

**Tulsi and Bilva - The Most Sacred Plants in Hinduism**

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In Hinduism, certain trees, plants and leaves enjoy an exalted, sacred status. These trees, plants and leaves form part and parcel of many rituals and poojas and hence, are vital to the daily life of a Hindu.

Hindus believe that the certain plants represent the deities' essence and hence, are able to invoke them. The colored leaves or patra are capable of attracting the deity and absorbing their energy unto themselves. These patras are thus believed to be able to purify the surrounding atmosphere. Only those patras should be offered to the deity, which can absorb the deity principle. That is why only those leaves are offered which are believed to be "liked" by that particular God or Goddess.

Two such plants, which are considered most sacred by the Hindu pantheon, include Bilva (or Bel leaves) and Tulsi (or Basil). Why are they so vital to the religion and what function do they have to perform? What is the legend behind their existence and their sanctity?

In this post, we bring you the legends of Tulsi and Bilva and discuss why they enjoy such a sacred space in Hinduism.

## **Tulsi**

Tulsi or Tulasi, also commonly referred to as Holy Basil, is one of the most sacred plants in Hindu belief. Scientifically called *Ocimum Tenuiflorum*, it is regarded by Hindus as the actual earthly manifestation of Goddess Tulsi, who was a great devotee of Lord Sri Maha Vishnu. Hence, the use of Tulsi leaves is mandatory in the worship of Vishnu and all his forms, such as Krishna, Pandurang, Rama and so on.

Hindus believe that the presence of a Tulsi plant in the house is capable of warding off negativity and evil spirits. Hence, most Hindus grow this plant in front of, inside or near their home. Those who have enough space in front of their house often construct special cuboid structures known as the Tulsi Vrindavan, in order to let their Tulsi grow densely. This structure is usually placed right in the center of the courtyard of their house. Incidentally, this plant is cultivated for both religious and medicinal purposes. Regular consumption of the Tulsi leaf is

considered to be very good for the throat and it is also known for its essential oil. It is believed to have many other health benefits as well.

Each and every part of the Tulsi plant is considered to be sacred. Even the soil around it is revered as being holy. The Padma Purana states that a person who is cremated with Tulsi twigs in his funeral pyre immediately gains moksha (liberation) and finds a place in Vishnu's Vaikuntha. That is why people often offer a little water mixed with Tulsi leaves to the dying; to help their souls ascend more easily and reach the Lotus Feet of the Supreme.



Ladies Offering Prayers to the  
Sacred Tulsi Plant - Wall Hanging

If a Tulsi stick is used to burn a lamp for Krishna or Vishnu, it is considered equal to offering lakhs of lamps to the Gods. Likewise, if one makes a paste out of dried Tulsi wood and leaves and smears it over the idol of Vishnu during pooja, it is believed to be worth several ordinary poojas and lakhs of Godana (act of donating cows).

While getting the benevolence of Tulsi can be highly rewarding to the worshipper, earning her wrath can be equally damaging. Hence, the follower has to be careful not to offend the Goddess in any way. One cannot urinate, defecate or throw any kind of waste near the plant. Similarly, uprooting the plant or cutting it is prohibited. Some cultures even stipulate that women cannot water the plant during menstruation. When the plant withers, it is immersed in a body of water. A prayer, asking for forgiveness, is also offered to the Goddess, prior to immersion.

### Other Names

Tulsi, which literally means, "matchless", is also known by many other names, including Vaishnavi (the one belonging to Vishnu); Vishnu Vallabha or Haripriya (beloved of Vishnu), Shri (the auspicious one, also a synonym for Lakshmi) and so on.

The Tulsi with bright green leaves is known as Shri-Tulsi or Rama-Tulsi. The plant with dark

green or purple leaves, on the other hand, is known as Shyama-Tulsi or Krishna-Tulsi (that which is dark in color). This variety is considered especially special for the worship of Lord Krishna.

### Legend of Tulsi

According to the Devi Bhagavata Purana, Tulsi is a manifestation of Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth and the Principal Consort of Sri Maha Vishnu.



