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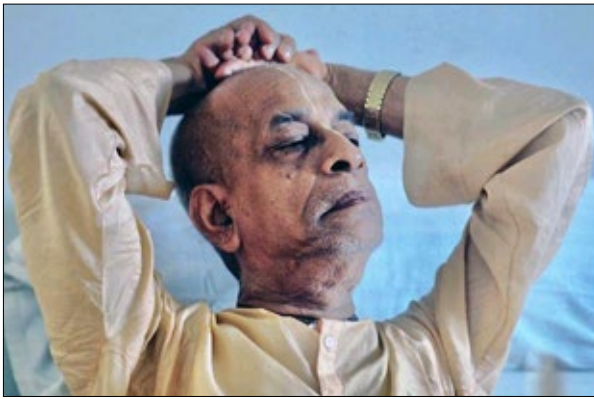
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Hari Parshad Das



NO SERVICE WITHOUT INSTRUCTION

His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

The spiritual master cannot accept service from a disciple without awarding him spiritual instruction. 🌸

— From the purport to *Bhāg.* 3.23.52.

THE VAISHNAVA TRADITION OF PUSHYA-ABHISHEK

By Hari Parshad Das

A prominent festival in the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* tradition is the *puṣyābhiṣekaḥ*, known also as *puṣya-snānam*. Per the traditional Indian calendar it is celebrated in the month of *pauṣa*, December-January. On the full-moon day of this month of *pauṣa*, the moon is situated in a specific *nakṣatra* (visible pattern of stars) known as *puṣya*. On that day, the festival of *puṣyābhiṣeka* is observed by the *vaiṣṇavas*.

The term *puṣyābhiṣeka* is a *sandhi*, a phonetic combination, of the terms *puṣya* and *abhiṣeka*. *Puṣya* refers to the eighth of the twenty-seven *nakṣatras*,

and the term *abhiṣeka* refers to a royal bathing ceremony usually offered to a deity or a king. According to the *Amara-kośa* dictionary, the term *snāna* is a synonym of *abhiṣeka*. Thus, *puṣya-abhiṣeka* and *puṣya-snāna*, refer to the royal bathing ceremony of the Lord carried out on the day in the month of *pauṣa* when the full-moon is situated in the *puṣya-nakṣatra*.

Significance of the Pushya Nakshatra

The *puṣya-nakṣatra* consists of one star, known to modern astronomers as Delta Cancri. During the time in any month when the moon is situated in this *nakṣatra*, it is considered to be a favorable time to begin a journey. It is described in the *Mahābhārata* (*Udyoga-parva*, 6.17) that the Brahmin messenger of the Pandavas began his journey to Hastinapur when the moon was situated in the *puṣya-nakṣatra*. He went there to convey the Pandava's message to the Kauravas regarding giving back their share of the kingdom after they had completed the thirteen-year exile. Again in the *Mahābhārata* (*Śalya-parva*, 34.6), Sri Balaram says that he will be going on a pilgrimage when the moon is situated in the *puṣya-nakṣatra*.

The *puṣya-nakṣatra* is connected with the sage Bharadwaj and its presiding sage is Brihaspati. The *Taittirīya-brāhmaṇa* (3.1.1.5) says, *br̥haspatiḥ prathamam jāyamānaḥ tiṣyam nakṣatram abhisambhūva* — “Brihaspati was born under the *tiṣya* (*puṣya*) *nakṣatra*.” The days pertaining to *puṣya-nakṣatra* are considered to be very auspicious for donating gold. Even today, the Indian Post encourages the sale and donation of gold coins on this day by offering various discounts.

The term *puṣya* comes from the verbal root *puṣ*, which, according to Pāṇini's *dhātu-pāṭha*, denotes nourishment (*puṣṭi*). Thus there is a tradition to administer ayurvedic medicines on the days in any month of the year when the moon is situated in the *puṣya-nakṣatra*. Every time the moon coincides with the *puṣya nakṣatra*, many children in India are administered *svaṛṇa-prāśana*, an ayurvedic preparation containing cow-ghee and gold particles meant to ensure their longevity, mental agility and strength.

Pushyabhishek in the Broader Vedic Tradition

In the Vedic literature, the ceremony of *puṣyābhiṣeka* is carried out for ensuring the strength, auspiciousness, prosperity and influence of the ruler of a kingdom. The fifth *pariśiṣṭa* of the *Atharva Veda* is dedicated entirely to the ceremony of *puṣyābhiṣeka* for a king. The forty-eighth chapter of the *Bṛhat-saṁhitā* of Varahamihira is also dedicated entirely to the same. This ceremony can be carried out in any month when the moon is situated in the *puṣya-nakṣatra*. However, there is special significance attached to performing it in the month of *pauṣa*:

