The Atirudra Havana at Jodhpur

(8th to 12th March 2023)

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H. H. Shrīmat Sadyojāt Shaṅkarāshram Swāmījī were invited by various Uttara Bhāratīya Sāraswat organizations to grace their cities with Their August Presence and shower Their Blessings on them. A five-week tour was therefore devised to visit Ahmedābād (Shaṅkarālok), Shrī Duṅgargarh in Rājasthān, Haridwār, Saṁvit Dhām at Pus͟hkar, Bhilwārā, Jodhpur, and lastly Mt. Ābū, Sant Sarovar. While each place had its own charm and left lasting memories, what follows is an account of the “Atirudra Swāhākār" organized at the Saṁvit Dhām - Jodhpur, conducted under the benign guidance of H.H. Swāmī Nārāyaṇ Girijī Mahārāj of Saṁvit Sādhanāyana, Sant Sarovar, Mt. Ābū, and, the reception and the honour accorded to our Pūjya Swāmījī.

Rudra or Rudra Prashna

Our vaidika-s chant Rudra Mantra-s at the time of Jalābhis͟heka and on many other occasions, in the Mat͟h, as you all must have often heard. Some of us know the Rudra by heart, and some of us have performed Laghu Rudra, Mahārudra, etc. at the Mat͟h or elsewhere.

Rudra - also called Rudra Prashna, occurring in Yajurveda Saṁhitā, is in two parts; “Namakam" so called because in each shloka of Namakam, the word " namo" occurs repeatedly. This part praises the terrifying forms of Rudra Devatā to begin with, and later the myriad forms we see around us, and prays for our protection by Rudra from all evil around us. Namakam has 11 "Anuvāka-s" (paragraphs).

The second part is Chamakam, in which the word " Cha me" meaning, “to me” occurs in each shloka. For example, when Cha me is preceded by saying “बलश्च मे ओजश्च मे” it indicates a prayer for strength to me and vitality to me. Chamakam is full of requests to the Lord to grant us various material things which we aspire for. It also has 11 anuvāka-s.

Importance of Rudra Prashna

Rudra mantra-s are a powerful set of mantra-s. The regular chanting of these with Shraddhā and bhakti, not only aid in ones spiritual journey, but are believed to have helped in curing specific severe ailments too.

Rudra Pārāyaņa - Laghurudra, Mahārudra and Atirudra

Completing the Pārāyaņa of 11 Anuvāka-s of both Namakam and 11 Anuvāka-s of Chamakam at one go, is one “Āvartana.” 11 Āvartana-s of complete Rudra Pat͟hana, constitute one "Laghurudra"; 11 Laghurudra-s make one Mahārudra; 11 Mahārudra-s make one Atirudra, i.e. chanting Rudraprashna 1331 times, with proper dhyāna-āvāhana, pārāyaņa, abhis͟heka-Āhuti-s, and prescribed procedure is Atirudra. In all these, Āhuti offered to Agni by the Yajamāna are important.

Atirudra performed at Jodhpur

At Jodhpur, elaborate arrangements were made to create a Yajñashālā to accommodate 41 (that’s right forty-one!) Havanakuṇḍa-s (Altars). Each Kuṇḍa had 2 to 4 "Yajamāna-s", and an assigned Āchārya (Kuṇḍāchārya). There were two types of yajamāna-s - ghṛta yajamāna - ones offering Āhuti-s of ghee, and other yajamāna-s "Shākalya" yajamāna-s - offering Āhuti-s of Shākalya, a mix of various "dravya-s” consisting of rice, sugar, dry fruit, unhusked rice, black til, some herbs, berries, and so on. Volunteers were constantly on the move to replenish ghee, Shākalya, samidhā-s and dried cow dung cakes, as needed.

There was one " Pradhāna Yajamāna", who performed yajña at the " Pradhāna Kuṇḍa" which had a special place in the centre of the Yajñashālā, decorated with flowers and had an " Aks͟haya Pātra" hanging over the Kuṇḍa, through which a constant flow of "Ghṛta" was maintained during Havana.

Five of us from Swāmījī’s entourage participated on all five days, while a few of us participated for a day or so.