Lakshmi Shola Pith Statue

According to popular legend, the ancient ruler, King Vrishadhwaaja was a great devotee of Lord Shiva. He was so ardent a devotee of Shiva that he banned his subjects from worshipping all other Gods. Seeing this, Lord Surya (the Sun God) got agitated and cursed him that he would be abandoned by Lakshmi.

This upset Shiva, who pursued Surya. The latter fled and took shelter with Vishnu. In the meantime, several years had passed by on earth. Vrishadhwaaja and his heir son were dead. Now, his grandchildren, Dharmadhwaaja and Kushadhwaaja, were ruling the land and were devotees of Goddess Lakshmi. Pleased with their devotion, Lakshmi was born to them in the form of two daughters, Tulsi to Dharmadhwaaja and Vedavati to Kushadhwaaja.

When Tulsi was old enough to know what she wanted, she decided to give up all royal comforts and proceeded toward Badrinath to perform penance to gain Vishnu as her husband. Lord Brahma appeared before her and told her that she would first have to marry the demon Shankhachuda, before she could go ahead and marry Vishnu. At that time, Sudama, who was a part-incarnation of Krishna, was born on earth as the demon Shankhachuda. This happened to him due to a curse inflicted upon him.

Shankhachuda, who also had pleased Brahma with his penance, was protected by the Vishu-

Kavacha (Vishnu's protective armor) on his body. Brahma told him that no one could slay him, as far as the armor remained on his body and his wife's chastity was retained.

Shankhachuda and Tulsi were soon married. The former, filled with false pride and arrogance, started terrorizing the Devas and earthlings. In order to set things right, Shiva challenged the demon to war and Vishnu approached Tulsi in order to break her chastity. Vishnu took the form of her husband and then seduced her into submission. With her chastity gone, Shankhachuda was easily killed and Sudama was finally freed of his curse as well.



Vishnu with Lakshmi Picture

In the middle of their lovemaking, Tulsi realized that this was not her husband and demanded the impersonator to reveal his true identity. Vishnu appeared before her and asked her to shed her earthly body and return to his celestial abode as Lakshmi. Accordingly, her mortal remains decayed and became the Gandaki River. Her hair changed form and became the sacred Tulsi plant.

### Alternate Legends

- According to a variant of the above-mentioned legend, Shankhachuda is replaced with Jalandhara and Tulsi, with Vrinda. This tale too relates how Vishnu destroyed Vrinda's chastity so that Shiva could kill Jalandhara. Here, however, Tulsi is distinct from Lakshmi. The story ends with Vrinda cursing Vishnu to become a stone. Thus, he turned into the Shaligrama stone (which can be found only in the Kali Gandaki River of Nepal). Vrinda self-immolated by jumping into her husband's funeral pyre. Vishnu ensured that, instead of her body turning into ashes, she transformed into the Tulsi plant on earth. In both versions of the legend, Tulsi attained the status of a pure, sacred Goddess.
- A Vaishnava legend connects Tulsi with the Samudra Manthana (Churning of the Ocean) incident. The cosmic ocean was once churned by the Devas and Asuras. Towards the end of the churning process, several entities came out of the ocean. Dhanvantari, the Divine Doctor, was one of them. He held the Amrita (the Nectar of Immortality) in his

hands. When the Asuras tried to steal it, Vishnu took the form of Mohini and got it back for the Gods to consume. After that, Vishnu shed tears of happiness, which fell into the Amrita and formed the Tulsi.



Dhanvantari Mural Poster

### **Tulsi Vivah**

Tulsi Vivah signifies the marriage ceremony of Tulsi to Vishnu in his Shaligrama or Krishna avatara. It also marks the end of the inauspicious monsoon season and the beginning of the auspicious wedding season, according to the Hindu almanac.

The Padma Purana details the relationship between Tulsi and Vishnu, culminating in holy matrimony. When Vrinda realized that she had lost her chastity to Vishnu, she cursed him that he would turn black in color and would be separated from his wife, Lakshmi. This curse was later fulfilled, when Vishnu transformed into the black Shaligrama stone (which is actually a fossil). In his Rama avatara, he got separated from his beloved wife, Sita, who was kidnapped by Sri Lanka's demon king, Ravana. Vrinda then drowned in the ocean and Vishnu himself transferred her soul into a plant, which was, from then on, called Tulsi. As per Vishnu's promise to marry Vrinda in her next birth, he married her in his form of the Shaligrama stone, on the Prabodhini Ekadashi day.

