Chudi Puja - A Unique Tradition

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The month of Shravana brings with it a host of festivals. During this auspicious month, married women from the Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmana community perform “Chudi puja” on Fridays and Sundays for Saubhagya - a long, happy married life.

Mythological significance

It is believed that Sita offered this puja with wild grown flowers and plants/leaves during her Vanavasa and hence, this puja came into existence. Another story says that the wild flowers had a strong desire to adorn the Devata-s and Devi-s. The compassionate deities granted the wildflowers their wish by saying that during the month of Shravana they could be tied together in a bunch (a Chudi) and after being sanctified through puja by married ladies, they may be offered to them.

How we Chitrapur Saraswat-s observe Chudi Puja

Married women of the family wake up early, have a head bath, dress up in traditional attire and prepare aesthetically designed Chudi-s by tying five blades of jirvankura/durva (a type of grass that has three blades at the tip) and five types of flowers. The number five is significant as it represents five married women in our Purana-s and Itihasa-s who are remembered even today for their devotion and commitment to the institution of marriage: Ahalya, Mandodari, Draupadi, Tara and Sita. They are considered role models for married women.

Traditionally, local and wild plants (‘Anvali’, ‘Ghanta Maddo’, ‘Nelanilli’ and ‘Pachchakana’) and flowers (‘Ratnagandhi’- Peacock Flower, ‘Sugandhi’- Ginger Lily, ‘Shankhapushpa’-Butterfly Pea, ‘Karavira’-Yellow Oleander and ‘Rathapushpa’- Pagoda flower) are used. In cities where these are not easily available, durva-s alo7ng with Gulab (Rose), Shevanti (Chrysanthemum), Champa (Champak) and so on are used. Usually, the Chudi-s are made in odd numbers - 5, 9, 11, 15, 21. The offering of Chudi-s symbolize a token of our gratitude to God for the greenery and colourful flowers in bloom during the monsoon.

Chudi

Flowers and Durva

Naivedya is also prepared for the puja. On Fridays, usually non-rice preparations are offered such as khiri, shira, godda phou, Hayagriva (made from chana-dal, water, jaggery powder, grated coconut, ghee, cashew nut, raisins, nutmeg and elaichi powder), etc. A special Naivedya of either ‘undlakal’ (dough made of rice flour, water, coconut milk, salt, jaggery); churna (made of grated coconut, jaggery, elaichi powder) or ‘kanayendri’ (made of rava, jaggery powder, ghee and coconut milk) is prepared on Sundays.

Once the Chudi-s and Naivedya are ready, a rangoli is made in front of the Tulasi katto. The Chudi-s are then placed on a phodi pana (betel leaf) along with a phodi (arecanut) and Naivedya. Haldi-kunkum, flowers and akshata (sanctified rice grains) are offered to Tulasi. The first Chudi is offered to Tulasi along with two phodi pana and phodi and her blessings are sought.

After the Tulasi puja, a rangoli is drawn outside the house. Haldi-kunkum is applied on either side of the threshold and one Chudi each is placed. The remaining steps are adorned with Chudi-s by the young, unmarried girls in the family. An arati is done facing the house with a prayer asking Devi Lakshmi to bless the home with Sukha (happiness) and Shanti (peace). In many homes, the bhajana ‘Bhagyada Lakshmi Baramma’ is sung. Next, Arghya is given to Surya Devata (Sun God)- first akshata (sanctified rice grains) are offered. Then water is poured from a kalasha while looking at the sun and the first shloka of the Navagraha stotram (Japakusuma Sankasham…Divakaram) is chanted (Pg 147, Shri Chitrapur Stutimanjari 2019 [Sanskrit])

Then, in the kitchen, the box used to store rice is decorated and haldi-kunkum and a Chudi is offered. Traditionally, in villages, the churner (khavlo) used to make butter is tied to a stick (khunto). A Chudi is tied to that stick. A Chudi is also offered to the water-well in the house.

On Sundays, on the reverse side of a clean, washed pana [either betel leaf or plantain leaf], seven stones are kept. Each stone is smeared with haldi-kunkum and a Chudi is placed on it. This is done to show respect and receive blessings of the Rshi patni-s of the Saptarshi-s.

On the first Friday of Shravana, one Chudi is kept for the Kula-Devi/Devata (family deity) in the Devakuda and one is given to the Kshetra Devata (local area deity) at the local temple. One Chudi is also offered to the ancestral married women who departed from this world before their husbands.

Finally, the elders in the house are given Chudi-s with pana-vido (betel leaves and arecanut) and their blessings are sought. The women also visit each other’s homes and distribute Chudi-s, a tradition that helped to strengthen family bonds and social relationships.

A newly married bride’s first Chudi pujana is performed at her maternal home. Her mother accompanies her to the homes of relatives where she offers Chudi-s and receives gifts and blessings. In the second year of marriage, she performs the puja with her mother-in-law who then accompanies her to distribute Chudi-s to their relatives.

Chudi puja is a beautiful tradition that not only fosters social relationships but also helps strengthen marriages with the blessings of the Devata-s and elders.