The Team

At the Jodhpur event, there was a team of 20 plus Āchārya-s, led by Pt. Navaratna Shāstrī, to do the principal chanting. In addition, there were more than 30 priests appointed as " Kuṇḍa Āchārya-s" who were assigned responsibilities of getting the Yajamāna-s prepared with tilaka, etc. and saṅkalpa, and generally guide where needed.

Performing Atirudra

The priests chanted complete Namakam of 11 anuvāka-s, followed by one anuvāka of Chamakam. This was repeated till all 11 Chamaka Anuvāka-s were recited. At times, Namakam was interspersed with other Stotra-s. The cycle used to take about 2.5 hours. This would complete one Āvartana. The yajña lasted for five days, starting every day around 8 am each day, and lasting till 5.30 to 6.00 pm with appropriate breaks.

The Start of the Ritual

On the first day, the team of priests led by Pt. Navaratna Shāstrī, a well versed Agnihotrī Brahmin, began the procedures. Pt. Navaratna Shāstrī was initiated by Pūjya Swāmī Īshwarānand Girijī Mahārāj. Nārāyaṇa Girijī Mahārāj said about Shāstrījī that, in India, today there may be more “Mahātmā-s" than "Agnihotrī-s", and Shāstrījī is one of the Agnihotrī-s. (Agnihotrī-s are expected to perform the fire ritual without fail, twice daily plus seasonal observance as ordained.)

In the first half of day one, elaborate pūjā-s starting with Gaṇesha Pūjana, Peet͟ha Pūjana, and other āvāhana mantra-s, navagraha pūjana etc, were conducted by the priests through the Pradhāna Yajamāna.

At around 11.30 am, the traditional Agni āvāhana as prescribed in Vedic rituals, with appropriate Veda mantra-s was made, in the August Presence of our Swāmījī and of Nārāyaṇa Girijī Mahārāj. Two wooden implements called "Araṇi” and “Uttarāraṇi" were used initially symbolically by the Pradhāna yajamāna and his wife, and then the priests took over to invoke and ‘kindle’ agni.

The agni thus produced was placed by our Swāmījī in the Pradhāna Kuṇḍa to ignite the sacred fire and with the Agni from here, all other 40 Kuṇḍa-s were lit. The kuṇḍa-s were ready with samidhā-s, specially brought for Havana.

In the second half of day one, the regular Rudra Āvartana-s began at the appointed time of Muhūrta which was around 12.15 pm. We, the yajamāna-s, could start with Āhuti-s. After each mantra, before the Āhuti-s started, we all did agni āvāhana dhyāna and elaborate "Nyāsa". The yajñashālā would resound with " Swāhā" and we were to offer Āhuti-s in the Kuṇḍa.

The krama followed by Uttara Bhāratīya priests is slightly different from what we follow in the Mat͟͟h. They chant additional stotra-s like Purus͟ha Sūkta, Durgā Stuti, etc., in between, and some other stotra-s. Also, they chant the Rudra mantra-s at a very fast pace. They insist on Swāhā being chanted by all while offering Āhuti-s. This created a resounding effect in the Yajñashālā with over 150 persons performing the yajña. We also offered Āhuti-s for the other stotra-s chanted in addition to the Namaka and Chamaka mantra-s.

For couples who sat together for the yajña, the Kuṇḍa āchārya performed "Gat͟ha Bandhana" tying the "pallu" of the wife's saree with a pink and orange dhāgā. In the pallu, a flower and some rice were placed, and a string tied around it. The string was then hung around the husband's neck. This probably obviates touching the husband's arm, while he performs Āhuti, which is the practice we follow.

They also tied a separate string around the wrists of each of us every day, chanting the well knows "Raks͟hā mantra"- ‘yena baddho Bali rājā,’ etc. These two constituted a part of the Saṅkalpa. Every end-of-day, we were expected to keep the rice safely and upon reaching home keep it in the place where we normally keep our money. For men, they also tied our tuft of hair with a string signifying “shikhābandha”.

At the end of the day, there would be a grand Āratī, in front of the central kalasha-s established with the photo of ‘Pūjya’ Īshwarānand Girijī Mahārāj. From day two, the āratī’s were performed at each Kuṇḍa, by the yajamāna-s.

