

About Flowers used in Hindu Rituals and Puja

In Hinduism, flowers constitute an important offering made to the deities. Flowers are used while doing puja at home, temples and at sacred places. In fact, rarely do we come across a puja in Hindu religion without flowers. The idol or image of the deity in temple and home is decorated with garlands of flowers and leaves. Flowers are also placed at the feet of deity and the idol is also showered with flowers.



Details about the types of flowers that can be used for puja and the method in which they are to be used in puja and rituals are mentioned in the scriptures. Some flowers are associated by a particular deity; while a particular flower is never used due to a curse etc.

Generally, flowers with strong odor are not used. Similarly, flowers without fragrance are also not used. Flowers that are not fully blossomed are not used. Mutilated and flowers eaten by insects are avoided. Flowers grown in a garden is considered apt for puja. Flowers collected from forest are also used.

Flowers used in a Hindu puja are classified into Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The classification is based on their color, fragrance, shape and origin. Sattva and Rajas flowers are used in daily worship. Tamas flowers are avoided and some are used during festivals.

Flowers like Arka, Nandyavartham, drona, white lotus, jasmine, coral tree flowers etc are considered as Sattva flowers. The Rajas flowers include Red lotus, trumpet flowers, white thorn apple flowers etc. The Tamas flowers include ketaki, China rose, cotton plant, Kasa grass etc.

Flowers and Leaves used in Ganesh Puja

Each deity in Hinduism has its own favorite flowers and leaves and they are used by Hindus during worship and while performing pujas on festivals. All festivals and rituals in Hindu religion begin with Ganesh Pooja. Red colored flowers are the favorite of Lord Ganesha.

Here is a list of flowers and leaves that are offered while praying to Lord Ganesha:

Red Flowers: Any usual red color flower used in Hindu rituals.



Durva Grass is an important offering to Ganesh. Especially in South India, you will find vendors selling garlands of Durva outside Ganesh Temples. It is known as arugam pul in Tamil, Dhub, Durva and Haritali in Hindi (North India). Bermuda or Bahama Grass is the English name.



Another important flower offered is the Milkweed flower. It is known as Arka in Hindi and Eruku or Erukkum Poo in South India. Jilledi is the name used in Eastern India.



Pomegranate leaves and flowers are also offered in many places.



Another important flower and leaf offered is the Sanku Pushpam or Conch flower.



Leaves and flowers of Screw Pine are also offered. It is known as Ketaki or Kedgi in Hindi and Kaita in South India.

There are also other local flowers and leaves that are used like the Naga leaves.

Tulsi leaves and flowers are not generally used in Ganesh Puja. But it is used during Vinayaka Chaturthi or Ganesh Puja.

Ganesh Patris, or Patri, is the numerous types of sacred leaves that are offered during Ganesh Puja. The Patris are usually offered during festivals like Ganesh Chaturthi Puja. Traditionally leaves of 108 different types of plants are offered. But today most people confine the offering to Dhurva grass and Bilva leaves. In some places, certain wild patris are worshipped instead of Ganesh idol.

In most community pujas, 21 different types of leaves are offered.

1. Machi
2. Brihati
3. Bilva
4. Durva Grass
5. Dattura
6. Badari
7. Apa Marga
8. Tulsi
9. Choota (Mango leaves)
10. Karaveera
11. Vishnu Kranta
12. Daadimi (Pomegranate)
13. Devadaru
14. Maruvaka
15. Sidhuvara
16. Jaaji
17. Shami
18. Aswatham
19. Arjuna
20. Arka
21. Nimba (Neem)

The most commonly used leaves are that of Durva, Aghada, Tulsi, Bilva, Prajakta, Mogra and Madhumalati (popular names). It must be noted here that Tulsi is only used during Vinayaka Chaturthi.

Most of the Patris that are used in Ganesh puja have medicinal properties and today many people are growing these plants at home.

[Flowers and Leaves Offered to Goddess Lakshmi during Puja](#)



Lakshmi Puja is one of the most important pujas performed by Hindus. It is done to seek blessings and favor from Goddess Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity. Based on the Puranas, each Hindu deity has favorite flowers and leaves and it is used for pujas and other rituals. Lakshmi puja is mainly performed during Diwali or Deepavali. Another major Lakshmi Puja is the Varalakshmi Puja during Sravana or Sawan month in South India.