Another minor legend narrates that Goddess Lakshmi killed a demon on this very day and remained on earth as the Tulsi plant.

### ***Wedding Ceremony***

The Tulsi Vivah ceremony resembles the traditional Hindu wedding. It is conducted in homes and temples. First, a fast is observed on the day, until evening, when the actual ritual begins. A marriage mandap is built around the courtyard where the Tulsi plant is placed. The bride Tulsi is decorated with an ornate saree and all the usual bridal ornaments. A paper face is drawn, on which is stuck a bindi and a nose-ring.

The groom is a brass image of Vishnu, Krishna or a Shaligrama; sometimes, even Balarama. This idol or image is clothed in a dhoti. Both the bride and groom are bathed and decorated with flowers and garlands, just before the wedding. The couple is then joined together with a cotton thread tying them.

The wedding expenses are usually borne by a daughterless couple, who act as the parents of the vadhu (bride). They perform the kanyadaan ceremony (giving away the bride to the groom) - this act is considered to be an immensely beneficial karma to the couple performing the ceremony. The bridal offerings are given away to a Brahmin priest or female ascetic, after the ceremony is over.

### ***Celebrations***

- In many villages, the Tulsi Vivah ritual is collectively conducted by the whole villages. At Prabhu Dham in Saunja, it is celebrated for three days. The festival starts with vedic chanting of the Ramcharitmanas or Ramayana. On the second day, a Shobha Yatra (procession) is undertaken. This is a major attraction, which brings in hundreds of spectators from far and wide. The third day marks the Tilakotsav and Vivahotsav of Vishnu and Vrinda. On this day, the villagers prepare 56 types of prasad, known as Chappan Bhog and distribute the same to everyone.
- In Maharashtra, this ceremony is conducted in the typical Maharashtrian way, with a white cloth held between the bride and groom. The priest recites the Mangal Ashtaka mantras and goes on to complete the wedding ceremony in the traditional way. Rice, mixed with vermilion, is showered upon Tulsi and Vishnu by the attendees, at the recitation of the mantra, "Savdhan". The white curtain is then removed and Vishnu is offered sandalwood paste, men's clothing and the sacred thread. The bride is offered sarees, turmeric, vermilion and the mangalsutra. This ceremony is mostly performed by women and the wedding menu includes all the items that are traditionally offered at Maharashtrian weddings. Prasad includes sugarcane, coconut chips, fruits and groundnut.
- In a couple of Rama temples in Saurashtra, the ritual is far more elaborate. Invitation cards are sent to the groom's temple by the bride's temple. Then a baraat (bridal procession) of Lalji (Vishnu/Krishna) is taken to the bride's temple. He is placed in a palanquin and taken to the outskirts of Tulsi's village, where he is welcomed by singing and dancing devotees. Tulsi is planted in an earthen pot and people desirous of children perform the kanyadaan for her. Hymns and bhajans are sung all night and in the morning, Lalji's baraat returns to their village along with Tulsi.

### **Worship of Tulsi**

Tree worship is quite common among Hindus. However, the Tulsi plant is regarded as the holiest of all plants, as it is considered to be the threshold between heaven and earth.

According to a traditional prayer, Lord Brahma resides in its branches; all major Hindu pilgrimage centers reside in its roots; the Ganga flows through its roots, all deities reside in its stem and leaves; and the Vedas in the upper part of its branches. Such is the exalted status of the Tulsi plant in this pantheon.

The person who cares for the Tulsi and waters it daily is believed to gain moksha (liberation) effortlessly. He or she also begets the grace of Vishnu, even if they did not otherwise worship Vishnu. Traditionally, the responsibility of taking care of the plant is given entirely to the woman of the household, as Tulsi is regarded as a "women's deity" and a "symbol of motherhood and wifeness". The Tulsi is usually planted in a separate platform called the Tulsi Manch, which is usually made of clay.



