

JYESHTA GOWRI POOJA

Jyeshtha gowri pooja falls on Bhadrapada shukla saptami, the day immediately following Rishipanchami. It is strongly believed that by performing this pooja sincerely, husbands who have deserted their wives return home safe even after a lapse of several years.

Pooja procedure : Two sisters, one the elder called Jyeshtha and the other younger called Kanishta are worshipped. In South Indian families, pooja models of the goddesses are usually prepared, as follows : Two bronze kalasas (pots) are required to make the models. One of them should be bigger than the other. On the sides of the pots, the figures of the goddesses are drawn, using sandal paste and turmeric and using black bindi for the eyes and hairlocks. A small silken cloth is tied round the belly of the bigger vessel and over its mouth is placed a smaller vessel which has the face of the deity painted and its head is also decorated. A similar model depicting the younger deity is also made ready and both are placed side by side on wooden plank so as to give semblance of two sisters sitting side by side.

Avahana of the deities is performed a day prior to the actual pooja day in the evening. Two suhasins each carrying one deity meet at the pooja place, one coming from the front door and the other through the backyard and place the deities on the wooden plank. A pair of strands of cotton thread with eight knots (called Dora) is placed by the side of the deities. The pooja is performed, devotional songs are sung and haldi-kumkum is distributed.

On the next day (Saptami day) the regular pooja is performed in the morning and a feast is arranged. At the end of the pooja the dora is given to each suhasin and each one holding one of the broken coconut in their right hand, and the thread tied to the right wrist.

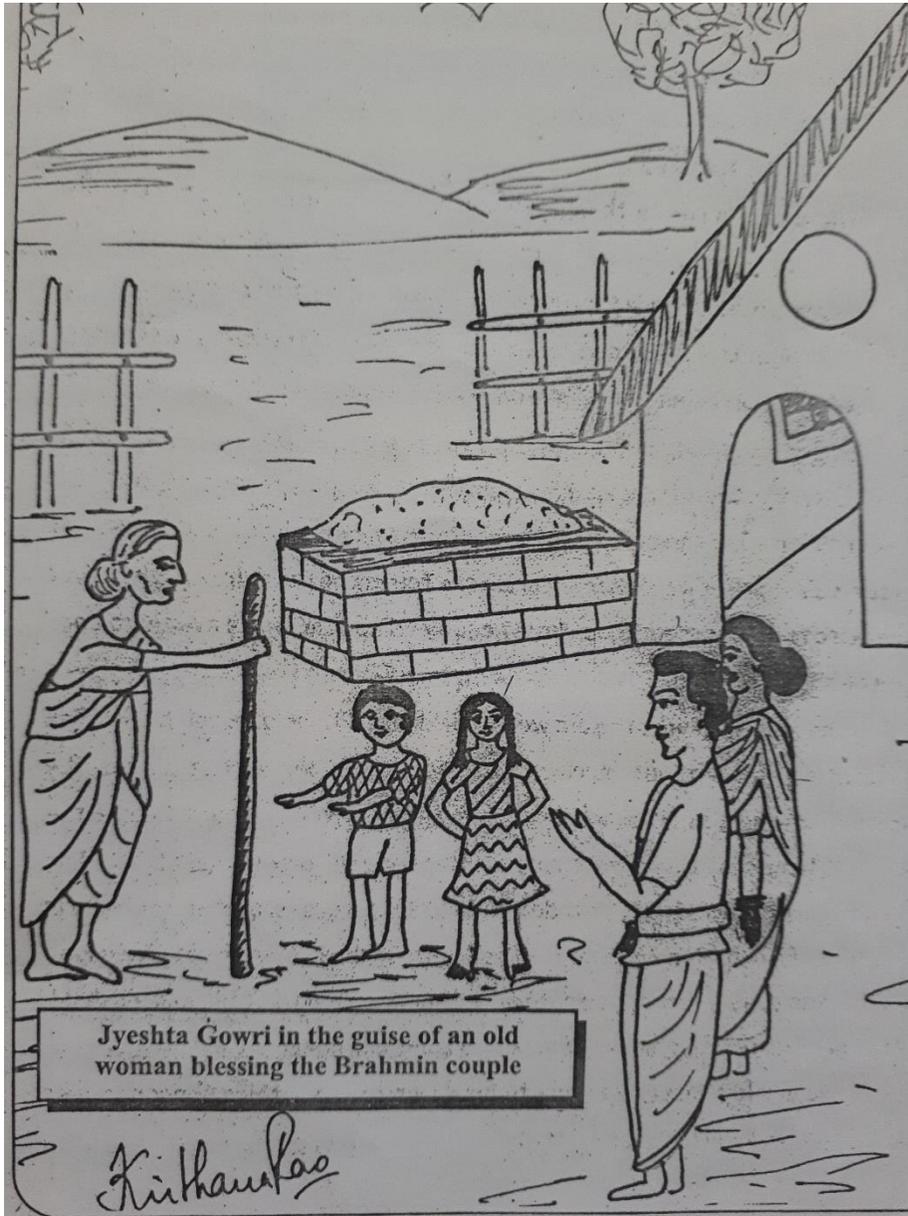
On the third day (Ashtami day), women partake left over food of the previous night.

