

Paarthiv Puja: A Distinctive Worship Practice of Lord Shiva

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Abstract

Lord Shiva, one of the principal deities in Hinduism, is revered by countless devotees and is known by 108 different names, each reflecting his multifaceted nature and attributes. The Himalayan region, with its serene and majestic landscapes, is widely considered the spiritual abode of Lord Shiva, making it a significant center for his worship. Lord Shiva is venerated as the epitome of eternal truth, omnipresence, and purity. He is often described as "unborn" and "eternal," embodying the ultimate reality and transcendental qualities. Despite His cosmic and supreme nature, Lord Shiva is known for his innocence, kindness, and deep compassion, qualities that endear Him to His followers. Among the myriad ways of worshipping Lord Shiva, the Paarthiv Puja holds a special place in the hearts of His devotees. This practice, which involves the worship of idols crafted from clay or earth, is deeply rooted in Hindu tradition and has been performed with great devotion for centuries. The ritual is particularly prominent in Shiva temples across India, with a special emphasis in the mountainous regions, where the divine connection to Lord Shiva is perceived to be even more profound. The grandeur and spiritual energy of these ceremonies are unparalleled, as they are conducted with utmost reverence and divinity. This study delves into the historical, cultural, and religious aspects of *Paarthiv Puja*, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of this significant ritual. The study focuses on uncovering the origins of the practice, its evolution over time, and its role in various regional and community-specific traditions. By examining the preparation, rituals, and symbolism associated with Paarthiv Puja, the study sheds light on the intricate processes that make this worship unique and spiritually significant. Through this exploration, the study also emphasizes 38 worship ingredients, the variations in *Paarthiv Puja* practices across different regions and communities, showcasing the diverse interpretations and adaptations of the ritual within the broader framework of Hindu worship. The study further aims to preserve and disseminate knowledge about this unique religious tradition, ensuring that its significance is understood and appreciated by future generations. By documenting the details of *Paarthiv Puja*, this study contributes to the broader goal of preserving India's rich spiritual and cultural heritage.

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Introduction

India is an all-religion country, due to which there are varied religious and customary systems here. The special feature is that on every auspicious occasion special importance is given to the natural resources, particularly plants during the worship of the respective gods and goddesses. In this connection, Devbhoomi Uttarakhand is considered a very important place from religious, spiritual and tourism point of view. Prominent

among these are Shivalayas, shrines, monasteries, temples etc. situated in different historical periods in this Himalayan region. At these places, days, ascendant and time are fixed for worship on various ceremonies, rituals, fasts, stories and other auspicious occasions [1]. Accordingly, the concerned deity is invoked using plants and other worship materials. It is believed that doing this brings happiness and prosperity [2]. Due to the high impact of these cultural practices people give

high reverence to plants and their flowers, leaves, seeds, roots and water resources like rivers, mountains and continue to be used in the sacred and social ceremonies of the Hindus. Some authors even expressed the need to study the scientific importance of these mythological activities [3]. According to mythological literature, Trimurti i.e. Lord Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh (lord Shiva) is also worshipped with plant ingredients and all the troubles are removed by this [4].

In the present study, the religious, social and environmental importance of various plants and their ingredients used for the worship of lord Shiva during *Paarthiv Puja* in Kumaun has been studied. Lord Shiva means the supreme one, the auspicious one and the pure one [5]. Apart from this, the importance of *Paarthiv Puja*, method of worship, faith of local people and chief Shivalayas (abode of lord Shiva) situated in Kumaun Himalaya have also been focused.

Materials and Methods

Study Area: The state of Uttarakhand is geographically divided into two distinct regions: Kumaun and Garhwal. Within Uttarakhand, Kumaun encompasses six out of the thirteen districts. The focus of the present study lies specifically within the Kumaun region. Historically, this rugged mountainous terrain has been a cradle for various dynasties, including the Pauravas, Kushanas, Kunindas, Guptas, Pratiharas, Katyuris, Raikas, Palas, Chands, Parmars or Panwars, Sikhs, and the Britishers. Notably, among these, the Kunindas dynasty, which emerged in the 2nd century BCE, held significance as fervent followers of Shaivism. Subsequently, the influence of Adi Shankaracharya, who traversed through Garhwal and Kumaun during the 7th to 8th centuries, led to a revival of Shaivite practices in the region. This revival endures to the present day, prominently observed at sacred sites like the Jageshwar shrine, where devotion to Lord Shiva continues to flourish. The present study was carried out in some religious places of Kumaun.

