

## **JIVATHI POOJA**

Jivathi or Jivantika is an incarnation of Parvathi, the goddess who is believed to protect children. On every Friday in the month of Shravan, jivathi pooja is conducted.

**Pooja procedure :** This pooja is performed by married women who have children. The conventional pooja is performed for the goddess Parvathi. Married women are invited for lunch by the female members of their parental home. This person can even be her mother's sisters or cousins, her own elder and married cousins or women from her father's side, as long as the hostess is not from her husband's home. At this meal, among various sweets and delicacies, puran poli is a must serve. In the evenings, along with the traditional offering of Haldi and Kumkum, roasted chana mixed with milk and sugar are offered.

### **Story of Jivathi Pooja**

There once lived a king and a queen in a beautiful town. Though they enjoyed all comforts, they were not happy. They had no children. The queen longed for a male child. She sent for a midwife from the town and promised to reward her with bounties if only she could manage to secure her a newly born male baby. The midwife readily agreed and waited for an opportune moment. After some enquiries, she came to know that a poor brahmin's wife was in her early stages of pregnancy. She approached her and said, "O, young lady, you are pregnant but you are poor. If you happen to feel the labour pains, send for me at once. I will help you during delivery. I require no fees". The lady agreed. The midwife went back to the queen and told her, "Queen, today, I met a poor brahmin's wife who is in her early stage of pregnancy. Her gait and features seem to indicate that she is most likely to deliver a male child. If you arrange to get ready a tunnel or a secret passage from your apartment leading to her house, I can manage to get you the male child soon after delivery. But you must feign pregnancy right from now on. The queen was overjoyed. She pretended to be pregnant by neatly arranging folded saris around her belly so that none would suspect her false pregnancy. Word went round that the queen was pregnant.

When the due date for delivery was approaching, the brahmin's wife showed signs of labour and the midwife was sent for. The midwife speaking softly to her told her, "Look, young lady, this is your first delivery. Naturally, you will be disturbed in mind and also afraid. Better allow me to bind your eyes with a cloth which I will remove after delivery". Soon a male child was delivered, but the midwife cleverly managed to transfer the child to the queen's apartments and instantly substituted a grindstone tied with a cloth in its place and told that lady that she was most unfortunate to have delivered a grindstone. The lady was disappointed but could not believe the concocted story.

At the palace, it was announced that the queen had delivered a male child and there was jubilation all around. The Brahmin's wife was grief stricken and

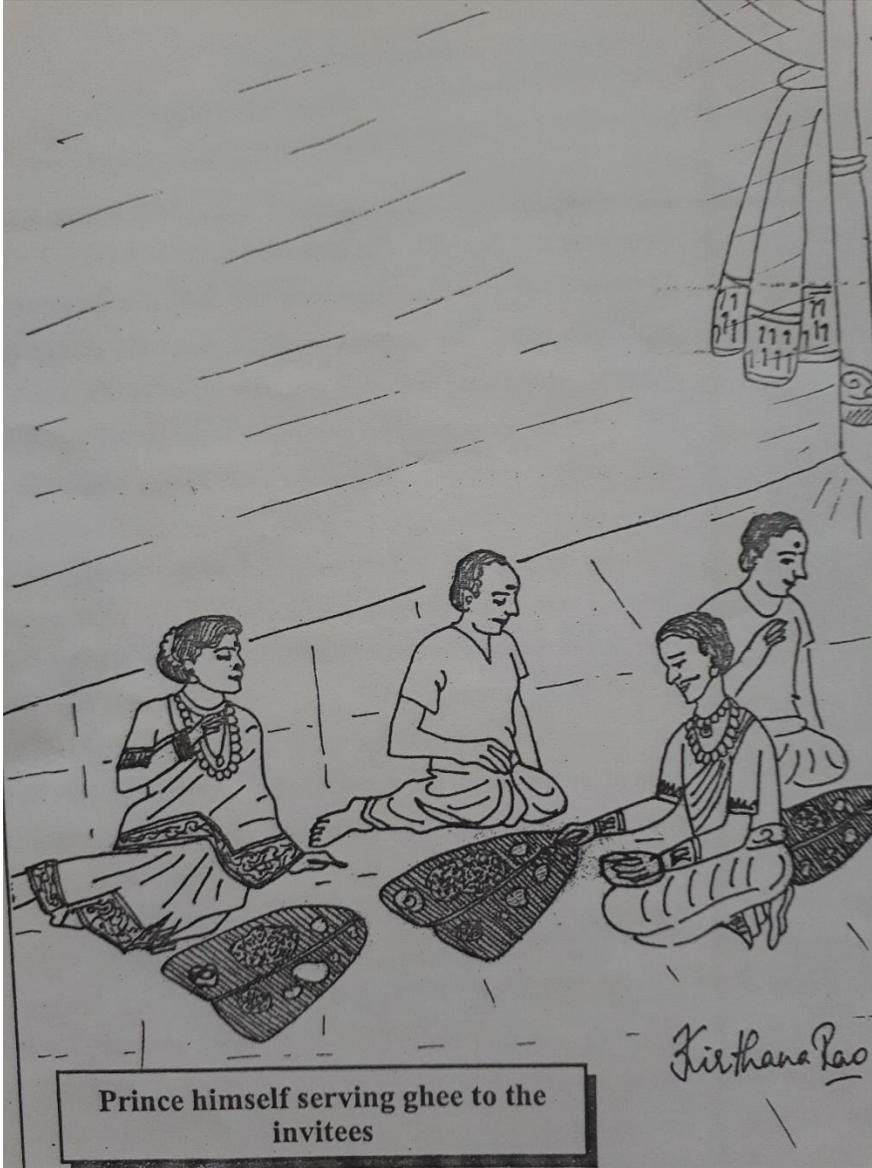
took a vow that she will worship “JIVATI MAYEE” every Friday of the month of Sravana and after worship, sprinkle akshata (full grains of rice) with full hope that it would fall on her child’s head, wherever he is and he will be blessed. Also she decided to abstain from wearing green saris, wearing green bangles, never cross a pandal supporting a bitter gourd creeper. It is worth mentioning, even today, among the Maharashtrian families, this custom is observed by mothers whose first child is male.

