

Snatra Puja

Introduction

Rituals

All religions, including Jainism have several rituals. Most, if not all, rituals of Jainism were designed not by Tirthankaras, but by Acharyas and other learned people. The purposes of various rituals include assisting “common people” to take some time out of their day to day lives and spend this time to remember the messages of God, practice proper conduct in life, and to bring peace and happiness for all.

Snatra Puja

In the Snatra Puja ritual, we remember various Tirthankaras and offer kusumanjali for various purposes, re-enact Lord Mahavir’s birth, and pray for the peace and happiness for the whole universe. Snatra Puja was written by Shri Virvijayji Maharaj. Like any other ritual, it is a lot more fun to do Snatra Puja with the knowledge of the purpose of the various steps of the ritual. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss the “what, how and why” of various steps of this puja. We will also describe the state of mind one should have while performing this puja and a description of the surroundings one must imagine.

Overview of Snatra Puja

The Snatra Puja is done in temple in front of Bhagawan’s Idol. We place a small, brass or bronze idol of Bhagawan (usually Shantinath Bhagawan, and in absence, any other Tirthankar) in a Sinhasan (or a throne) on top of three tables. Three tables and the Sinhasan symbolizes the MERU Mountain where Indra Maharaja performed the celebration of Tirthanka’s birth.

The people performing Snatra Puja should be dressed in clean puja clothes. They should do a kesar chandlo and wear a nada chhadee (a red string) on the wrist. To really get into the “mood” of the puja, they should dress as an indra/indrani by wearing a crown and nice ornaments.

To perform this puja, we need kesar, nada chhadee, kusumanjali, things needed to perform ashta-prakari puja (panchamrut, water, kesar/sukhad, flowers, dhoop, deepak, rice, sweet, fruit), coins, pearls and jewels, rice, dhoop, kalash of water, mirrors, chamars, fans, rakhis, deepaks, bells, and a kalash in the shape of a bull.

The Snatra Puja is done in three main parts.

1. Offering Kusumanjali
2. Re-enactment of Mahavirswami’s Janma Mahotsav
3. Shanti Kalash and Chaitya Vandan

We will learn more details of each one of these parts in the following paragraphs.

Offering of Kusumanjali

Kusumanjali is the mixture of flowers, rice, and kesar/sukhad. We use the best and the purest things to prepare the kusumanjali. During the songs of Snatra Puja we offer kusumanjali on the right foot of Bhagawan's Idol with different intentions every time we hear the words "kusumanjali melo---Jinanda." Some of the reasons to offer kusumanjali are as follows.

- To get rid of the sins or bad karmas.
- To become Siddhas.
- To get rid of all the obstacles in life.
- For the peace and the happiness of the Jain Sangh.

After offering kusumanjali for these various purposes, we do a Chaitya Vandana that helps us remember special virtues of Tirtankaras and all the places of pilgrimage. At the end of Chaitya Vandana we start the second part of the Snatra Puja, Janma Mahotsav, which is the description and re-enactment of Bhagwan's birth.

Janma Mahotsav

In this step of the Snatra Puja process, we re-enact Bhagwan's birth by remembering and performing various activities and festivities performed by Devs and Devis. The following events are re-enacted.

- Display of the 14 dreams -- The meaning and the results of the dreams are discussed.
- The birth of Bhagwan is described.
- Various activities done by 56 Devis (dikk-kumari)
- Indra Maharaja learns about Bhagwan's birth. He approaches Bhagwan's mother and takes Bhagwan to MERU Mountain for the celebration of Bhagwan's birth.

All the activities and festivities that the Devs and Devis did are re-enacted.

After the re-enactment of Janma Mahotsav, on some special occasions, some people also sing a prayer for Shantinath Bhagwan.

Ashta Prakari puja is performed to Bhagwan's idol.

Arti and Mangala Devo are performed next.

Shanti Kalash and Chaitya Vandana

Shanti Kalash and Chaitya Vandana are performed to end the puja. During Shanti kalash, we pour panchamrut into a pot while reciting mantras for the peace of the Jain Sangh and the entire universe and for removal of all the obstacles in our lives. The water in the pot is considered to have special powers to bring peace and to get rid of obstacles in life for people and places where it is sprinkled. At the end of Shanti Kalash we do a Chaitya Vandana.

Conclusion

The description of the Snatra Puja given here will help you to understand the purpose of the Snatra Puja and will make your participation in this ritual an enjoyable experience.