Tulsi Manch Miniatures

Tuesdays and Fridays are considered especially sacred for the worship of Tulsi. Rituals involve cleaning the area around and near the plant, watering it, offering food, flowers, incense and so on, creating rangoli designs in front of it, praying for the Goddess' grace, lighting a lamp and finally circumambulating it.

Interestingly, in the 19th century in Bengal, there were entire families who considered her to be their family deity and separately identified themselves not as Hindus, but as exclusive Tulsi worshippers.

### Festivals

The Tulsi Vivaha ceremony is performed by Hindus between Prabodhini Ekadashi (eleventh lunar day of the waxing moon of Kartika) to Kartik Poornima (full moon in Kartika). This festival celebrates the wedding of Tulsi to Vishnu, in his Shaligrama, Rama or Krishna forms. Both the bride and groom are worshipped and then married off as per traditional Hindu wedding rituals. This festival marks the end of the Chaturmasa (four-month) period, which corresponds to the monsoon season and is considered inauspicious for any mangala (auspicious)

event like this.

In Odisha, on the first day of the Hindu month Vaishakha (April-May), a small vessel with a hole is hung over the Tulsi plant. It is then filled with water, so that a steady stream of water flows over the plant for an entire month. In this hot summer month, anyone that offers cool water or shade to Tulsi is believed to be cleansed of all sin. The stream of water is also considered to be a prayer for good rains in the forthcoming season.

Further, Tulsi Pujan Diwas is celebrated on 25th December every year.

### **Tulsi Japamalas**

Being so sacred, Hindus often make japamalas or strings of prayer beads from Tulsi leaves. Some create elaborate garlands made of 1000 leaves. Traditionally, Vaishnavas use japamalas made from Tulsi stems or even roots. These malas are known as Tulsi malas and are an important symbol of a person's initiation into Vaishnavism.



Tulsi Beads Japamala

Tulsi malas are considered to bring great good to the wearer, as they are believed to be able to connect him with Vishnu or Krishna and confer constant protection on him. They are either worn around the neck or are held in the hand and used as a rosary. Some pilgrims even carry Tulsi plants on their pilgrimage to Dwarka, the legendary capital of Krishna; also one of the seven holiest Hindu cities.

### **Bilva**

The Bilva or the Bel tree can be found almost in all parts of India, irrespective of the weather and water conditions in that area, nature of the soil and so on. This leaf tastes bitter and has an astringent and rather dry feel to it. Tall and imposing, the tree is quite unlike the Tulsi and has a gnarled trunk and sharp thorns, which discourage people to go too close to it.

Bilva is also referred to as Bael or Bael Sripthal. Its fruit, called 'stone apple', is rather large and pale yellow when ripe. The botanical name for the tree is *Aegle Marmelops* and it belongs to the Rutaceae family.

Bilva is Lord Shiva's tree - the Lord is always worshipped with its leaves. It is believed that the tree is beloved to him. Practically every Shiva temple in India will have a Bilva tree in or around its area. This tree can also be found in many Devi temples, where it is treated with great veneration and respect.



White Metal Shiva Wall Hanging

At midnight on the eve of the Durga and Kali pooja, a tantric ritual called Bel Varan is carried out with appropriate mantras. A particular energy is invoked from the tree and is placed in a kalash (pot). This energy is then transferred to the effigy of Durga or Kali. The process, which is called prana pratishtha, is believed to be able to empower the statue with the life force of the tree. Once the pooja is over, the energy is released. This is called visarjan.