In the palace, the prince grew up to be youth and in one of his wanderings, spotted a lady near a courtyard and instantly fell in love with her. The same night, he decided to meet her and located her house. He also saw a cow with its calf tied to a pole nearby. Unwittingly, he trampled upon the calf’s tail and in pain, the calf asked the cow, “Mother, who is the sinful fellow who tramples upon my tail carelessly?” The cow replied, “Oh, my dear, a fellow who falls in love with his own mother, how else will he behave?” The prince overheard this, come home and decided to go to Varanasi and Gaya. On his way, halted at a brahmin’s house and since it was already night time, he decided not to disturb the inmates and slept at the entrance.

In the Brahmin’s house, for quite sometime, strange but horrible incidents were taking place. Every time a child was born, a SATAVI (meaning a wicked woman or, sorceress) used to visit the house on the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> day and kill the child. This way the family had lost many children and was grief stricken. However, this time, a miracle happened. It was the 5<sup>th</sup> day since the birth of a child. The SATAVI came as usual, but was in fury, as some one was lying at the entrance, blocking her way. At once, JIVATI MAYEE appeared and scolded her saying, “You wicked lady, this prince blocking your way was born out of my grace to a lady who worships me. He is therefore, my child too. You have no right to trespass, go away”. The Satavi left and so too Jivati Mayee. The brahmin’s child was saved. He could not believe that this time his child was spared. The next morning, when he opened the door, he saw the prince laying down. He cried in ecstasy, “Oh, Prince, you saved my child. Please be my guest today”. The prince agreed and by evening he continued his journey to Varanasi and Gaya. It is usual for pilgrims visiting Gaya to abstain from eating any vegetable most dear to them. When the Prince was doing his ablutions in the river, suddenly two hands appeared. He could not understand this phenomenon and when he approached pundits nearby, they told him to make “Annadana” on a large scale after returning and he is likely to get a clarification.

It was a Friday, when the Prince returned home. He immediately arranged for a feast and ordered all people, men and women, not to cook food in their homes, but take part in the feast without fail. This order applied also to the lady who had given birth to him. She too had to attend the feast. But how could she? It was Sravana Friday, the day for Puja of Jivati Mayee. So she met the Prince and he agreed to her conditions. The conditions were that the floor should be free of the starch or the water used to wash the rice, and she should not see women wearing green bangles.

The feast commenced. The Prince himself began to serve ghee from a vessel. As he approached the row where the lady was seated and served



ghee to the lady out of a mother's pure love, milk from her breasts showered on the Prince's face and he angrily left the place and refused to come out and oversee the arrangements. The queen, his foster mother, came there and explained the whole happenings. She divulged the truth that she was only his foster mother and her true mother was the lady partaking in the feast.

The prince was delighted to know the truth, apologized to the original parents, built a separate palace for them nearby and looked after them well.

Even to this day, Maharashtrian ladies observe this vow "JIVATHI PUJA"

worship her on all Fridays in Sravana month and bless their children with akshata.

Whenever a delivery takes place in a family, on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> day, the eldest of the family will be made to sleep at the entrance to the delivery room to ward off evil effects of SATAVI, the sorceress.

Such is the faith in 'JIVATHI's grace.

\*\*\*\*\*