

## **UPAKARMA 2016**

### **Concepts and Significance:**

Upakarma is a Vedic ritual celebrated every year generally on the full Moon day of the Lunar Month Sravana that falls during August–September months of English calendar which also coincides with the monsoon season. Upakarma is referred to as Avani Avittam in Tamil, Jandhyala Punnama in Telugu, and Janivarada Habba in Kannada. This day also coincides with two other important events viz. Raakhi (Raksha Bandhan) and Hayagreeva Jayanthi (Supreme Lord of knowledge and wisdom).

Legend has it that Lord Hayagreeva, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, got back the Vedas stolen by the Asuras (Demons) on the Shravan Pournami day.

### **What is Upakarma?**

Upakarma is a Sanskrit word (Upa + Karma). Literally Upa means “before” and Karma means an “action”. Upakarma means an action performed before beginning the Vedic studies. Upa also refers to nearness or close touch with Upanishads (Vedas). In simple terms Upakarma refers to changing of sacred (Holy) thread called Yagnopaveetham on this day by the three varnas (Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vysyas).

Upakarma in Sanskrit also means the beginning or Aarambha. It is beginning of the study of Vedas and Upanishads. In ancient days study of Vedas and Upanishads was compulsory especially for Brahmins. One will get the eligibility to study Vedas and Upanishads only after getting properly inducted into Gayathri Manthra through a process of Upanayanam (sacred thread ceremony). To commemorate this, even today, the day is observed as Upakarma by symbolically changing the sacred thread and performing certain rituals that marks the beginning of study of Vedas.

### **Why Upakarma on this day?**

One may get a doubt as to why it is to be observed only on this day? why not on other days?

Sravana/Bhadrapada months also falls during the period of Chaturmasam the sacred period to perform sacred austerities. In olden days people used to resort to study of Vedas only for a period of six months in a year starting from this day (Sravana to Pushya). Hence, to begin study of Vedas they used to start with a ritual of changing the Yagnopaveetham (Upakarma) on this day. Of course nowadays the study of Vedas is being done throughout the year as it is not possible to restrict for only six months.

Also in olden days when proper transportation facilities were not available people used to stop travelling during rainy/monsoon season that coincide with Chaturmasam and stay for four months in a particular place. Since this period is not suitable for travelling they used to resort to study of Vedas. This we observe even today in case of Ascetics who stick to a particular place during this period and perform their austerities and also engage themselves in study Vedas and Upanishads.

Another reason is this day of Sravana Pournima also coincides with Hayagreeva Jayanthi. Lord Hayagreeva an avathara of Lord Vishnu and regarded as the Supreme God of knowledge and wisdom is said to have taken his birth (avathara) on this day. He has restored the lost Vedas to the Universe (Brahma) by taking birth on this day as Hayagreeva (Horse head). To pay our obeisance and salutations to the God of Vedas (Lord Hayagreeva) who is also protector of Vedas, this day is marked as Upakarma by commencing the study of Vedic scripts.

Yagnopaveetham is changed on this day to convey a message that Vedic scripts cannot be studied or learned without Upanayanam (sacred thread ceremony).

### **What is Yagnopaveetham?**

Yagnopaveetham is a triple stranded sacrificial filament joined by a knot called Brahmagranthi that is worn by those initiated into the Gayatri recital. Yagnopaveetham is a Sanskrit word; Yagna means “Sacred ritual” and “Upaveetham” means a covering. Yagnopaveetham means a sacred covering on the body without which a Yagna or a sacred ritual cannot be performed. It is also called as Brahmasuthram. In Telugu it is called as Jandhyam, in Tamil it is Poonal, while in Kannada it is called as Janivara. In English it is called sacred thread. Yagna-upavita means ‘thread of sacrifice’ that symbolizes the sacrifice of ego, anger & selfishness.