[Here is a list of flowers and leaves that are used in Lakshmi Puja:](#)



Lotus: Goddess Lakshmi is associated with Lotus and she is portrayed. Lotus is Kamal in Hindi, Ambuja, Padma, Pankaja, kamala in Sanskrit, Ambal and Thamarai in Tamil, Kamala and Tavaregadde in Kannada, Thamara and Senthamara in Malayalam, Padam in Oriya, Padma in Bengali, Kamala in Marathi, Lalung and Erra Tamara in Telugu and Suriyakamal in Gujarati.



Durva Grass (Dhruva) is an important offering to Goddess Lakshmi. This grass is an important element in most Hindu pujas. It is known as arugam pul in Tamil, Dhub, Durva and Haritali in Hindi (North India), Hariali in Kannada. Bermuda or Bahama Grass is the English name.



Fragrant Screw Pine: There are numerous myth in Hinduism associated with screw pine. It is used in several pujas and avoided by some deities. It is Umbrella Tree, Screw pine and Screw tree in English, Keora (Hindi), Mugali (Telugu), Ketuki (Bengali), Thazhampoo (Tamil, Kannada), Kaita (Malayalam), Kevada (Marathi, Gujarati), Ketaki (Sanskrit).

The flower that is usually avoided during Lakshmi puja is Thumba poo a small white bell-shaped flower.

The flowers used also vary from region. Lotus is considered to be most important flower in Lakshmi Puja.

[Flowers and Leaves offered to Lord Krishna during Pujas and Prayers](#)



Tulsi or Tulasi leaves is the most important leaf and flower used in pujas and prayers dedicated to Lord Krishna. Tulsi acts both as a flower and leaf and in most temples it is also offered as 'prasad.' It is also known as Krishna Tulsi – a dark variety of the plant. It is holy basil in English and in most Indian languages it is known as Tulsi or Thulasi.

Nandhyavattai is another flower is used in South India.



Another important flower that is used in some regions is the Parijatha or coral flowers.

Usually all local flowers that are used pujas and prayers are used in worshipping Lord Krishna.

It is always said by elders that the greatest offering to Lord Krishna is a Tulsi leaf.

Flowers that are avoided during Krishna Puja include hibiscus, milkweed and angel's trumpets.

[Why Lord Shiva Covers His Body With Ash?](#)

Lord Shiva's body is always covered with ash and Shiv devotees wear ash tilak on forehead and hands. There is an interesting story in the Shiva Purana which narrates how Lord Shiva came to be associated with Ash. There once lived a sage whose lineage was traced to the famous Saint Bhrigu. This sage performed intense austerities and became very powerful. He used to consume only fruits and later only green leaves and thus got the name – Parnada.

Sage Parnada continued his intense tapas and controlled all the animals and plants in the forest he lived. Once while cutting some grass to repair his hermitage, the sage cut his middle finger. But to his surprise instead of blood he saw sap of tree oozing through the cut.

Now Parnada thought that he had become so pious that instead of blood, sap is oozing through his body. Pride filled his mind and he started shouting in joy that he is the most pious man in the world now.

Lord Shiva who witnessed this event took the guise of an old man and reached the spot. When the old man asked for the reason for his uncontrollable delight, Parnada said that he has become the most pious man in the world as his blood as become quite similar to the sap of fruits and trees.

Then the old man asked what is there to be elated in this. It is just a sap. But when trees and plants are burned they turn into ash. Only ash remains that is surely the higher stage.

To demonstrate it the old man sliced his finger and suddenly ash came out of it. Sage Parnada soon realized that it was Shiva standing before him and prayed to him for forgiveness for his ignorance.

It is said that ever since then Shiva wears ash to remind his devotees about the ultimate reality and foolishness of getting enamored in physical beauty.

Definition of Hindu

Is there a proper definition for the term Hindu? The meaning of the term Hindu has always been controversial for many reasons. Today it is limited to denote the practitioners of Hinduism or Hindu religion. But while searching for a definition of the term I came across a beautiful meaning and explanation of the term Hindu by Dr. N. Gopalakrishnan, Ph. D., D.litt. Indian institute of scientific heritage, Thiruvananthapuram.

The definition of Hindu as per Dr. N. Gopalakrishnan reads like this –

Aa sindho: sinduparyantham yasya bhaaratha bhoomikaa maathru bhoo: pithru bhoo (punya) schaiva sa vai Hindu iti smruthaa:

Meaning - Whomsoever, is considering the land between the sapta sindu (Indus valley river) upto Indian ocean as the motherland/ fatherland and holy land, is known as Hindu. This land is known as Hindustan which is defined as follows:

Himaalayam samaarabhya yaavath hindu sarovaram tham deva nirmitham desam hindustaanam prachakshate.

The land created by god himself and which is lying between Himalayas and Indian Ocean is known as Hindustan.