Story of Jyeshtha Gowri pooja

In a countryside, there lived a poor Brahmin family, which could not afford even one square meal a day. During Bhadrapada sukla paksha ashtami, the whole village looked festive. There was a lot of movement of women dressed in bright costumes and were seen carrying home images of Goddess Gowri for puja. Bells were ringing and there was joy all round. The scene was however, different in the brahmin's house. They could neither buy image of Gowri nor afford to get fruits and flowers for pooja. The children, observing the festive mood in every house, went to their mother and asked, "Mother, why don't you also go out and get us an image of Gowri?" The mother replied, "What is the use of getting Gowri alone? We should have fruits and flowers and prepare neivedya. Go and ask your father to get all these, I will get Gowri".

The children ran to their father and put forth their demands. But how could he convince them that he cannot afford to get all these? The children were stubborn. He was upset and even thought, that ending his left is the best solution. He began to wander, hither and thither until towards evening, he met an old woman. She consoled him and

asked him to take her to his home. He agreed and took her to his home. At home, his wife, and children seeing the stranger asked their father who that lady was. He simply replied, "It is the grandmother". In the night, when his wife went to fetch rice for porridge, to her surprise she found the pot full of grain, which otherwise normally used to be almost empty. The family was overjoyed and ate well and slept.



The next morning, the old woman demanded to be given oil bath. The Brahmin's wife, without murmur, obliged. The old woman called the Brahmin, "My son, ask your wife to prepare milk kheer". Prompt came the reply, "Where can I go for so much milk? Nobody will give me milk free. The old woman intervened, "My son, don't say 'NO' always. Don't say nothing is available. Pray to Goddess Gowri. Prepare a Goshala. Go out and give a loud call for the cows and buffaloes, they will come running and fill your goshala. Milk them, you will get plenty of milk. Prepare milk kheer".

He meekly obeyed her and to his surprise, everything happened just as told and they all had a grand feast. The next day, the old woman wanted to go back to her house. The Brahmin appealed to her, "O Mother, by your grace, we are having plenty of eat and are happy. Please stay back with us".

The old woman replied, "My son, don't be afraid. You have my blessings. You will henceforth be never in want. I am "JYESHTA GOWRI!" When you return home, I will give you plenty of sand. Sprinkle a part of it all round the house, the rest throw on your cooking

utensils, on your grain pot, in your trunk box and at the Goshala. You will ever be happy and prosperous”.

Jyeshta Gowri, then explained to him, how the vrata or pooja should be performed. “On Bhadrapada suklapaksha ashtami, go to the lakebed, collect two stones wash them with hot water, do Pranaprathishta, calling one Jyeshta and other one Kanishta (meaning Elder and Younger), worship them with Dora (sacred thread), the next morning invite a suhasin, do all the upacharas and offer rice and coconut in her ONTI and offer her plenty of food. In the evening, invite women for haldi kumkum. You will never be in want”, so saying she blessed him.

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