### **Who should wear Yagnopaveetham?**

In olden days both men and women used to wear Yagnopaveetham. But nowadays only men who are eligible and initiated into Gayatri Manthra wear it. Among the Varnas, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vysya who is a dwija can wear Yagnopaveetham. They should start wearing from the day they are initiated into the Gayatri Manthra which generally happens through a ceremony called Upanayanam.

### **How many Yagnopaveethas one should wear?**

It is said that a Brahmachari (unmarried person) should wear only one Yagnopaveetham that has three strands. A Grihastha (married person) should wear two such Yagnopaveethas. It is in practice to wear three Yagnopaveethas by a Grihastha, the third one that acts as an Uttareeyam (upper dhoti).

### **What should be its length?**

When you wear the length of Yagnopaveetham should come up to the navel level and it should be neither above nor below the navel. It is said that if it is below the navel it will lead to the loss of power of penance and if it is above the navel it is Ayuksheenam (decline in longevity). Manu Smruthi says that the portion below the navel is impure. We also find a reference to this in Dharma Sindhu.

### **Who are the Presiding Deities of Yagnopaveetham?**

Pranava (Om-karam), Agni, Naaga, Soma (Moon), Pithru Devathas, Prajapathi, Vayu, Surya and Vishve Devathas are the Presiding Deities of Yagnopaveetham.

### **How to wear & remove Yagnopaveetham?**

Wear Yagnopaveetham one by one reciting the relevant sankalpa and Yagnopaveetha dhaarana manthra. Every time Achamanam should be performed and Gayathri manthra should be recited ten times. While wearing Yagnopaveetham it should be held by both hands with the knot in the Yagnopaveetham being held above by the right hand facing upwards.

Similarly old and worn out Yagnopaveetham should not be removed from above the neck. It should be removed from below the navel without touching the feet. Logic behind removing from below the navel could be; Man is said to be purer above the navel. Manu Smruthi says that, portion below the navel is impure. After changing Yagnopaveetham the old one worn becomes a decayed thing. It should not be removed from sacred portion of the body that is above the head.

### **Upakarma - Yagnopaveetha Dhaarana Vidhi.**

In ancient days Upakarma used to be an action that was performed to mark the beginning of the study of Vedas and Upanishads. One will get the eligibility to study Vedas and Upanishads only after getting properly inducted into Gayatri Manthra through a process of Upanayanam. In the present day context Upakarma has become a symbolic ritual of changing old Yagnopaveetham and wearing a new one. Having understood the concept, significance, sanctity and technicalities of Yagnopaveetham and Upakarma from earlier posts published it becomes imperative also to know the procedure of changing Yagnopaveetham ie. Yagnopaveetha Dharana Vidhi.

On the day of Upakarma, it is recommended to participate in Upakarma Vidhi conducted at various temples and mutts. But, it may not be practically possible for everyone to visit temples for performing Upakarma vidhi for various reasons. Moreover, the need to change Yagnopaveetham arises time and again on several occasions during the course of one's spiritual life. Hence, for convenience of those who cannot visit temples/mutts on the day of Upakarma, a small attempt is made to provide below the process of changing the Yagnopaveetham as a ready reckoner in the form of a check-list. Also, clarifications have been provided to the frequently asked questions about Upakarma and Yagnopaveetham within my limitations.

### **When to perform Upakarma? (Preferred)**

- For followers of Rug-Veda, Upakarma falls on the day coinciding with Sravana Nakshatra during Sraavana masam (month).
- For followers of Yajur-Veda, Upakarma falls on the Pournami (Full Moon day) during Sraavana masam.
- For followers of Saama-Veda, Upakarma falls on the day coinciding with Hastha Nakshathra during Bhadrapada masam.
- For followers of Adharvana-Veda, Upakarma can be performed either on Sraavana Pournami or on Bhadrapada Pournami day.

Above rules are applicable for both regulars as well as for first timers.

