Bengali language at the feet of Goddess Saraswati from the very person who represents learning – and he happens to be the priest. Young girls dress in vibrant golden-yellow while the boys wear exotic clothing to appear with their new, clean slates and chinks in front of the deity. Slates are good for writing. In most parts, the purpose of using Slates is perhaps economic, for a beginner. Besides if a child starts writing on a slate, it develops good handwriting. Slates can be cleaned with water and dried out to write on it all over again. It is fascinating to see how those age old customs are still carried out quite the same way in traditional Bengal.

On the heels of Saraswati Puja comes Holi; it's celebrated with much opulence. The day before Holi, "Holika" is burnt after dark with cheers; "Holika" represents ills of past winter. In preparation for Holi, powdery dusts called "Abil" along with other colored powders are sold in local shops; these colors range from vibrant yellow, to pale green, to red, fuchsia, blue, gold, purple. Children of all ages, young and old, buy these dusts in large quantities to throw

at each other to commemorate Holi. The fervor of Holi sometimes gets out of hands with over-enthusiastic crowds. Certain neighborhoods of North Calcutta display parade of colors on the sidewalks providing delightful treat to the eyes! One popular belief is that these colored-dusts have medicinal effects. It can ward off horrific diseases like measles, chicken pox and other ailments; such diseases often killed people in large numbers in olden days.

Besides my culture, other cultures seem to herald the advent of spring as well. For the Christians spring comes with merriment of Easter. Jesus is believed to have resurrected in spring which is celebrated as Easter.

On a rather not so sweet note the spring also marks the exodus of the Jews from captivity in Egypt; they observe "Passover" during this time. They did not finish baking their breads before they fled in fear of persecution. Thus Passover is commemorated by eating flat breads. Yet, even for the Jews, it was the time for renewal of life with renewed hope in a new land. It is interesting to note that spring means LIFE and somehow we all manage to give a sense to it.

Flora and fauna of nature invite the birds and the animals for courtship; they mate and bring new lives to the world in spring. It is a busy time for plants as well; sprouts appear everywhere. Suddenly the bare grounds wear magical green with effervescent colors of wild flowers. A rebirth of life occurs. The skylines appear colorful with tree-blossoms. Bees get busy with pollination, working round the clock at the call of nature. Glaciers melt making water available for lives to bloom. The sun gets warmer, stays longer in the horizon to provide bountiful of daylight. Life cycle begins all over again; and so I join in the choir of nature - 'roses are red, violets are blue, and spring in air is naturally blissful'!