

SHIYAL SASHTI AND SHEETALA SAPTAMI

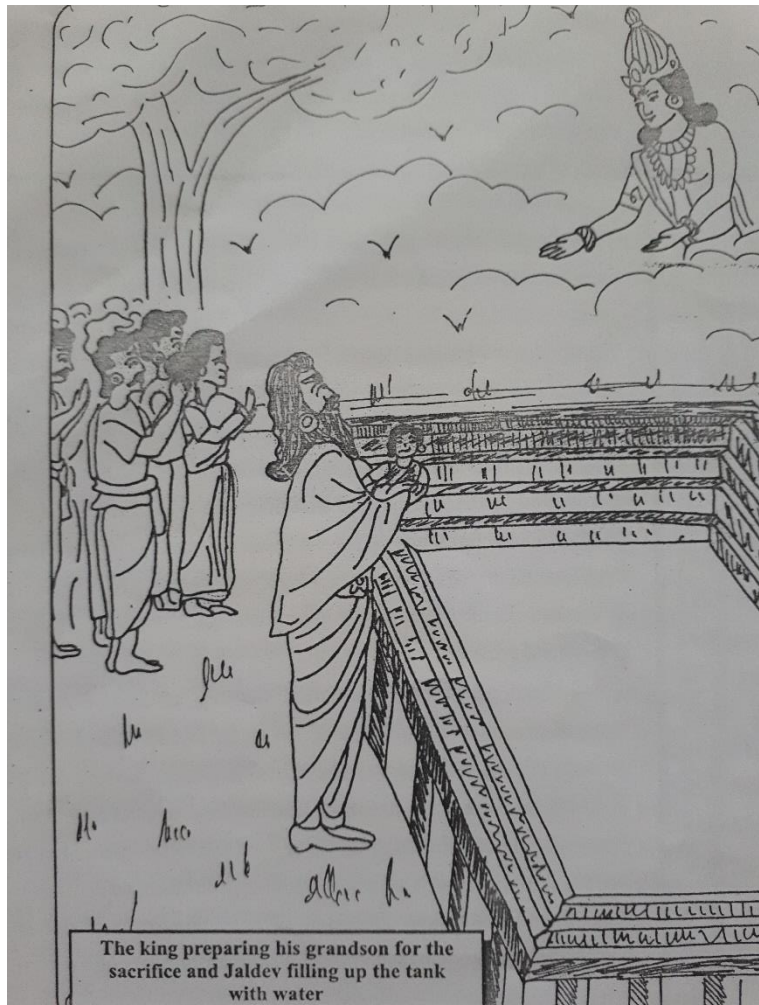
This pooja falls on Sravana suddha sashti and saphami.

Pooja procedure : To this day, it is customary in Maharashtrian households to prepare curd rice and lime pickle on Sravana suddha saphami, offer it to Jal Dev first and reserve the rest for their children. Every mother will call out for her child fondly “Shiyala, come and partake of this curd bath”. Such is the faith resposed in Jal Dev.

Story of Shiyal sashti and Sheetala saptami

There once lived a kind hearted king who was always mindful of the sufferings of his people and wanted to relieve them of their distress. He arranged to lay roads, plant avenue trees on roadsides, build rest houses and provide water-tanks for their use. Work on digging a tank was almost completed and expectations were on the see the tank full of water. To his utter dismay, the king found that his efforts to get the tank full with water did not fructify. The tank remained dry. Before long Jal Dev, was propitiated. The prayers were answered. Jal Dev appeared before the king and said, “O King, I am pleased with your prayers but you will have to offer your eldest daughter-in law’s child (meaning the king’s grandson) in sacrifice before your wishes could be fulfilled”, so saying Jal Dev disappeared. The king was grief struck, for how could this happen? How could he offer his grandson in sacrifice without the consent of his daughter-in-law? Yet, the needs of the people were uppermost in his mind. The benefit of the people will far outweigh the loss and agony he will have to suffer.

He decided to send his daughter-in-law alone to her parents for a short while. Meanwhile preparations were afoot for the intended sacrifice. On an auspicious day, the child was given an



The king preparing his grandson for the sacrifice and Jaldev filling up the tank with water

oil-bath, dressed well, Jal Dev was propitiated, the child was placed in a cot and sacrifice performed. Jal Dev was pleased and soon the tank was full with water. People were happy.

The daughter-in-law returned with her brother from her parent's house, was pleased to see the tank full of water and was all praise for the king. She was, however, ignorant of the sacrifice. That day happened to be sravana sudda saptami. She offered prayers to Jal Dev under a tree on the tank bund took a cucumber leaf, placed a little curd rice with lime pickle and placed betel leaves and nuts and a copper coin (Paisa) as Dakshina, gave it to her brother as Vaana. She suddenly remembered her child and thinking that it would be playing nearby, called out in a loud voice "Shiyala, my child, come and partake this curd bath and lime pickle". To everybody's surprise, the child who was offered in sacrifice come back to life and was seen coming from the tank and running towards her.

The king, in complete silence, watched all the happenings and asked his daughter-in-law, how her child who was offered in sacrifice, come back to life. She told the king how she worshipped Jal Dev, gave curd bath to her brother as Vana and called out to her child. Everyone present praised her. There was happiness all around.

The Marathi School and the Maharashtra Association Building Trust, Chennai.