### **When not to perform Upakarma?**

In general Upakarma should not be performed if the day coincides with Adhika-masam (Mala masam) or Sankramana or Eclipse. This is applicable for first timers as well as for subsequent Upakarma. Upakarma should not be performed when there is Jaataasoucha (birth) or Mruthaasoucha (mourning) in the family.

### **Upakarma for the first timers...**

Apart from the above, for first timers who are newly inducted into Upanayanam, Upakarma should not be performed if there is an overlapping of Guru or Sukra Mouddyami (Guru/Sukraastha) or Brihaspathi (Jupiter) transiting in Simha Raasi (Leo sign). However, some of the texts suggest that it can be performed during Guru or Sukra Mouddyami after conducting proper Guru or Sukra Shanti accordingly. In such cases it is suggested that it can also be performed during Aashaada masam on the full moon day. Above rule is not applicable for the first timers if Upakarma is performed in the second year except the one stated above for regulars.

### **What? If it cannot be performed on the stipulated day...**

If Upakarma could not be performed on the stipulated day, texts like Dharma Sindhu and others suggest that, in case of Rug-Vedis and Yajur-Vedis, it can be performed in Bhadrapada masam on the day coinciding with Sravana or Hastha star or on the day of Panchami during bright fortnight (Sukla Paksha). Similarly in case of Sama-Vedis it can be performed during Sraavana masam on the day of Hastha star. Provided in all such cases, the day should not be an eclipse or Sankramana day.

### **How many Yagnopaveethas one should wear?**

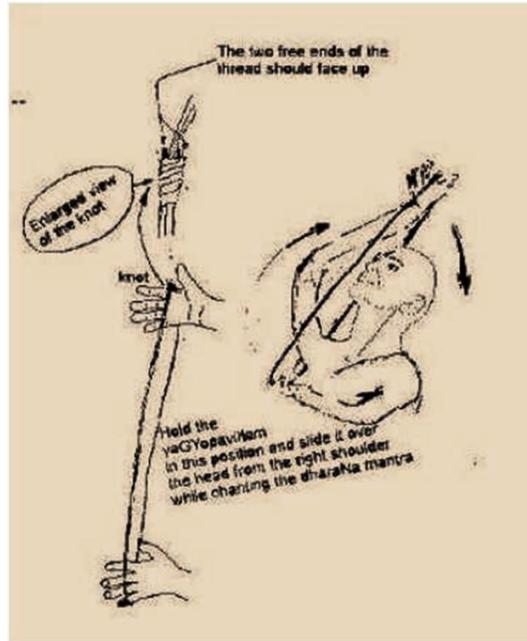
Brahmachari (unmarried person) should wear only one Yagnopaveetham that has three strands. A Grihastha (married person) should wear two such Yagnopaveethams. It is in practice to wear three Yagnopaveethams by a Grihastha, the third one act as an Uttareeyam (upper dhoti). There is also a sampradaya to wear four, as the fourth one is for donating to someone in case of exigency.

### **Who are the Presiding Deities of Yagnopaveetham?**

Pranava (Omkaram), Agni, Naaga, Soma (Moon), Pithru Devathas, Prajapathi, Vayu, Surya and Vishve Devathas are the Presiding Deities apart from the Trinal Lords, Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara (Rudra) and Goddess Gayatri to be invoked before changing the Yagnopaveetham.

### **How to wear new Yagnopaveetham?**

Wear Yagnopaveetham one by one reciting the relevant sankalpa and Yagnopaveetha dhaarana manthra. Every time Aachamanam should be performed and Gayathri manthra should be recited ten times. While wearing Yagnopaveetham it should be held by both hands with the knot in the Yagnopaveetham being held above by the right hand facing upwards as shown in the image.