*etat prayujyamānani
prati-puṣyam sukha-yaśo 'rtha-vṛddhi-karam
puṣyād vinārdha-phaladā
pauṣī śāntiḥ parā proktā*

If the *puṣyābhiṣeka* of a king is carried out when the moon is situated in the *puṣya-nakṣatra* it increases the happiness, fame and prosperity of the king. When the bathing is carried out when the moon is in *nakṣatras* besides *puṣya*, it only gives half the result. However, when it is carried out on the *pūṛṇimā-tithi* of the month of *pauṣa* it bestows the highest result. (*Bṛhat-saṁhitā* of Varahamihira, 48.82)

Pushyabhishek in the Puranas and Gaudiya Tradition

A doubt then arises: This seems to be a ceremony intended primarily for a king. Why is it then observed for Krishna by the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas*? The answer is that treating and serving the deity as the king of a particular place is one of the sixty-four limbs of *bhakti* mentioned in the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhuḥ*. In his commentary on the thirty-first limb of *bhakti*, named *paricaryā*, Srila Jiva Goswami says, *paricaryātra rājña iva sevocyate* — “The term *paricaryā* means to serve the Lord exactly like a king.” (*Durgama-saṅgamaṇī* on *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhuḥ* 1.2.140) Thus, among the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas*, Krishna is the *rājādhirāja* — the king of all kings, and the ceremony of *puṣyābhiṣeka* is thus rightly carried out for pleasing him.

The *Skanda Purāṇa* specifies the exact day on which this festival should be observed:

*puṣyarkṣeṇa ca sarinyuktā paurṇamāsī yadā bhavet
pauṣe māsi tathā kuryāt puṣya-snānotsavam hareḥ*

In the month of *pauṣa*, when the full-moon is situated in the *puṣya-nakṣatra*, one should carry out the *puṣya-snāna* bathing ceremony of Lord Hari. (*Vaiṣṇava-khaṇḍa*, *Puruṣottama-kṣetra-māhātmya*, 41.1-2)

The detailed procedure for observing *puṣyābhiṣeka* is specified in the same chapter of the *Skanda-purāṇa*. A brief procedure for observing *puṣyābhiṣeka* is also mentioned in the *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* as follows:

*ghṛta-prasthena deveśam pauṣa-puṣya-site narah
snāpayitvāśvamedhasya phalam āpnoty asaṁśayam*

A person who on the day of the confluence of the moon with the *puṣya-nakṣatra* performs an *abhiṣeka* of the Supreme Lord using one *prastha* (about 768 gms) of pure cow ghee attains the result of performing an *āśvamedha-yajña*. (*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 14.19)

This is the standard procedure of celebrating *puṣyābhiṣeka* in the *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava* tradition. One should note that one *prastha* of ghee is sufficient for relatively smaller-sized deities. For larger deities, more quantities of ghee may be needed. Thus, the term “one *prastha*” in the verse should be interpreted as, “at least one *prastha*”.

Srila Prabhupada and Pushyabhishek

Srila Prabhupada wrote the following in a letter:

I am very pleased that you are making arrangements for the 1st annual Puspabhisheka Yatra Parade and Festival, 1971, and if he is free to come, Vishnujan Swami may come to lead the *kīrtana* and preaching. That is a good proposal. Krishna was just a toy in the hands of the *gopīs*, so one day the *gopīs* decided that we shall decorate him. *Puṣpābhiṣeka* means a ceremony to decorate the deity profusely with flowers, ornaments, cloths. After there should be lavish feasting and a procession through the streets, so that all the citizens should see how beautiful Krishna appears. (Letter to Danavir, 20 November 1971.)

In this letter, Srila Prabhupada uses the term “*puṣpābhiṣeka*”, not “*puṣyābhiṣeka*”, and it is found that many devotees in ISKCON celebrate *puṣyābhiṣeka* in the form of a *puṣpābhiṣeka* and arrange for multitudes of flowers to be offered to the deities in a royal *abhiṣeka* ceremony. Certainly followers of Srila Prabhupada can carry out the *puṣyābhiṣeka* festival according to the instructions given by him in the above letter for a *puṣpābhiṣeka* without worrying about external criticism.



Photo by Nitin, Jaipur.

Govindaji's special dress on Pausa Pūrṇimā

The Tradition in the Jagannath Puri Temple

On the *puṣyābhiṣeka* day, Lord Jagannath is traditionally offered a special dress named *Raghunātha-veśa*. This is also known as the *rājyābhiṣeka-veśa* (royal coronation dress) of the deities. Balaram and Subhadra are dressed as Lakshman and Shanta (Rama's elder sister). A deity of Lakshmi dressed as Sita is also kept near Jagannath. Thus in the Jagannath temple it is Lord Ramachandra who is offered *puṣyābhiṣeka* along with Sita and Lakshman. Jagannath (as Rama) holds a bow and arrow in his hands, and Balaram (as Lakshman) carries an umbrella on top of his head. The various gods and monkey associates offer services at the lotus feet of the Lord. For more information about this dress see the article, "Jagannath's Dress as Lord Ramachandra" in *Sri Krishna Kathamrita* magazine issue 12.

