

Upakarma an article by Dr. N V Koteswarara Rao

This religious function is performed on the full moon day in Chandramana Sravana Poornima every year. Rakshabandhan also is celebrated on the same day. Each has a different significance. The purpose of Upakarma is not understood by many or is not known to many, whichever is applicable in the present day context. Today most people think it is performed by a vatuvu who got the Upanayanam performed before or after Sravana Poornima. The parents of the vatuvu feel that their responsibility ceases after they perform the first Upakarma for their son! They even invite relatives and friends and make it a celebration. The facts are different.

Upakarma is a function to express our gratitude to nine maharshis beginning with Prajapati. Our religious functions make us feel grateful to the great personalities who helped us learn Vedas and to perform the rituals therein to purify our minds. This purification is essential to understand the secret of life, the knowledge of Atma (AtmaJnaanam). We pray and give offerings to Agni and other Divine Personalities to bless us with mental abilities to strengthen our memory to remember the Vedas learnt thus far during the Adhyayana days. Customarily and conventionally, Veda adhyanam is to be performed by those who have been given Brahmopadesam through Upanayana samskaram.

Upanayanam is a samskaram performed to a male child of apparent age seven years, which will be counted as eight years with the nine months of his life in his mother's womb. Maharshis fixed certain time limitations to perform certain religious functions called Shodasa Karmaas to purify the soul of a male child born in a Brahmin family. Amongst them, Upanayanam is a function performed by the father of a child to make him eligible to learn and to perform the Vedic karmas such as SandhyaVandanam, Gaytryopasana, Samith Adhanam(Agnikaaryam – offering of dried twigs with Vedic Mantras to Agni), and Veda adhyayanam(learning of Vedas)etc. As a student should fulfill certain preliminary requirements to join a school for the present day education, Maharshis fixed Upanayanam as a prerequisite to study Vedas to learn and practice different assignments/ duties specified therein for a Brahmin. This prerequisite enlightens the child and makes him improve his memory.

In the modern era, one good feature is that some young parents are performing Upanayanam for their son(s), at an early age, though they may not be aware of its significance. Even unknowingly if one does a good job, it is appreciated.

Soon after Upanayanam is performed, the child (vatuvu) is expected to join a Vedic school and learn Vedas as a full time assignment. In olden days the child was sent to an ashram where he would be under the care of the Guru who teaches him Vedas. He would take about seven to eight years to study Vedas. Vedas were taught orally and were to be memorised by the pupil by uttering repeatedly. Initially the pupil would learn the pronunciation of the mantras in Vedas. Later he takes some time to memorise them through several repetitions called “Valle” /”Santa”.

The Acharya teaches the mantras to the pupil from Sraavana Poornima to Poushya Poornima or Poushya Rohini. That is, he teaches for six months. Thereafter the adhyayanam is stopped. This is called AdhyAyoatsarjanam. The pupil would spend the time till Sraavana Poornima, in repeating the mantras to memorise them thoroughly.

However, if the pupil is not fit to remember all the mantras at a stretch for six months, the Acharya would teach small portions and allow the pupil to memorise them parallelly. In such cases the Utsarjanam (stopping of teaching of Vedas) is postponed till Sravana Poornima. Since the Utsarjanam is not performed on the prescribed time the Acharya and the pupil would perform a prAyaschitta homa called PaahitrayodasaHoma. Then Shodasa upachaara poojas, tarpanas and homas are performed to the nine maharshis starting with Prajapati to bless the learners of Vedas to strengthen their retention abilities.

After performing these homas, the pupil would change his yagnopaveetam after giving one to any other (yajnopaveeta daanam) Brahmin.

Then the Acharya teaches the pupil the first four anuvaakams (Paragrahphs?) of Veda.

Thus this function is not limited to be performed only on the first occurrence of Sraavana Poornima by the vatuvu, but by every Brahmin every year on this day. It is not just for changing the yagnopaveetam on that day but to study at least a few lines from Veda after expressing our gratitude to the Maharshis, as mentioned earlier.

The following day is meant for Gayatri Homam or Japam to purify oneself from the ill effects of erroneous utterance if any, of the Vedic Mantras during the past year. Thus it is a duty of every Brahmin to perform Upakarma, every year on this day.

This is Upakarma.

In the present vocabulary this function is called jandhyala pandaga, jandhayala Poornima, or poonal in Tamil meaning that this is the day to wear a new Yagnopaveetam!! Some learned persons are of the opinion that this function is being performed by Tamil Brahmins and not by the Andhras!! One would probably change such opinions if he understands the spirit behind performing this function.

RAKSHABANDHANAM:

Rakshabandhanam is also performed on this very day. As per DharmaSindhu, Rakshabandhanam is to be performed while reciting the Sloka:

Yenabadhhoa Balee Raajaa daanavendroa mahaabalaha, tena tvaamabhi badhnaami
rakshamaachalamaachala”

Means: O Rakshabandhana, don't move. I am binding you by the one who bound the Rakshasa Emperor Bali.

The details of who would perform the Rakshabandhanam to whom and for what is not mentioned in Dharma Sindhu..

This Poornima has another important significance.

This is the day when Hayagreeva's form came into existence.

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