

Rituals of Karthika Masam: Cultural Significance, Scientific Perspective & Disseminate Traditional Wisdom through Modern Interpretation

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Abstract

Karthika Masam is one of the holiest months in the lunar calendar of Hindus, Karthika Masam is of great significance in the state of Telangana as well as other southern states of India. This month is devoted to both Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu, with various ceremonies of worship, discipline, and care for Mother Earth being observed throughout the month. This study mainly aims to understand the pulse of the society, especially the youth about the ancient rituals. A survey was conducted for 100 participants aged 20 to over 50 to assess their views on Karthika masam, its spiritual and scientific significance, environmental awareness, and self-discipline through a targeted questionnaire. The results have depicted that participants have recognized rituals such as fasting, Tulasi puja, Vana bhojanam, deepam lighting to be helpful in personal as well as community well-being. The youth participants are more inclined towards scientific and psychological aspects of these rituals. The study has concluded that Karthika masam rituals act as a medium for mental well-being, community well-being, sustainable living, and are filled with discipline and ethics. It calls for the need to preserve the cultural heritage, ancient rituals that provide solutions to modern problems.

Key words: Karthika masam, Tulasi Puja, Vana Bhojanam, cultural heritage

1. Introduction

India, a nation full with festivals, rituals, and cultural history. Since the beginning, they have been an integral element of civilization. Rituals and festivals play a significant part in integrating spiritual and ethical ideas. They are part of socializing and communal gathering. These traditions and ritual practices are passed down from one generation through various methods such as scriptures, oral narratives, communal practices. These traditions play an important role in guarding the Indian culture and guiding these rituals in sustaining the health, morality and communal peace. One of the most significant months of the lunar calendar is the Karthika Masam. It holds a revered place in the Hindu customs and traditions. Observed mostly during the months of October-

November, it is the eighth month of Hindu calendar and widely spread across India. It marks its beginning with the full moon day of Āśvina and concludes on full moon day of Karthika Masam (Tagare) offers extreme auspicious time for spiritual growth, purification and achieving our goals. It holds a deep spiritual and ecological importance mainly in South India and Telangana. According to the Skanda Purana, Padma purana, Brahma purana, Karthika Masam worship is dedicated to Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu (Deshpande; Tagare). It marks the triumph of good over evil. According to these Puranas “no month is like the month of Kartik”.

The Puranas have described various rituals and customs that are to be followed during Karthika Masam. These rituals include Karthika snanam, Deepa Daanam, Tulasi Puja, Rudrabhishekam, Fasting and Chanting and customs like Vana Bhojanam in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. However, these rituals have scientific, environmental and social significance in addition to the spiritual significance. In spite of the significance of Karthika Masam in culture, not much research has been carried out regarding the scientific, ecological, and psychological significance of Karthika Masam along with its awareness among people, particularly the younger generation. There is an acute lack of interdisciplinary research linking the traditions followed during this period with the scientific explanation of these traditions. The current research thus seeks to fill this void.

2. Review of Literature

In ancient Hindu texts such as Skanda Purana and Padma Purana, the spiritual significance of Karthika Masam and the significance of rituals such as Deepa Daanam, Tulasi Pooja, fasting, and Karthika Snanam have been mentioned in detail. It is believed that these rituals foster purity, devotion, and discipline.

There are various scientific and social studies regarding the significance of traditional rituals. Fasting, meditation, and bathing in the mornings promote both mental and physical health (Anton et al.; Cain et al.; Álvarez-Pérez et al.), while Tulasi was believed to help in air purification and act as a medicine plant (Cohen). Socially, practices such as Vana Bhojanam, help in developing social bonding and continuity.

The environmental significance of these traditional practices is also evident from recent studies. These practices include the usage of biodegradable substances and sustainable lifestyles. However, very few interdisciplinary studies have focused on all aspects of these rituals such as cultural, scientific, environmental, and psychological aspects. Thus, the current study attempts to bridge this gap.

3. Methodology

The current research has been undertaken in the form of a cross-sectional survey to analyze the cultural, scientific, environmental, and sociological significance of Karthika Masam rituals. A sample of 100 respondents, comprising both male and female members between 18 and above 50 years of age, has been selected from Telangana on a convenient basis.