### What should be the posture of Yagnopaveetham?

Generally we find three postures of wearing of Yagnopaveetham. One is Upavita where the Yagnopaveetha is worn over the left shoulder and under the right arm. This posture is used for performing auspicious ceremonies and sacred rituals related to Gods. This is called Savya position. Under normal circumstances Yagnopaveetham should be in Savya position. The second one is Praachinavidhi where, the Yagnopaveetha is worn above the right shoulder and under the left arm. This posture is used while performing sacred rites to the Forefathers (Pitru Karma rites). This is called Apasavya position. When the Yagnopaveetha is worn around the neck and over the chest in Maalakara (like a garland) it is Nivita. This posture is used during Rishi Tharpanam, while answering the nature calls and while carrying a corpse etc.

### How to remove old Yagnopaveetham?

Old and worn out Yagnopaveetham should not be removed from above the neck. It should be removed from below the navel without touching the feet. Logic behind it could be, Man is said to be purer above the navel. Manu Smruthi says that the portion below the navel is impure. After changing the Yagnopaveetham the old one becomes a decayed thing. It should not be removed from sacred portion of the body that is above the head. Old Yagnopaveetham should be removed by reciting the Visarjana Manthram after performing at least Dasa Gayatri Mantrams. Old Yagnopaveetham should be dropped into water or on a Tree and should not be thrown into garbage.

### When to change the Yagnopaveetham?

- In normal course on the day of Upakarma once in a year, we have to change. Whenever there is Jataasoucham (birth of a child) or Mruthaasoucham (birth/death in the family) after completion of the stipulated period one should change.
- Whenever one visits the Cremation Ground, or touches a Corpse
- Whenever one happen to touch a woman during menstruation.
- Whenever the threads of Yagnopaveetham are severed or it is soiled or worn out.
- Whenever one attends the 10th day ceremony and gives Dharmodaka.

### The Other useful information:

All those who are inducted in to the process of Upanayanam should perform Upakarma compulsorily every year.

On the day of Upakarma it is highly recommended to perform Gayatri Japam according to one's capacity (10/108/1008). There is also a tradition to perform Gayatri Japam on the next day of the Upakarma day. One may follow their respective sampradaya.

One should not wear Yagnopaveetham brought from a shop directly without performing proper Samskara (Pooja) to the new one.

On the Upakarma day those who are eligible, should give Pithru and Guru Tharpanam. Apart from Pithru Tharpanam, everyone who performs Upakarma should give Rushi Tharpanam according to their sampradaya.

Yagnopaveetham and Gopeechandanam along with Dakshina should be offered, at least to two Brahmins on the day of Upakarma.

There is no need to change Yagnopaveetham after Eclipse.

***Direction for changing Yagnopaveetham should be facing East/North***

**Checklist... (For Yagnopaveetha Dhaarana Vidhi)**

1. Guru Vandanam (Invoking Gurus)
2. Vighneshwara Prarthana
3. Aachamanam with Chaturvimshati (24) Kesava Namas
4. Praanayaamam
5. Sankalpam (Recitation of Sankalpa manthra)
6. Yagnopaveetha Samskaram
7. Praana Pratishta
8. Invoking Trinal Lords (Brahma, Vishnu & Shiva)
9. Invoking Presiding Deities of Yagnopaveetham
10. Invoking three Vedas (Rug, Yajur and Saama)
11. Invoking Goddess Gayatri and Surya
12. Yagnopaveetha Dhaarana as mentioned above
13. Removal of old Yagnopaveetham
14. Aachamanam
15. Samarpanam – Sri Krishnaarpanamasthu

Above check-list will be useful during Upakarma and also while changing Yagnopaveetham in normal circumstances.

