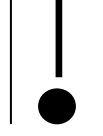


Importance of ANGARA and AKSHATA
Mail sent By
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21-Aug-2007



Dear Haribhaktas,

Any religious practice, to be valid, should be backed by a valid scripture or an authentic sampradAya. For, what is enjoined in the scriptures or adhered to by the saMpradAya becomes important and relevant. Apart from this, in these modern times, we also feel a need for some scientific explanation or background for all our religious practices, for everyone to practice them with conviction.

Today, we find reference to some of our practices in our scriptures such as gopichanda UrdhapuNdra dhAraNa, mudrA dhAraNa, a~NgAra dhAraNa etc. But, for some practices such as akshata, there is no specific scriptural evidence available or has come to light so far. But we learn that this is as authentic as gopichandana or a~NgAra dhAraNa as it was practiced by great stalwarts of Madhva Philosophy like shrI satyadhyAna tirtha and other great j~nAnis. The sampradAya is itself is a sufficient evidence in this case.

All these practices may or may not have an explanation in terms of modern science. But there must be scientific explanation for everything and these practices must also have some traditional scientific reason. But, our scriptures, for some reason, don't reveal the traditional scientific reasons for such practices. May be people of this age are not qualified for such higher knowledge. Therefore, these basic questions though they look simple, become very difficult to answer with authority.

I have presented below what little I know about the practices of a~NgAra and akshata. In places where I did not find any scriptural evidences I have used my own little understanding. As a result, I could have missed something or added more to the confusion. I beg your forgiveness for this.

Importance and relevance of a~NgAra

As to the pramANa regarding applying a~NgAra we have the following quote from ahnika prakaraNa of smR^itimuktAvali of shrI kR^iShNAcharya (disciple of shrI raghavendra tIrtha)

viShNora~NgArasheSh eNa a~NgAniparimArjayet .
duritAni vinashyanti vyAdhyayo yAnti khaNdashaH ..

This verse is attributed to shrIkR^iShNAmR^itamahArNava of shrI madhvAcharya by shrI kR^iShNAcharya. But other commentators of like tAmraparNI srInivAsAcharya did not include this verse in their version of kR^iShNAmR^itamahAr Nava. The meaning of this verse is as under.

One who applies on different parts of his body, the a~NgAra offered to viShnu would be free from all difficulties and diseases

The importance of applying a~NgAra, which is referred to as dhUpa shesha in the verse quoted in smR^itimuktAvali is as follows

rudra uvAcha

sha~NkhodakaM ca naivedyaM nirmAlyaM pAdayorjalam .
ArArtirdhUpasheShas hcha brahmahatyApahArakA H ..

The sha~Nkodaka, naivedya, nirmAlya (gandha, tulasi, flowers), tIrtha, Arati and dhUpa shesha(a~NgAra) all these cleanse one from ghastly sins like brahma hatya.

There is also a quote available from padma purANa which says

na bhayaM vidyate tasya divi bhaumAntarixajaM .
viShNordhUpasya sheSheNa yasyA~NgaM ca vilepitaM

There will be no fear on earth, sky or antarixa who has applied the dhUpa sheSha of viShNu (a~NgAra) on his body.

bhavanti saMpadastasya nApadastasya dehinaH
harerdattAvasheSheN a dhUpena parimArjati .

One who applies the a~NgAra after offering it to shrI hari, will be blessed with wealth and will be free from adversities.

pishAcato bhayaM nAsti na corAdi bhayaM kvacit .
shcayitvA harerdhUpaM nirmAlyaM pAdayorjalaM
dIpaM nIrAjanaM kR^itvA devadevasya chakriNaH .
varShakoTi shataM sAgraM viShNorloke mahIyate .

There will be no fear of devils and thieves to one who offers dIpa and nIrAjana, applies a~NgAra and wears the nirmAlya of shrI hari.

Preparation of a~NgAra

a~NgAra, basically is a burning coal, which is red hot. First, dhUpa should be offered to viShNu by sprinkling dashA~Ngam etc on the red hot coal during puja. Later it is cooled by putting it in water. It should be kept aside for applying after the completion of pUjA.

Where to apply

It is applied at all places where gopichandana is applied.

When to apply and when not to

Should be applied everyday without fail even on ekadashi's and even during ashauca.

Akshata

As mentioned earlier, there is no specific reference to this practice in the scriptures available to us today. But our rich sampradaya stands as a proof to this practice.

Important and relevance of Akshata

As we have no scriptural evidence available today for this practice we cannot give specific details on its importance or relevance. We may approach the learned for answers (mahAntaH praShTavyAH) .

Preparation

The basic ingredients of akshata are

1. turmeric root
2. powder ash of burnt plantain flower

The steps to prepare akshata are as follows

1. The covering of the plantain flower (baLe hUvina sippu) should be dried and burnt and the ash collected.
2. A turmeric root should be ground on a nice stone(shaane kallu) adding small quantities of water to make a soft paste
3. mix sufficient quantity of the ash from step 1
4. The paste will turn maroon in color.
5. Offer it to viShNu during pUja and to other deities .Keep it aside for applying after the completion of the pUjA.

Note: Normally, the dried ash is mixed with some plantains and small akshata balls are prepared and dried for later use. The dried balls are used in step 3 in the place of the powder. Some also use the bark of a tree as it also gives the same color but we don't know how authentic the practice is though. But the quality of akshata of the tree is not as good as that which is obtained by the above procedure

The purity of this depends and the type and quality of the material used.

When to use and when not to?

According to the sampradaya, akshata is not applied during ekadashis and ashauca (due to death of some near relative)

Where to apply

To the forehead.

Haraye namaH,

Regards,

R.Rachuri