

Simplified Pooja Procedures by A.C.Sekhar

Like various rituals prescribed for various functions by different religious groups, Puja is a ritual of worship of chosen Hindu Deities. . Puja is a common word in many Indian languages with Sanskrit as its origin. It consists of two letters 'Pa' and 'Ja' Some interpret the two letters of 'Pa' and 'Ja' as abbreviations of two words ' Papanasana' (meaning purification and redemption from sins) and Janmavicheda (meaning freedom from re-birth in this world of turmoil). Thus by performing puja one hopes to reach Moksha , the ultimate goal of human existence.

Pujas are performed in individual houses, or in temples, or at specially chosen places on special occasions .In the following paragraphs normal and simplified procedure is first described for Pujas in individual houses, particularly for very busy people. It consists of five steps as follows. At every stage in each step there are Sanskrit hymns (Slokas) to utter indicating what one is doing ,which not only help to do things in orderly manner but also keep one's thoughts under control without distractions. However if one does not know these hymns by heart, nor he is able to read from written material, he should utter in his mind in his own language or in English, the various acts he is performing so that the needed concentration and continuity of Puja are not lost. The five steps are,

1. Invocation
2. Presentation
3. Meditation
4. Dedication
5. Conclusion

These are explained a little more detailedly below. Sample prayers in English are also given in bold type

1. Invocation

Before invocation one should purify himself in body and mind. After bath and good clothing put on, one should get rid of any bad thoughts and entertain only pure and good thoughts with full faith in what is going to be done. A suitable clean place free from obnoxious odors and other external disturbances should be preferred. The place may even be made with appealing decorations and the chosen deities idols, pictures and other sacred objects can be placed there. When one gets ready with the above, the power of the chosen gods is invoked by concentrating attention on the same. Thus the in-conceivable Infinite form is thus merged with the easily conceivable finite objects placed as above. At this stage one should feel that the chosen god has come to the place of worship to be received and treated just like a guest is treated on invitation. A sample prayer in English could be as below

O! Lord I pronounce thy name three times so that I may become pure both externally and internally
(close your eyes and touch your heart and take the name of the deity three times).
I pronounce your name again three times for purification of all surroundings and the puja articles I placed for worship.
(touch all the articles with a flower or a soft cloth)
I now invoke all the powers of my chosen deities to be present during my prayer

(You may utter the various names of your chosen deity as known to you because these names indicate the powers of the deity. You may in your heart feel that you are providing all necessities for lodging the powers comfortably undisturbed, in the articles placed for worship)

2. Presentation

As a guest is treated, so also the God, is received with all respect and attention, He is seated comfortably, offered refreshments, fruits, drinks, incense, as is the custom in various countries. In India ,for example He is offered water to wash his feet, hands etc because of the climatic and social customs existing there. Even if above articles are not available, at least two grains of Akshatas (rice smeared with kumkum (vermilion) powder, saffron, turmeric and a little water) are offered symbolically. He is extolled and praised and even some gifts offered.. In the elaborate form of worship there are Sanskrit Slokas to be uttered at every stage but as mentioned above, when it is not possible to utter the Slokas in Sanskrit, one may think and say the words in their own language or in English, as they are making the offerings.. Sample prayer is given below:

O Lord of Supreme Power, I offer to Thee your favorite flowers, fruits, eatables, water, dress, perfumes ornaments and special gifts so that you may happily settle down to hear my prayers and bless me with Thy grace.

3. Meditation

This is the most serious part of Puja and has to be done in a systematic manner. Meditation is a spiritual exercise for improving physical health and /or realizing the unknown and inaccessible. It should be done regularly, in serene atmosphere, in the same posture, at the same time, for the same duration, and keeping the goal clearly in view. Some slokas are available for repeating frequently during meditation but at least 'OM' can be repeated as many times as may be convenient. All these factors can be adopted to individual's circumstances. There is considerable amount of literature available on practices and consequences of meditation, but the above simple guide lines will go a long way for the required routine of busy individuals.. Sample prayer:

OM OM OM Om iti Brahma Om iti Sarvam (Om is the entire Cosmos) Om Namaha the chosen deity

4. Dedication

After meditation one should completely surrender to and seek refuge in the chosen deity .Sarvam Parabrahmarpanamasthu One should ask for the blessings to achieve one's desires, and forgiveness for any sins and omissions committed. One should sincerely feel that all has been gained so far was only through the grace of the deity under prayer and all actions and reactions are guided and controlled by the deity only.

O Lord I dedicate to You and You alone, all my actions, my possessions, and my entire life for Your kindness and mercy on me. I seek your forgiveness for all sins and omissions I may have committed in my actions and in my prayers to Thee.

5. Conclusion

Like one bids a pleasing farewell to the invited guests at the end of spending some time with the guest so also the devotee should bid farewell to the powers that were invoked at the beginning .This is called Visarjan in Puja rituals., By this, once again normalcy is established with the objects at the place of the prayers, and the devotee is once again reminded of the distinction between the power of the Infinity and limitation of finite objects .In conclusion one should go round and round himself with folded hands (Pradakshina) and end with a prayer Sarvajeno Sukhino Bhavantu, meaning that All persons should live in happiness and peace.. This is basic Hindu philosophy

As mentioned above the simplified Puja procedure is recommended only for busy individuals. If however the above procedure, is to be done in elaborate style with accompanying slokas , added rituals and full offerings , nearly about 25 to 30 items .are prescribed and this is usually practiced only by those who have been initiated into religious practices like priests etc. Some of these items are mentioned in the monthly journal of Cincinnati Hindu Temple 'Aradhana' July 2003