Field Survey: Mostly *Paarthiv Puja* is performed during Shravan month from mid-July to mid-August of every year. But in the year 2023 first half month of *Shravan* was assumed unfavourable for organising such event like *Paarthiv Puja*. Therefore, in this year it was celebrated 15 days later. By this reason the survey was conducted in two phases. In the first phase of the study only photographs of the worship ingredients including plants were taken at the time of *Paarthiv Puja* from different places of Kumaun. Thereafter, with the help of photographs and field observations an account of plant materials was prepared.

Data Collection: A semi-structural questionnaire was also prepared to collect the detailed information about each worship ingredients used during *Paarthiv Puja* in the second phase of the study during September-October 2023. Information on the method of usage of plants and other ingredients along with religious beliefs was also collected. This questionnaire-based information was gathered by using google form discussion with each informer at their place. Some priests were also interviewed during the survey.

Data Analysis: All the collected information was downloaded from the google form in excel data sheet. For compilation and preparation of report relevant literature was also consulted.

Result and Discussion

1. Worship Ingredients Associated with *Paarthiv Puja*

Usage of total 38 plant species belonging to 28 families were observed during the present study (Table 1). All these sacred

ingredients are traditionally applied in different steps of *Paarthiv Puja* and also in fasts of Shravana Monday's in Kumaun. This information was gathered from twenty households of the region who performed this worship every year. The worship ingredients used in *Paarthiv Puja* are found to be of two types- the plant-based ingredients and the other ingredients which are not plant material. It was also observed that the major ingredients which are used for worship belongs to plants. On the basis of growth forms of the plants, the religious plants which are used to perform *Paarthiv Puja* are categorized as- (A) trees (B) shrubs (C) other varieties.

- A. Tree Species:** During the study a total number of 11 trees species were identified (Figure1). Various plants like leaves, flower, seeds and wood etc are offered during the worship in the area. These important tree species are as follows- Aam (*Mangifera indica*), Badam (*Prunus dulcis*), Chandan or Kumkum (*Santalum album*), Nariyal (*Cocos nucifera*), Jayfal (*Myristica fragrans*), Kaaju (*Anacardium occidentale*), Kapoor (*Cinnamomum camphora*), Painya (*Prunus avium*), Timul (*Ficus auriculata*), Seb (*Malus pumila*), Supari (*Areca catechu*).
- B. Important Religious Shrubs:** Beside, trees 13 shrubs species are also applied during *Parthiv Puja* which include Dhatura (*Dhatura stramonium*), Bhang (*Cannabis sativa*), Chameliol (*Jasminum officinale*), Gulab (*Rosa indica*), Ilaichi (*Elettaria cardamomum*), Sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*), Jatamasi (*Nardostachys jatamansi*), Laung (*Piper longum*), Nirgundi (*Vitex negundo*), Cotton (*Gossypium arboretum*), Sarson (*Brassica campestris*), Vashlochan (*Bambusa vulgaris*), Til (*Sesamum indicum*) thus a sum of 10 species of shrubs varieties of plants are also worshiped (Figure1).
- C. Other Plant Varieties:** Besides trees and shrubs 7 species of herbs- Guggul (*Commiphora wightii*), Kachhi Haldi (*Curcuma longa*), Kamal (*Nelumbo nucifera*), Kasuri Methi (*Abelmoschus moschatus*), Kela (*Musa bulbisiana*), Kesar (*Colchicum autumnale*), white clover (*Trifolium repens*), 4 species of climbers- Bel (*Aegle marmelos*), Giloy (*Tinospora cordifolia*), Kishmish (*Vitis vinifera*), Paan patta (*Piper betle*) and 3 species of grasses- (*Oryza sativa*), Doob (*Cynodon dactylon*), Jaw (*Hordeum vulgare*) are used to perform the worship (Figure1).