Origin of the word Hindu

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[The Story of Jara and Jarasandha](#)

The story of Jara, a demoness, is mentioned in the Mahabharata and is associated with the king Jarasandha. Jara is believed to be an indigenous medicine woman by some scholars. Although she is considered as a demoness, she is respected and is also mentioned as a goddess in Mahabharata for her curative powers. She is believed to have joined the body of King Jarasandha, who was born as two halves.

Brihadratha was the king of Magadha and he had two wives. After few years of marriage, the two wives delivered two halves of a male baby. The king was horrified to see them and he asked the soldiers to throw them away in the forest.

Jara, the demoness, picked them up from the forest and she joined them. When the child was joined it gave out a huge cry which shook the entire kingdom. Jara took the child to the king and told what had happened.

As the baby was joined by Jara, he was named Jarasandha and he later became the king of Magadha. He had fought numerous battles with Lord Krishna and his brother Balarama. He was finally killed by Bhima, the second of the pandava brothers.

Some scholars are of the view that Jara might have had knowledge of indigenous medicines and the child that she got might have been a Siamese twin or a defective baby. She might have cured the baby using her knowledge of medicine.

[The Story of Shiva as Mahakala - Mahakaleshwar](#)

Shiva is worshipped as Mahakala in Ujjain and the Mahakala Shiva Temple in Ujjain is counted third among the twelve Jyotirlingas. There is an interesting story which explains about the Mahakaleshwar form of Shiva – a fierce form which is beyond imagination and description. The story took place when Ujjain was known as Avanti and is mentioned in the Shiva Purana.

Once there lived a pious man in Avanti who was an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva. He had four sons and the family worshipped Lord Shiva daily.

Not far away from their home in a hill named Ratanmala there lived an Asura (demon) named Dooshana. Demon Dooshana hated all forms of Shiva and vedic worship. He went around killing people who worshipped Shiva. Soon Dooshana came to know about the family in Avanti that worshipped Shiva.

Soon the demon arrived with his army and attacked the city. But the family continued to worship Shiva in the form of a Shivling.

Finally, the demon and soldiers reached the home of the pious man and started hurling weapons. The demon broke open the door and advanced towards the Shivling by raising a sword.



Suddenly, there was a deafening sound and there appeared a dreadful form beyond explanation before the Shivaling. A single glance by the Mahakala form of Shiva burned the demon and his army into ashes. Uncontrollable and unsatisfied, the form of Shiva gave a huge roar; the entire universe trembled in fear.

The family was but delighted to see Lord Shiva and continued chanting his glory and prayers. Before his true devotees, Shiva is always the Bholenath – one can be easily influenced. Hearing the prayers of his devotees, His anger subsided.

But the family who was aware of the dangers of the world realized that the form of Shiva as Mahakala was essential for peace and prosperity and asked him to reside in this form at Ujjain. Since then Shiva remains at Ujjain Mahakala Temple as Mahakala – the one with the power to annihilate all living and non-living.

[Why Hindus Tie Cotton Threads Around Trees?](#)

Cotton Threads of various colours like red, yellow and white are tied around Pipal tree trunks especially in Northern and Western parts of India. This ritual is performed especially on the Vat Savitri puja day (May – June). During Vat Savitri Puja, the Banayan or Pipal Tree symbolically represents Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The root of Vat Vriksha is Brahma, the stem is Vishnu and the upper part is Shiva.



The Pipal tree plays an important role in the famous story of Satyavan Savitri. It is believed that Satyavan spend his last moments under a Vat or Banyan tree on the full moon day in month of Jyeshtha. And Yamraj appeared here and Savitri pleaded with Yamraj under the Banyan tree.

In memory of this event, women go round the Banyan tree for 108 times tying threads and fast for the health and longevity of their husbands.

There are also other hidden symbolic meanings – one such meanings is narrated by Bhagwat Shah of Pushtimarg

The Pipal tree represents the tree of life and is sacred in Hindu Religion. It supports life of all sorts and is famous for its long life. The pipal tree also has the property to purify air.

The cotton thread is just the opposite The cotton thread represents the fragile nature of life, love, trust, faith – and all things that go on to make up a relationship. A single thread may be weak, but, when it is wound 108 times around the trunk, it becomes strong. It is no longer so fragile and no longer easy to break.

By walking around the tree 108 times, the wife contemplates on these matters. Love can only be strengthened by trust, faith and desire to make it work! With each step, the woman strengthens her relationship with her husband. She prays not just for her husband's long life, but an enduring relationship that will last beyond this life and into the next.