TAYI AND CHAVATI

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30 August 2022

Tayi (Suvarna Gauri Vrata or Hartalika) and Chavati(Ganesha Chaturthi) are amongst the most delightful utsava-s celebrated by the Chitrapur Saraswat-s. These utsava-s appeal to the senses and the very inner core. Encompassed within all the celebration is the thought that Goddess Gauri has come to Her mother’s home (kulara) - the ‘me’ time is given to Her. During this time, ongoing worries or concerns disappear, warm camaraderie and kinship pave the way for stronger relationships, and the meeting and mixing with people help us step back from the virtual, and into the real world. This is also the time when olfactory and gustatory cravings are tickled… and happily satiated! All finery in clothing and jewellery are worn by families to celebrate these occasions. As the third and fourth days of Shukla Paksha in Bhadrapada approach, the flurry of activities and huddles in Amchigele (Amchi in short) households multiply, with hectic micro planning and execution. The excitement is almost unbearable!

Tayi (Vayna Puja or Gauri Trtiya) occurs a day prior to Ganesha Chaturthi (Chavati), and Devi Parvati (or Suvarna Gauri) – the mother of Lord Ganesha is worshipped on this day. On Tayi, the ladies, young maidens and girls are at the forefront, carrying out all tasks joyously, while the menfolk offer their support.

Traditionally, puja arrangements for Tayi and Chaturthi begin after Amavasya - about 2 days prior to Gauri pujana. A complete decoration of the puja area, the temple area, and the home and preparation of (much awaited) naivedya food items is meticulously done. All family members joyfully involve themselves with whichever chore they are capable of carrying out as assigned to them by the lady of the house. Any helpers in the household find themselves running between the house and marketplace for puja and food items umpteen times a day, efficiently performing different tasks rapidly one after the other. One cannot help being sucked into the vortex of uplifting festivities.

Tayi – Vayna and Gauri puja (Vayna: a Dori or mixed coloured silken string)

With the lady of the household centre-stage, this is a holy and auspicious occasion celebrated with intense fervour that often overshadows most other festivals. At times assisted by priests, ladies of the household perform this puja to seek Devi’s grace and blessings for the family’s descendants, as well as for longevity of the significant other. It is a big celebration for a new bride who visits her parental home for her first Tayi as a married lady (sumangali or savashini).

After bathing, coconuts are de-husked and cleaned thoroughly, leaving only a tuft (called shendi) in the middle of the coconut’s 3 pores (we call it the ‘2 eyes and mouth’). Married ladies usually use a minimum of 5 coconuts and the unmarried maidens (called kanya-s) and young girls use 2 (some families use 3). A sought-after task by youngsters is the fine cleaning of coconuts, and then immersing them in turmeric infused water to purify them. The shells of damp coconuts are then patterned creatively with coloured chalk and later, paint. Two coconuts are selected to represent Gauri and Ganesha respectively. Special home-made collyrium (kajal) is applied to the eyes of the coconut and the mouth dabbed with coconut oil infused sindur (an orange-red cosmetic powder) or Kunkum and inscribed with a circle going round the circumference at its greatest bulge. The coconut slated to be Gauri is coloured completely with white chalk or paint (except for the eyes and mouth), and a vermillion (kunkum) tilak is applied on one side of the coconut - some apply a horizontal kunkum tilak while some apply plain round dots. All the readied coconuts are then kept in the prayer area (devakuda) or in a secluded corner of the house.

On the morning of Gauri and Vayna puja, women have a head-bath and ladies fast until Vayna puja is over. A strict no-garlic no-onion diet is followed thereafter. A portrait of Gauri is affixed behind the podium where the coconut symbolising Gauri is to be placed for worship. To Gauri’s left, space is left for placing Ganesha the next day (Chavati). On a flattened plantain leaf (with the tip facing the worshipper), fistfuls of rice grain are placed to form a small mound. A kalasha filled with water is positioned on the rice mound, with a 5 rupee coin, 5 blades of grass that have spikelet arrangement (durva-s), and a whole piece of betelnut (supari) immersed inside. Five clean mango leaves or betelnut leaves are arranged on the mouth of the readied kalasha and the ‘coconut signifying Gauri’ is positioned firmly atop. The coconut on the kalasha is then bedecked with jewellery (some families keep jewellery to be used only for Gauri Puja), and a new silk sari is wrapped around the kalasha, along with aromatic flowers. A mangalasutra and green and black glass bangles are placed on either side, and often a Devi-mukha (a mask made of silver, copper or clay) is also placed around the coconut.

During the puja, a series of vidhi-s are performed: Achamanam, kalasha puja, Shankha puja, Shuddhiprokshana, panchamrta puja and Gauri pranapratishtha with abhisheka. A small bamboo winnow or a plate (PaIeru) containing fresh areca nuts, betelnut leaves (vido-s), fruit (specially plantains), areca flowers (Bhingara), or flowers like champa, mogra and sweet-scented flowers, turmeric powder (haldi), Kunkum, cucumber, ridged gourd, a piece of sugar cane (kabbu), okra (lady’s finger) and a lit lamp (divli), is placed. Alankara offered are a mirror, comb, haldi-kunkum, mangalasutra and vaynadori.