2. Religious Beliefs Associated with *Paarthiv Puja*

The Hindu month Shravan (Shravana) holds a great religious faith among people and it is considered to be one of the most auspicious months in the year. Different types of fasts are observed in this Hindu month. Fasts started as 'sixteen Mondays' from this month are believed auspicious in particular [6]. During Shravan lord Shiva and goddess Parvati are worshipped with great devotion and dedication. As per Shiv Purana, it is also believed that Naar is another name of lord Shiva which is derived from the word Neer means water. It refers to the occurrence of more rain and erupting water naturally from the earth during Shravan [7]. Besides Monday's fasts (Shravan Somwar), this month is also marked by some other important festivals- Drikpanchang, Kamika Ekadashi, Mangala Gauri Vrats, Hariyali Teej (a famous Kumaun festival Harella), Naag Panchami, Raksha Bandhan, Kalki Jayanti etc. Out of these Harella is the most popular festival of the region. It has a great agricultural and environmental significance. This festival is also associated with lord Shiva and mother goddess Parvati. Apart from this, Shiva's devotees

perform Kanwar yatra (auspicious journey to holy rivers to collect water for offering over the Shiva linga to get blessings and prosperity of the family). Thus, performing *Paarthiv Puja* using various plant materials is an inspiring medium to remove bad habits and give a positive thinking to others.

In Kumaun some people also performed *Paarthiv Puja* during holy month Kartik which is considered a very auspicious month. During the entire month, lord Shiva is worshipped with great reverence and prayers are offered. It is also known as Purushottama masa (month) as it is believed that lord Shiva and Vishnu exist together during this holy month. The significance of the holy Kartik month is marked by Deep Aradhana (the lighting of the lamps). Fasting is undertaken on Mondays, Kartik Yekadashi and on Kartik Poornima. During the worship lord Shiva is worshipped using bel plant called *Bilva Puja*.

As mentioned in ancient Hindu mythology, humans accumulate various sins, and it is believed to remove these sins, it is highly advisable to perform the worship of lord Shiva with unwavering dedication and follow the righteous path thereafter. Lord Rama, after defeating Ravana, made a *Paarthiv linga* by using sand in Rameshwaram (Tamil Nadu) to atone for the sin of killing a Brahmin (Brahmahatya mahaapaatakam). It is believed that the use of clay or mud in *Paarthiv Puja* symbolizes the earthly nature of human existence. It reminds worshippers of their connection to the earth and the impermanence of life. Construction of *Paarthiv linga* using soil reflects the humility of the devotees. It is a reminder that like clay, the body will return to the earth one day.

3. Procedure of *Paarthiv Puja*

According to mythology the raw soil is brought from the sacred river banks or some people collect the soil from termite anthills and dry it a day before the worship. The earthly *Shiva linga* is made from this soil. The person organizing the *Paarthiv Puja* takes a fast since morning and eats only Satvik food. The performer also arranges all the worship material such as flowers, fruits, leaves, woods, sweets, incense Diya (lamp) for the event. Following methods were observed during the field survey.

- i) **Invitation:** On this occasion priests, relatives, daughter, sisters and friends are invited to join this worship. The venue (worship area) is decorated with flowers, rangoli (colourful designs) and other festive decorations.
- ii) **Arrangement of Worship Ingredients:** An altar is set up with the *Paarthiv* idol, and worship ingredients like fruits, sweets, incense, lamps and offerings are arranged. Panchanga KarmaPuja is also performed by the priest before *Paarthiv Puja*. Besides *Ganesh Puja* using *Cynodon dactylon* (Durva) and *Matri Puja* using plants like *Ocimum sanctum* (Tulsi), *Piper betle* (betel leaf) and *Jasminum officinale* (Jasmine) is also performed. These plants are favorite of mother goddess. *Abhyudak Shraadh*, *Punyavachan*, *Kalash Sthapana*, *Raksha Vidhan* and *Graha Puja* are also performed systematically during *Paarthiv Puja*.
- iii) **Abhyudaya Shraadh:** It is a significant ritual in Hindu tradition that is performed to give honour to the ancestors. During this worship *Desmosta chyabipinnata* (Kush grass) is applied to express gratitude and seek blessings from the departed ancestors for the well-being and prosperity of the family. Besides *O. sanctum* can also be used. Besides these various rituals such as Sankalp, Tarpana, Pinda daan, anna daan, chanting mantra and Dakshina (donation) are also observed.