The Closing Ceremony

On the last day, pūrṇāhuti was to be offered, in the presence of our Swāmījī, Nārāyaṇ Girijī Mahārāj and several other Mahātmā-s, who were present. The pūrṇāhuti here was an elaborate procedure lasting two hours. Various Devatā-s were invoked and offered āratī-s. As͟hṭottara Shata swāhākāra-s were done, and the final Āhuti was offered. At the end, we all did Bhasma Dhāraṇa concluding the ritual, so well performed.

Reception accorded to our Pūjya Swāmījī’

The Uttara Bhārata Yātrā was verily a “Digvijaya Yātrā” for our Swāmījī. The honour, love and affection shown by all organizations was phenomenal, touching, and made us proud.

At Haridwār, Swāmī Saṁyamendra Teertha of Shri Kāshī Mat͟h made a special request to Swāmījī to extend Their stay by another three days, and be present for the Vardhanti ̄of Vyāsāshrama. Our Swāmījī were accorded the most honoured treatment with Kāshī Mat͟h Swāmījī giving them a place of preference in every Pūjana. They did Gaṅgā Āratī, Gaṅgā Pūjana, Vyāsa Pūjā, etc., together.

Swāmī Nārāyaṇ Girijī Mahārāj, acknowledged our Swāmījī’s seniority at every stage, saying our Swāmījī were His elder Gurubandhu.

Swāmī Vimarshānandjī Mahārāj, when asked to speak after our Swāmījī’s Āshīrvachana, said, “I am a “Baṭuk” in front of Swāmījī and what can I talk after They have expressed so well.” Then He went on to elaborate the nature of Swāmījī’s Āshīrvachana in glowing terms . He said, “Today we have seen the Vyakta, Vyaktāvyakta and the Avyakta swarūpa of our Gurushakti through this Āshīrvachana.” He exhorted the audience to listen to this Āshīrvachana a hundred times, to be able to absorb the true meaning and internalize the same.

The response of the general public too was unbelievably warm and enthusiastic. One sādhaka from New Delhi said though he was not well “जहां स्वामीजीका चरणस्पर्श होता है, उस जगह कम से कम एक दिन तो हमें आना ही था”| When we left Shrī Duṅgargarh, after a few minutes our bus came to a halt because a vehicle stopped in front of the bus. A girl came in our bus and bid tearful farewell to the ladies with whom she was associated during the past four-five days. This affection was demonstrated by all the laity.

The Shobhā yātrā at Shrī Duṅgargarh, for over about five km was a sight to be cherished, with people vying to receive Swāmījī’s darshan.

On the concluding day of the Jodhpur sessions, Mr. Bharat, the M.C. said, “We asked Swāmījī to come here every year, but Swāmījī said, you too can come to Shirālī.” He further said, “We have taken this आदेश seriously.” Moreover he said Swāmījī have asked them to spend some time at least once a week or fortnight in Saṁvit Dhām to do Sevā and thirdly, he said Swāmījī have asked them to do regular Sādhanā. He said we will follow the three आदेश-s of “गुरुजी”. It’s important to mark the words here, as he referred to Swāmījī as Gurujī. That is the stature our Swāmījī have reached amongst non-āmchī Sāraswat-s. The concluding Nagar Sammāna function was overwhelming - organized at the behest of Swāmī Nārāyaṇ Girijī Mahārāj. Newspapers reported that 51 institutions honoured our Swāmījī, but including all small organizations, the number was 125.

At this function Mahārānī Hemalatā Devī of Jodhpur personally honoured our Swāmījī. During the entire Atirudra function, Rānī Vasant Ushājī of Jodhpur was present every day. She is also the Adhyaks͟hā of the Saṁvit Dhām Jodhpur. Our Swāmījī honoured her with a shawl. She organised a Bhanḍārā (annadāna for the entire assembly) in honour of Pūjya Swāmījī. During this yatra, Many sādhaka-s took Dīks͟hā from H.H. Sadyojāt Shaṅkarāshram) Swāmījī. A real proud moment for Sāraswat-s from Chitrāpur, indeed.

Shubham Bhavatu