The Doribandhana ritual is carried out amidst stotra chanting. Betel-nut flower or other flowers are knotted onto the multicoloured thread (16 or 9 or 7 or 5 knots) while taking circumambulations (pradakshina) from a fixed point. The Dori is then worn round the neck or tied to the left wrist.

Thereafter, Vayna Puja is performed. After doing Namaskara, flowers and rice grain (akshata) are offered to Gauri. In a paIeru, a coconut, akshata, haldikunkum, betelnut, betelnut leaves are offered. Complete Naivedya prepared for Gauri Puja and Chavati, is offered to Gauri. Naivedya prepared for Chavati is placed back in the store, to be offered to Lord Ganesha the next day (Mother Gauri must know what her son Ganesha would be eating!) Prasada of kunkum, veni (a flower braid) and flowers offered to Gauri is removed and used subsequently by the ladies. All present partake tirtha panchamrta (a mixture of milk, water, honey, sugar and ghee). The Puja concludes with a sincere and devoted Prarthana to Goddess Gauri for happiness, wellness, prosperity (sukhasamrddhi), healthy children, longevity of spouses (akhandasaubhagya) and seeking pardon for any errors committed.

After vayna, ladies partake rice as part of lunch and observe fasting (phalahara) in the evening. For Gauri, Naivedya preparation involves making Patolyo from wheat flour or varai, cucumber khiri, cucumber salad (koccholi), an AIani upkari of 5 types of green leafy vegetables, cheppi (without salt or sugar) coconut khiri and some folks prepare ambat and phodyo-s (fritters) too. Both cucumber khiri and aIani upkari are prepared without salt. Goddess Gauri is ‘saumya’, simple and gentle – her naivedya accordingly is very simple as well.

Chavati

The next day (being the fourth day of Shukla paksha in the month of Bhadrapada), Goddess Gauri’s son Lord Ganesha’s arrival is celebrated with pomp and grandeur. It is said that He comes to take His mother back to Mount Kailasa. The portly Ganesha, the God of wisdom, prosperity and good fortune, is a favourite of the masses. Being the remover of all obstacles and calamities, His blessings are invoked before embarking on anything auspicious. Devotees bring home murti-s of Lord Ganesha and worship in a special way for a day and half, or 3 or 5 or 7 or 10 days depending upon family tradition or Sankalpa.

Ganeshasthapana: The priest does the pranapratishtha, and the murti is smeared with rakta-chandana. Some amchi homes use a turmeric water immersed and dried large coconut with shendi, as Ganesha. A white chalk mark circles around the bulge, two eyes smeared with kajal and mouth smeared with sindura.

The coconut signifying Ganesha, is placed on a cleaned flattened plantain leaf with the tip pointing towards the worshipper, on a small mound of rice. A silk dhotar and angavastram is placed around the coconut. In the absence of dhotar and angavastram, a tiny garland is made out of cotton puncatuated by tweaks of red kunkum and placed oblong across the coconut like the zanve (sacred thread). He is often decorated with jewellery kept specifically for Him. A garland of flowers and especially His favourite hibiscus is placed round the ‘neck’. The Durva is significant in Ganesha Puja, and a garland of Durva is also placed round Ganesha’s neck. If enough durva is not available 21 durva-s are tied together and offered. Ganesha pujana usually takes an hour and half where the whole family prays together. During the Puja, 108 durva-s and 108 belpatri-s, are offered, and it ends with kunkumarchana.

Ganesha loves food and an elaborate menu of 21 food items is laid out as naivedyam, and later enjoyed heartily by family and friends. Prasada bhojana preparation has Ambode ghasshi with bitter gourd, Potato sukke, bhendi upkari, kakdi kocchoIi, Colocasia bhaji, Patrodo (optionally with ghasshi), Khotte with chutney, madgane, variety of fritters, vermicelli khiri etcetera. Savouries normally are chakli-s, nevryo, jaggery ladu-s, modaka-s, panchakdaya and urad dal ambode. Twenty-one modaka-s are specially made as divli-s (lamps) that are lit and used for arati to the Lord Ganesha and arati-s are sung enthusiastically with fervour and devotion.

On the last day of worship, Visarjana takes place first for the Mother Gauri, by shifting the coconut a little bit. Lord Ganesha’s visarjana takes place by turning the coconut (or Murti) a bit in it’s place, with participants lustily cheering “Ganapati bappa moraya, pudhchya varshi lavakara ya” (like saying Punarmilamah !!). The idol is taken out in a colourful procession to the accompaniment of music, to be immersed in a water body. Just prior to this visarjana, kunkum is added to water to colour it red (lattya / kunkuma uddaka) in a vatte (a shallow, rimmed plate). This is then positioned at a distance from the podium/dais in such a way that family members can view the reflection of the coconuts and lit lamps in the water. This is the last ‘chance’ (as elders advise youngsters) to offer intense prayers and seek blessings from the Lord.

It's time thereafter, to offer vayna to elder suvashini-s and gorging on the delicious prasada. The coconuts symbolising Gauri and Ganesha are used to prepare sweet savouries that people crave for.