**Dating of Upakarma...**

While Upakarma is generally observed on full moon day of Sravana Masam, but in practice it is based on the Vedic division or branch one belongs to. We all know that Vedas were conveniently bifurcated into four divisions viz. Rig Veda, Yajurveda, Sama Veda and Atharvana Veda. Since ancient days people have started adopting one of these four divisions according to their lineage for performing sacred rituals. Upakarma which is also one of the Vedic rituals is observed by people as per the branch of Veda they belong to as per their lineage. Reference to these we find in texts like Dharma Sindhu, Nirnaya Sindhu, and Dharma Shastra Darpana. As per these texts performing of Upakarma is based on coincidence of certain elements of Almanac. Accordingly,

Rig Veda Upakarma will be carried out on the lunar day coinciding with Sravana Star during Sravana Masam

Yajur Veda Upakarma on the Full Moon day in Sravana Masam and

Sama Veda Upakarma on the lunar day coinciding with Hastha Star during Bhadrapada Masam

If there is a coincidence of eclipse or transit of Sun (Sankramana), Adhika masam (Mala masam) on the day of Upakarma the timing for performing will change accordingly. For more details please refer to the respective texts/follow your respective religious Almanac. Above rules are applicable for the first timers as well as for the subsequent Upakarma.

Upakarma is not just simply a festival to celebrate and enjoy. It is an occasion to make us remember the significance of Yagnopaveetham and Gayatri Manthra that has been initiated at the time of Upanayanam and to rededicate ourselves to the spiritual path. Hindu Dharma is so strong that even after millions of years the traditions started by our great Rishis and saints followed by our forefathers is still alive even today.

Success in any endeavour, be it studies, or, in a job, we know comprises three things. First we need to have clarity on our objectives. Second, we need a framework for delivering. Third, we need to execute, for which discipline is most important.

Kamokarsheet Japam and Mahasankalpam start with a review of the past and let us go in our mind over what we did not or did do and atone for our sins, but, more importantly, set out our objectives. The schedule of karmas, nithya karmas, provides us with a framework for performance. Upaveetham is a symbol of sanctity to constantly remind us of what we need to do and help us in our karmas. Gayatri Japam is the first and a rather substantial step in following the discipline in execution.

Let us remind ourselves: all we have done on the Upakarma day is Veda Aarambam, or, 'Pillayar Chuzhi'! It needs to be followed by an intense period of Veda Paarayanam and Veda Adyayanam!!

ॐ सह नावतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु । सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।

तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ।

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om Saha Nau-Avatu | Saha Nau Bhunaktu | Saha Viiryam Karava-Avahai |

Tejasvi Nau-Adhii-Tam-Astu Maa Vidviss-Aavahai |

Om Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih ||

Om, May God protect us both, the teacher and the taught, by revealing Knowledge;

May He nourish us both; May we work together with Energy and Vigour;

May our study be enlightening and invigorating, and, not giving rise to hostility.

Om, Peace, Peace, Peace.

### **Upakarma 2016 date:**

Yajur Upakarma – Avani Avittam which is performed in the month of Sravana, on the full moon day. This year, it falls on 18th August, 2016

It is very important that all of us perform this ritual without fail and do Prayshchita for removal of all the sins and secure the divine blessings.

**Note** - Rig Vedi Upakarma as per Sringeri mutt is on August 7. This is because Sringeri Mutt scholars feel that there is Sankramana Dosha on August 17. Rig Vedi Upakarma is observed on the day of Shravan Pournima this year. Brahmins who are the followers of Rig Veda change the sacred thread on the day. In 2016, the date is August 17.

Yajur Vedi Upakarma is observed a day before Shravan Pournami day (Full moon day in Sawan month) this year. Brahmins who are the followers of Yajur Veda change the sacred thread on the day. In 2016, the date is August 18.

Gayatri Japam is on August 19.

Sama Vedi Upakarma is observed on the day after Shravan Amavasi (No moon day in Sawan month). Brahmins who are the followers of Sama Veda change the sacred thread on the day. In 2016, the date is September 4. For Sama Vedis Gayatri Japam is on August 19

The Upakarma dates in 2016 are August 17 and August 18. In 2016, Sama Vedi Upakarma is on September 4.

Attachments: Yajur Upakarma (Avani Avittam)-2016 – Text in Tamil