- iv) **Punyavaachan-Pujan:** It is also a ritual performed on every auspicious occasion to purify and sanctify the worship area and worship ingredients before using them. It is believed that by doing this all the abstractions are removed and only the positive and auspicious forces are present in the event.
- v) **Kalash Sthapana-Pujan:** A copper or brass pot filled with holy water is placed at the worship place in beginning of every worship including *Paarthiv Puja* and this tradition is called *Kalash Sthapana*. The *Kalash* is considered sacred and symbolizes abundance, purity, and the presence of divine energy. The event is also performed to invoke the blessings of deities. A string of five leaves of *Mangifera indica* (mango) are tied on the holy *Kalash*.
- vi) **Rakshavidhan:** In this ritual a holy thread (a product of *Gossypium* sp) is worshipped and it is called *Mauli*. It is first offered to gods and goddess then further is tied by the priest on the hands of organizers and other participants of the event.
- vii) **Graha Puja:** It is performed to worship and seek the blessings of *Navgrahas* (nine planets). All these nine celestial deities represent the planets in Vedic astrology. During the worship all nine *Grahas* are represented by different plant species includes *Calotropis gigantea* (Ark/madar) for Sun, *Butea monosperma* (Palash) for Moon, *Senegalia catechu* (Khadir) for Mars, *Ficus religiosa* (Peepal) for Jupiter, *Achyranthes aspera* (Apamarga) for Mercury, *Ficus glomerata* (Audambar) for Venus, *Prosopis cineraria* (Sami) for Saturn, *Cynodon dactylon* (Durva) for Rahu, and *Desmostachya bipinnata* (Kusha) for Ketu.
- viii) **Purification of soil used to make Shiv Linga:** The rosary made of ashes and Rudraksh is applied first. If ashes are not available then Tripund of pure clay should be applied on the forehead. Then flowers, sandalwood and Gangajal are used to purify the soil which is later on applied to making *Shiv linga*. After the purification of soil, the cow's milk is mixed in the soil. Along with chanting *Shivamantra 'Om Namah Shivay'*. It is also believed that *Shiv linga* is also prepared by mixing cow dung, rice flour, jaggery, butter and ash. Thus, a total of 108 small *Shiv lingas* are made on a big copper plate which are referred to as *Shiva* and *Shiva Gana* (devotees of *Shiva* who reside in Kailash with him). All 108 forms of *Shiva* hold importance in Hindu cosmology, astrology, and spiritual practices.
- ix) **Abhishekam:** *Abhishekam* (a ritual related to bath) of the idol of *Shiva* is performed. It is done by using sacred ingredients such as milk, curd, honey, ghee, sugarcane juice and water. While performing the *Abhishekam*, the appropriate mantras are recited and prayers are dedicated to lord *Shiva*.
- x) **Offerings of Sacred Ingredients:** During the worship (*Paarthiv Puja*) various sacred ingredients of plants and other products are offered to lord *Shiva*. Some of these important ingredients are white flowers (Jasmine/rose/lotus), seasonal fruits i.e. mango, apple, banana and cucumber, leaves of Bel (Belpatri) and Bhang, incense, sweets etc. (Table 1 and 2).
- xi) **Prayer and Distribution of Prasada:** The worship is completed by performing the prayer or Aarti (ceremonial waving of light) in front of the idol. After that offered fruits and sweets are used to make *Prasada* (blessed food) to distribute among the devotees. Besides as a

symbol of divine blessings and devotional songs, bhajans, and hymns are sung by the devotees and it converts the surrounding into positivity. On the occasion donation of clothes, grains and money to daughters, sisters and brahmins is also done.

xii) Dispersion of Worship Remains: After the worship, the clay idols, Shiv *lingas* are traditionally immersed in the running water body such as a river, lake, or ocean. Besides some people immersed worship material under the holy trees. This immersion practice symbolizes the dissolution of the material form back into its elemental state to continue the nutrient cycle, representing the transient nature of life and the impermanence of physical existence. Immersion of the clay idols is a significant aspect of the *Paarthiv Puja* and is often accompanied by prayers and mantras seeking blessings and purification.

The use of clay or mud idols in *Paarthiv Puja* is considered more eco-friendly than idols made from materials like plaster of Paris or plastic. Clay idols are biodegradable and do not have long-lasting environmental impact. Thus, this worship

gives a message of faith which connects the culture directly with the nature. Clay idols are typically devoid of harmful chemicals and paints, reducing the risk of water contamination when they are immersed. In contrast, idols made from non-biodegradable materials often contain toxic substances.