A questionnaire containing demographic information along with objective multiple-choice questions regarding the rituals and their significance has been adopted. The questionnaire has been reviewed and tested by subject specialists through the pilot survey before distributing the same among respondents.

For collecting data, a Google Form survey was conducted. Participants could provide their responses on a voluntary basis. Percentage and frequency analysis have been performed through Microsoft Excel for analyzing data, which has been displayed in the form of pie-charts, and bar graphs.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

A total of 100 people took part in the survey, consisting of members of various ages, gender, and occupations. The female members made up the majority in the survey. The majority of participants fell within the age bracket of 20-30 years, followed by members over 50 years as per figure 1.

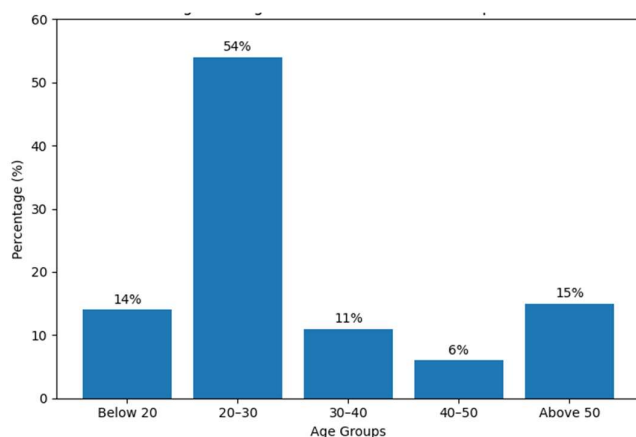


Figure 1: Depicting age distribution of the participants .

4.2 Documentation and Practice of Karthika Masam Rituals

From the wide range of rituals carried out during Karthika Masam, deepa daanam ritual was the most widely practiced ritual by the participants (51%), followed by tulasi pooja (31.6%) as per figure 2. Most participants performed rituals regularly each day during this period, while many had been practicing these rituals ever since their childhood.

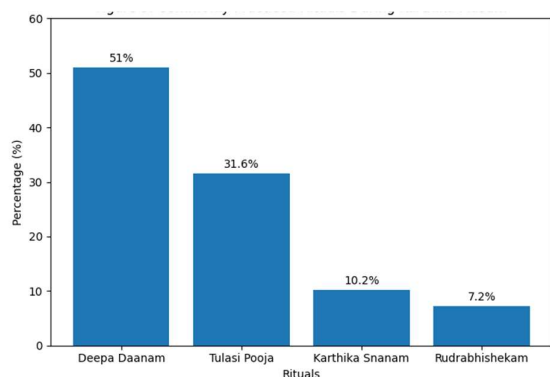


Figure 2: Commonly Practiced rituals during Kathika Masam

4.3 Spiritual and Psychological Significance

Karthika Masam was mostly viewed by most participants as representing purity, devotion, and harmony with the environment. The rituals were considered beneficial for providing emotional stability, stress relief, and discipline (Figure 3).

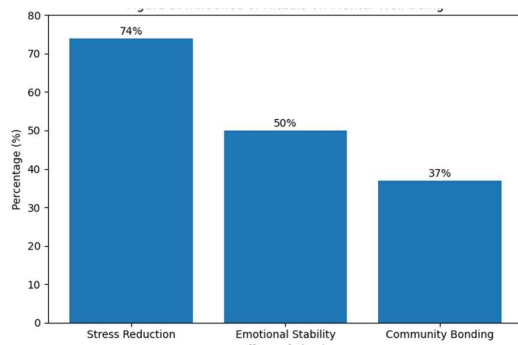


Figure 3: Influence of rituals

4.4 Scientific, Health, and Environmental Perspectives

The majority of the participants believed that Karthika Masam ritual activities were beneficial not only to people's health but also the sustainability of the environment. For instance, morning bathing, fasting, meditation, and use of biodegradable products were considered conducive for improving immunity and clarity of mind, and promoting ecological living as depicted in figure 4.

