

Baby's first MORSEL

The literal translation of the Sanskrit word means 'food feeding' or 'eating food,' but in the Bengal regions, it is more commonly known as "Mukhey bhaat."

The selection of time and date of the Annaprashan is selected after consulting a priest, and usually held at a temple or at home. The child has to be six months of age for the ritual to be conducted, in fact for baby girls, it is performed in odd months like the fifth or seventh, and for boys, on even months, like the sixth or eighth.

Baby boys are usually dressed in the traditional 'dhuti' and 'panjabi' and baby girls are dressed in 'saris' or 'lehengas.'

The ritual takes place in two parts, and begins with a puja for the baby's health and happiness first. A bowl of 'payesh' (rice pudding) specifically prepared by the mother or grandmother is blessed during the brief puja, after which, while the child is sitting on the mother's lap, a senior male (grandfather, elderly uncle) member of the family feeds a small spoonful of the rice pudding.

For the second half, it involves a fun

game where a set of five symbolic objects are organised on a banana leaf, or silver tray, and then placed in front of the child to pick.

The baby is cheered on by family and friends as he or she chooses an item that is believed to be representational of the child's forte of interest in the future.

The items include —
books to symbolise knowledge
jewels to symbolise prosperity
a pen to symbolise insight
clay to symbolise possessions
food items to symbolise love for food

Annaprashan is not celebrated as just the child's first taste of solid food, but a landmark event in the growing up of the next generation and thus is a joyful event for family, relatives, friends and neighbours.

By Supriti Sarkar

Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

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Different religions have different customs that mark a significant event in an individual's life; such is also the case for the Hindu rite of passage ritual known as Annaprashan that marks the baby's first consumption of rice.



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