

Pūjā 101 = पूजा दर्शन

The **topic** of my talk today is: "**Pūjā 101**", i.e. the Pūjā basics. What is the **purpose** of doing a Pūjā ? What are **basic principles** to be followed for doing a Pūjā ? What are the essential & preferred **items to have** in the Pūjā ? What is the right Pūjā **procedure** ? These are some of the questions that come to the mind, while we do a Pūjā.

A. Purpose of a Pūjā

- The purpose of doing a Pūjā is to attain, enjoy & share material prosperity and peace of mind, by pleasing one or more deities, i.e. Gods & Goddesses.
- We invite our friends & relatives to participate. Thereby it becomes a social get-together as well, in addition to the religious ceremony.
- Pūjā is done at numerous times in the life of a human being. A few important occasions are: Before & soon after birth of a child, at various stages in life in the form of Sanskārs (= sacraments), at the marriage, soon after death, even regularly after death, and while starting to live in a new home (= गृह प्रवेश).

B. Basic Principles of a Pūjā

- **Time** spent for the entire Pūjā should be reasonable.
- **Money** spent should be well used, and not wasted.
- **Simplicity** of procedure, so that every person can manage to do a Pūjā.
- Education and **lessons** to be learnt, self-development, and utility to life.

Responsibility of the Priest: The person conducting the Pūjā is called the Pujāri (पुजारी), Purohit (पुरोहित), or priest. He should chant all the Mantras (मंत्र) correctly & clearly, and know their meaning as much as possible. While starting the Pūjā, it is advisable that the priest briefly explains the purpose of the Pūjā, main deity, sequence of activities to be done and the estimated time, to the audience for better appreciation by them.

Responsibility of the Audience: The audience should pay attention to the words & actions, and listen patiently. If they know the wordings of any Mantra by heart, they can join the priest in reciting it, if so invited by him.

Chanting of the Mantras: The Pūjā is done by the Kartā (कर्ता) i.e. the "doer", who is in principle the host or any one from the family or friends as designated. The priest is only a medium. Ideally, all the Mantras should be spoken by the host as well. But to avoid their mispronunciation and to save time, the priest naturally recites all the Mantras, but requests the host to repeat only some.

C. Components of a Pūjā:

Pūjā is the perfect combination of Bhakti Yog (भक्ति योग), Gyān Yog (ज्ञान योग) and Karm Yog (कर्म योग). The essential items used in a Pūjā are called Pūjā Sāmagri (पूजा सामग्री), and Upchār (उपचार). Minimum Upchārs are five called 5-Upchārs, then 10-Upchārs, 16-Upchārs, or sometimes even more. The well-known ones are:

आवाहन, आसन, पाद्य, अर्घ्य, आचमन, स्नान, वस्त्र, यज्ञोपवीत, आभूषण, गन्ध, पुष्प, धूप, दीप, नैवेद्य, आचमन, ताम्बूल, दक्षिणा, स्तवपाठ, तर्पण, नमस्कार, प्रदक्षिणा, पुष्पांजलि ।

- Other items normally required are: प्रतिमा, चौकी, शंख, घण्टा, कलश, आचमनी, कुश, नारियल, पंचामृत, अक्षत, कुमकुम, हल्दी, चंदन, मौली, तुलसी, आसन ।
- **Water** is used for Âchman and internal & external cleaning of the host & priest, and symbolic bath of the deities.
- **Fire** is in the form of Dīpak & Havan. It was worshipped in all ancient religions. Fire supposedly protects from all diseases & evil powers. Fire is a messenger & medium of communication between the humans & Gods.
- **Food** can be plain water, or a large variety of food (all vegetarian without any onion or garlic).
- नैवेद्य = भोग = Bhog: Food offering to the deities (gods in the form of idols).
- प्रसाद = Prasāḍ (literally means generosity): Food items consumed by humans, partaken from the deities.
- Pay special attention to the **facing positions** of the deity, priest and host.
- **Methods to use the Pūjā water:** By thumb + middle finger + index finger, Âchmani, Kush, and a flower.
- If any items required to be offered are not easily available, then we do मानसिक (mental) offering of those items "by imagining" and so declaring to the deity.

D. Pūjā Vidhi: A large number of activities are performed by the priest, from the starting to the completion of the Pūjā. Precise activities and their sequence always vary slightly depending on the authors of written Pūjā books, place of Pūjā, preference of the priest, convenience of the host & audience, and available time. The most essential factors are full satisfaction of the host, attentive devotion of the audience, and utmost effort by the priest. Nothing is right and nothing is wrong, if the above conditions are fulfilled.

Major activities carried out during a Pūjā are summarized below as an overview.

1. Bhautik Shuddhi (= भौतिक शुद्धि), or Pavitrikaraṇ (= पवित्रीकरण) = Physical Purification.
 - a) Swayam Shuddhi (= स्वयं शुद्धि) = Self external purification.