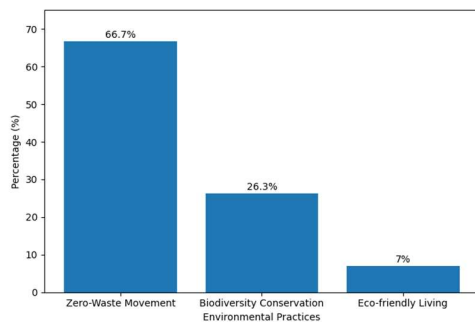


Figure 4: Environmental Relevance

4.5 Awareness and Preservation of Traditional Knowledge

Social media and temple platforms were highlighted as the best means of communicating information about Karthika Masam activities (Figure 5). The participants stressed that cultural education, digitization of culture, and involvement of the youth in cultural activities are essential for maintaining traditions.

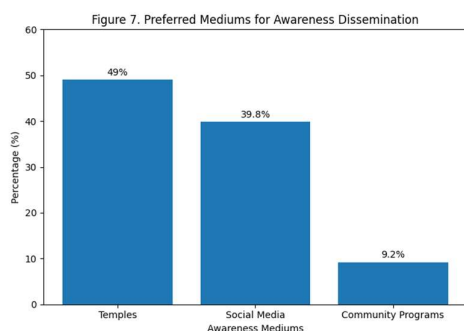


Figure 5: Preferred mediums of awareness dissemination

5. Discussion

The present study on Karthika Masam ritual emphasises that these rituals continue to hold cultural, spirituals and social reverence in modern society. Participants adhere to the traditions and evolving interpretations of its significance. The major rituals followed by the participants were Deepa daanam and Tulasi pooja. Though

these are traditionally spiritual practices, many young participants associated these rituals to mental well being, environmental awareness and healthy living. One of the primary observations in this study was the psychological, emotional environmental benefits that are linked with these rituals. Previous research has shown that chanting, meditation and periodical practice of rituals can positively influence mental health (Álvarez-Pérez et al.) Practices like Van Bhojanam were perceived by the participants as a chance to bond with the community similar to the collective prayers. They feel that these rituals help in decreasing the community isolation and increase the social interaction.

The principal practice of Tulasi Puja by many of the participants has several medical benefits that were scientifically proven. Tulasi has many antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and air purifying properties that were mentioned in many research articles (Kumar et al.). Along with this, the present study also highlights the significance of rituals in improving immunity. Karthika snanam- cold water bath and fasting were perceived as cleansing practices. Karthika Snanam was particularly viewed as a method of improving physical well being. Many studies have shown that cold water baths improve blood circulation, immunity and reduce stress (Cain et al.) Research says that fasting acts as a metabolic switch and helps in improving insulin sensitivity (Anton et al.) Likewise Deepa daanam using traditional oil, biodegradable leaf plates, and cotton wicks contribute to safeguarding the environment and calming the atmosphere. However, scientific evidence is required.

While these are important findings, limitations of the study include the small number of participants used and convenience sampling that might limit the generalizability of the results. Self-reporting can also bring some response bias. Future studies should use randomized large samples and employ experimental designs to be able to make causal inferences. In conclusion, the results of the study show the importance of looking at culture in terms of science, not just beliefs.

6. Conclusion

According to the present study, apart from being culturally and spiritually significant activities, the Karthika Masam rituals are associated with mental wellness, building social relationships, adopting healthy living styles, and ecological consciousness. Survey results suggest that individuals, particularly the younger generation, have been increasingly interested in knowing about the significance of their rituals from the perspective of science and practicality. Fasting, Deepa Daanam, Tulasi Pooja, and other rituals were perceived to improve one's self-discipline, maintain emotional balance, and promote sustainable living styles. It is important to preserve the knowledge of the rituals by adopting a scientific approach to make them more relevant to the current times.

Further research could be done on a larger sample size along with scientifically analyzing the impact of the rituals on health, psychology, and environment using an experimental approach. Awareness programs and digital documentation can further assist in maintaining the cultural heritage of India.

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