It is said that when Sri Tulasidas, the famous devotee of Lord Ramachandra, visited the Jagannath temple, he uttered the following verse of the *Vālmiki-rāmāyaṇa* — *ārādhaya jagannātham ikṣvāku-kula-daivatam* — "Worship Jagannath, who is the family deity of the Ikshvaku lineage!" (*Uttara-kāṇḍa*, 108.27) In response to his devotion, Sri Jagannath displayed his *Raghunātha-veśa* to Sri Tulasidas. For more information about Tulasidas' historic *darśana* of Jagannath in Puri,

see the article, "Tulasidas Visits Lord Jagannath" in *Sri Krishna Kathamrita* magazine issue 12.

In commemoration of the same event, Sri Jagannath is offered *Raghunātha-veśa* on the day of *puṣyābhiṣeka*. Jagannath, Baladev and Subhadra are offered profuse golden ornaments. Moreover, since the visit of Sri Tulasidas, a phrase attributed to him, *joī rāma soī jagadīsā* — "He who is Rama is Jagannath." — is chanted every morning in the Jagannath temple.

On the *puṣyābhiṣeka* day, 108 golden pots of fragrant water mixed with ghee are supposed to be brought to the temple. Instruments such as the *ghaṇṭī-ghaṇṭā* and *kāhālī* are played. After the morning *ārati* of Jagannath, he is brought in front of a mirror, where he is given a *darpaṇa-abhiṣeka*, mirror bath. The Jagannath deity is never given a direct water bath except on the *snāna-pūrṇimā* day in the month of *Jyeṣṭha*.

During the *puṣyābhiṣeka* ceremony, the following verses from the *Nīlādri-mahodaya* are chanted:

*jagannātha namas tubhyaṁ namas te rāvaṇāntaka
nānāvātāra-līlā-bhūr nila-sāila-pate prabho
divye 'smin pratibimbe tvāṁ tat-kumbha-jalato 'dhunā
snāpayāmi surādhiśam aparādhaṁ kṣamasva me*

Obeisances unto you, O Jagannath! Obeisances unto you, O killer of Ravan! O manifestor

of various pastimes in various incarnations!
O Lord of Niladri! O Prabhu! Today, in this divine mirror I
am bathing you — the Lord of all gods, using waters from
various pots. Kindly excuse my *sevā-aparādhas*.

Sadly, this *veśa* along with the *puṣyābhiṣeka*
celebrations have not been carried out in the Puri
Jagannath Temple for more than a hundred years. The
last *Raghunātha-veśa* was done in 1905, and since then
it has been discontinued. The main reasons for doing
so are the quantities of gold and ornaments needed for
this *veśa*. According to the *Māḍala-panaji* records, this
veśa was first done in 1577 AD, and since then it has been
done only nine times. Nowadays, on the *puṣyābhiṣeka*
festival, Jagannath, Baladeva and Subhadra are offered
śunā-veśa (Sanskrit: *svaṇa-veśa*), golden attire. This
attire doesn't require as many expensive ornaments
and decorations as the *Raghunātha-veśa*. Thus, the
tradition nowadays is to dress the Lord in *śunā-veśa*.

Tradition of the Govindaji Temple in Jaipur

Traditionally in Vrindavan and Jaipur the main part
of the winter season is considered to be from *Śarat*
Pūrṇimā in the month of *Āśvina* (October-November) to
the *Pauṣa Pūrṇimā*. At the Govindaji temple in Jaipur, due
to the cold during this time, flowers are only offered on
top of the deities clothes. The *pūjārīs* don't place them
directly against the body of the Lord. Throughout the
month of *Pauṣa* they offer to Govinda a special dish
called *Khacarāna* (*khichri*) made with eight different



Photo by Nitin, Jaipur.

Govindaji on Pauṣa Pūrṇimā

types of grains. Following the injunctions given in the
Dvādaśa-utsava-praṇālikā, a book describing the details of
the festivals offered to Govindaji throughout the twelve
months of the year, on the day of *Pauṣa Pūrṇimā* they offer
a special dress to Govindaji. The outfit is all white and
consists of tight pants with a kind of skirt, and an outer
coat, all of which have a golden embroidered border
called *kirana*. On that day Govinda is given a special flower
garland on top of his clothes and an exceptional *mukūṭa*
(crown) called the *mayūra-mukūṭa* that is made of solid
gold with figures of peacocks on it. This is the only day of
the year that Govinda wears that ornament. 🌸

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- Interview with Vishnu Tattva Das, a devotee in the *pūjārī* line of Govindaji in Jaipur.

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