Environmental organizations and community groups often promote the use of clay idols and responsible immersion practices to raise awareness about the environmental impact of religious rituals. However, it's important to note that in some regions and communities, the use of clay idols may not be as widespread, and there may still be instances of less eco-friendly materials being used. Promoting awareness and encouraging eco-friendly practices in religious rituals like *Paarthiv Puja* can help to reduce negative impact on environmental. The power of faith and devotion can have a profound impact on one's mental and emotional state. However, it's also essential to seek medical or professional help when dealing with issues related to disease, stress, and health [8].



Fig 1: Illustration of various worship ingredients applied during *Paarthiv Puja* at Jageshwar shrine

4. Major Religious Places of Kumaun Where *Paarthiv Puja* is Performed

There are many temples and holy places in Uttarakhand. The temples on the top of every mountain are symbols of religious spirit in the culture of the state. It is believed that peaks are graced by the presence of gods and goddesses. Some people of the area organize this worship every year with great pomp in their home. Besides, there are many ancient Shiva temples in Uttarakhand where *Paarthiv Puja* is also performed. Some of these places are Jageshwar, Binsar Mahadev, Kapileshwar, Bagnath, Patal Bhubaneswar, Thalkedar, Bhimeshwar,

Mukteshwar Mahadev, Risheshwar Mahadev etc. are famous Shiva temples situated in Kumaun where the flow of devotees continues throughout the year. Jageshwar is a prestigious temple of Kumaun where the *Paarthiv Puja* is performed every year during Sharvan. Some of the temples of the area are preserved by Archeological Survey of India namely Dandeshwar, Jageshwar, Kuber, Baleshwar, Nanda Devi, Surya temple etc. During July-August Shraavan Mela is also organized at Jageshwar which is a source of income for local traders. Thus, all these religious places are not only symbol of faith but also contribute in the local economy.

Table 1: An account of plant-based worship ingredients applied in *Paarthiv Puja* in Kamaun

S. No.	Worship Ingredients	Part Applied	S. No.	Worship Ingredients	Part Applied
1	Badam	Fruit	20	Karnal	Flower
2	Aam	Fruit wood & leaf	21	Laune	Fruit
3	Dhaan	Seeds (for making Akshat- cleaned rice)	22	Kapoor	Bark

4	Doob	Whole plant	23	Kasuri Methi	Seed
5	Bel	Leaf	24	Kela	Fruit
6	Dhatura	Flower & leaf	25	Kesar	Flower
7	Bhang	Leaf	26	Kishmish	Fruit
8	Chameli oil	Flower	27	White clover	Leaf
9	Chandan	Wood	28	Nirgundi	Flower
10	Giloy	Stem	29	Paan Patta	Leaf
11	Gola (Nariyal)	Fruit	30	Painya	Leaf
12	Guggul	Bark	31	Timul	Leaf
13	Gulab	Flower	32	Cotton	Fruit
14	Ilaichi	Fruit	33	Sarson	Seed
15	Sugarcane	Stem	34	Seb	Fruit
16	Jatamasi	Root	35	Supari	Fruit
17	Jayfal	Fruit	36	Vashlochan	Joints (node)
18	Kaaju	Fruit	37	Til	Seed
19	Kachhi Haldi (Kamkum)	Rhizome	38	Jaw	Seed

Table 2: Other ingredients used in the worship

S. No.	Clarified Butter (Ghee)	S. No.	Sacred Thread (Janeu)	S. No.	Perfume (Itra)
1	Milk (Doodh)	4	Honey (Shahad)	7	Cattle-light (Gorochan)
2	Curd (Dahi)	5	The nine planets (Navgrah)	8	Five gems (Panch-ratna)
3	Sweets (Punch Mithai)	6	Yellow and red cloths (Vastra)	9	Mica (Abhrak)

Conclusion

The Himalayan region of Uttarakhand has long captivated people with its rich tapestry of beliefs and storied history, making it a sought-after destination for religious pilgrimages, spiritual retreats, and tourism alike. Amidst this vibrant cultural backdrop, the significance of local customs, rituals, and fasting traditions takes on a profound dimension, yet much remains uncharted, particularly regarding the environmental elements integral to these festivities. Hence, this study holds paramount importance as it seeks to delve deeper into the undocumented plant materials associated with regional festivals, providing invaluable baseline data for further exploration in this domain.

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