- b) Āsan Shuddhi (= आसन शुद्धि) = Purification of the host's & priest's seats.
- c) Āchman (आचमन = अन्तर्शुद्धि) = Internal purification.
- d) Hast Prakshālan (= हस्त प्रक्षालन = हाथ शुद्धि): Washing of hands after the Āchman, as the Pūjā is to be continued.
2. Dīp Prajjvalan (= दीप प्रज्ज्वलन): Lighting of the Ghee lamp.
3. Rakshā-Bandhan + Tilak (रक्षाबन्धन + तिलक): Tying of sacred thread on wrist, and applying red powder & rice on forehead: To host by priest, and to priest by host.
4. Sankalp (= संकल्प): Determination and declaration to do the designated Pūjā.
5. Upchār Shuddhi (= उपचार शुद्धि) = Purification of the flowers and other Pūjā items.
6. Upkaraṇ Pūjan (= उपकरण पूजन): Worship of the Pūjā props:
 - a) Ghantā Pūjan (= घण्टा पूजन): Worship of the bell.
 - b) Shankh Pūjan (= शंख पूजन): Worship of the Shankh (= conch). There are two uses of the Shankh: One for Pūjā as is done here, and the other for blowing to create loud uniform sound.
 - c) Kalash or Ghat Pūjan (= कलश पूजन): Worship of the small metal pitcher.
7. Nyās (= न्यास): Invocation of the deity in the body of the host:
 - a) Anga-Nyās (= अंग-न्यास): Invocation & Pūjā of the deity in the respective five limbs of the host.
 - b) Kar-Nyās (= कर-न्यास): Invocation & Pūjā of the deity in the respective five fingers of the host in both hands.
8. Invoking of the Deities:
Consists of ध्यान + आवाहन + स्थापना + प्रणाम + आराधना of various deities:
 - a) पंचदेव - गणेश, गौरी, विष्णु, शिव, सूर्य ।
 - b) नवग्रह - The main nine stars.
 - c) Any other Gods & Goddesses by specific names, as desired by host or priest.
 - d) All other Gods & Goddesses, in general.
 - e) The main Gods/Goddess, e.g. Satya-Nārāyan, Saraswati, etc.
9. Āsan (= आसन) = Seat: Offer seats to all deities already invoked.
10. 16-Upchār Pūjā (= 16-उपचार पूजा): Pūjā of all the deities, offering 16 or more items, including Naivedya (= नैवेद्य) and Dravya-Dakṣiṇā (= द्रव्य-दक्षिणा).

11. 5-Grās (= पांचग्रास).
12. **Items Specific to the Pūjā Being Done:** i.e. Praṇām (= प्रणाम), Stav (= स्तव), Nav-Archan (= नव अर्चन), etc.
13. Sarva-Praṇām (= सर्व प्रणाम): All the audience to stand up.
Satya-Nārāyaṇ Kathā (= सत्यनारायण-कथा), if applicable.
14. **Activities By All the Audience Standing:**
 - a) Pushpāñjali (= पुष्पांजलि): Offering of flowers.
 - b) Praṇām (= प्रणाम), Gauri Praṇām (= गौरी प्रणाम), Guru Praṇām (= गुरु प्रणाम).
 - c) Pradakṣiṇā (= प्रदक्षिणा): Circumambulation while chanting the Mantra, to be done ideally around the deity, otherwise standing still.
 - d) Shānti-Pāṭh (= शान्ति पाठ).
15. **Activities By the Priest & Host Only**
 - a) Kṣhamā Yāchnā (= क्षमा याचना): Asking for forgiveness.
 - b) Mantra-Aarati (= मंत्र आरती).
 - c) Shankh Bhrāmaṇ (= शंख-भ्रामण): By the priest only.
 - d) Prokṣaṇ (= प्रोक्षण): The priest sprinkles the holy water from the Shankh, on the host and other devotees.
16. Bhajan (= भजन), by all.
17. **भोग-स्तुति + सार्वजनिक आरती, by all**
 - a) Bhog Stuti (= भोग-स्तुति).
 - b) Sārva-Janik Aarati (= सार्वजनिक आरती): Of the main deity.
18. **Final Activities by the Priest & Host Only**
 - a) Visarjan (= विसर्जन): Ask all Gods to go to their abodes, to come back later.
 - b) Charaṇāmrit to Yajmān (= यजमान के लिए चरणामृत).
 - c) Hast Prakshālān (= हस्त प्रक्षालन = हाथ शुद्धि): Washing of hands after the Charaṇāmrit, as the Pūjā is to be continued.
 - d) Prasād to host (= यजमान के लिये प्रसाद), by the priest.
 - e) Dakṣiṇā to priest (= पुरोहित के लिए दक्षिणा), by the host.
19. Distribution of Charaṇāmrit (= चरणामृत), Panchāmrit (= पंचामृत) if prepared, and Prasād (= प्रसाद), to all attendees.