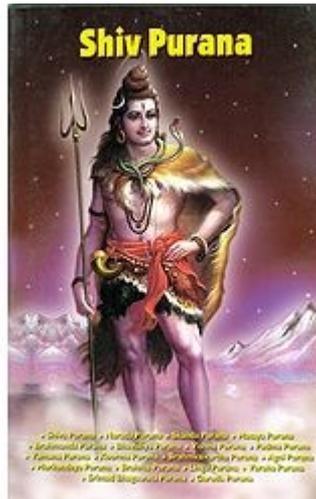
### Medicinal Properties

- Ayurveda states the Bilva tree has tremendous medicinal properties and that each of its parts, including its root, fruit and leaves are capable of curing multiple diseases afflicting the human body.
- The Atharva Veda describes the Bilva tree to be so sacred that its wood cannot be burned for fuel. Even today, it is worshipped as a totemic deity by certain aboriginal tribes in India. Not only is it sacred; it also has immense medicinal properties.
- The fruit has a hard rind, which is green when not ripe and turns pale yellow to brown as it ripens. Its flesh is sweet and astringent and contains tannin, which is good for the bowels. It has a rather pleasant and aromatic flavor and can act as an excellent dietary supplement. The fruit contains vegetable acid, gums and small doses of sugar, white seeds and a transparent gel-like substance. The pulp of this dried fruit, mixed with arrowroot, is considered to be very good for health.

- This mixture is believed to be able to stop dysentery and diarrhea, particularly in the case of children. The unripe fruit cures excess vata and kapha, indigestion and other mild stomach problems and dyspepsia. When mixed with honey, it can even help stop vomiting. While the half-ripe fruit is digestive, anti-diarrhoeal and can bind the bowels, the ripe fruit is laxative, and acts as an appetizer and blood purifier as well.
- The dark trifoliate of the Bel leaves represent the three eyes of Shiva. They also comprise a small percentage of Shiva's substance, Mercury. The leaves have a pleasing smell and are used in the worship of both Shiva and Parvati. They also form an essential part of tantric rituals. It is said that offerings of water sprinkled on these leaves will also remain fresh.
- Bilva leaves too help control excess vata and kapha and can be helpful in the treatment of diabetes mellitus. Chewing a few leaves on a daily basis and drinking their fresh juice is believed to be beneficial to this condition, over the long term.
- They also produce more perspiration, thus reducing temperature and; in this manners; treating mild fevers. They also are believed to act as an aphrodisiac. Combined with black pepper, this can cure mild cases of jaundice and when diluted with water or honey, this can control feverishness as well. Interestingly, there are sadhus (mendicants and sannyasis) who live on the consumption of Bilva leaves alone.
- The root of the Bel tree is the most important part, medicinally. The root's outer skin is first removed. A preparation made from this root with ginger and toasted rice cures vomiting. The root mixed with the root of Padma can be used for the treatment of piles, dysentery and diarrhea. The oil extracted from the root and boiled along with the juice of Bilva leaves is applied to the head to treat some minor nasal and ear conditions. The Vilvadi Lehiyam is also made from this root.

### **The Bilva Tree and the Shiva Purana**

The Shiva Purana states that the Bilva tree is the manifest form of Lord Shiva himself. All the great tirthas (pilgrimage spots) are believed to reside at its base. The one who sits under the Bilva and worships Shiva can effortlessly attain the state of the Lord himself. Washing one's hair by this tree is said to be equivalent to be bathing in all the sacred rivers.



Shiva Purana Book

It is further said that the one who performs Bilva pooja with flowers and incense achieves Shiva Loka; the abode of pure consciousness; and also is showered with happiness, peace and prosperity. When the devotee lights the holy lamp before this tree, he or she can easily merge into Shiva himself. The Shiva Purana also says that if a devotee plucks out new leaves from a branch and worships the tree with them, they will be forever free of vice. One that feeds a devotee sitting under the Bilva tree will grow in virtue.

### The Hunter and the Bilva Tree

The Shiva Purana relates an interesting tale about the Bilva tree. As the story goes, there was a cruel hunter by the name of Gurudruh. He lived with his family, deep inside the dense forest. On the auspicious day of Maha Shivaratri, he had to go hunting, as his family had nothing to eat. Maha Shivaratri is one of the most sacred days for Hindus. It is a time for prayer, fasting and offerings. Shiva being a kshipraprasadi (easily pleased), even the smallest and most involuntary acts of devotion are capable of begetting his abundant grace.

Gurudruh had set out for the hunt early in the morning. However, he had not found anything even by sunset. So, he walked up to the vicinity of a lake and climbed a tree and waited for some unsuspecting animal to come for a drink of water. He was unaware that the tree he climbed on was the Bilva tree and that there was the sacred Shivalinga beneath it, plus a pot of water hanging in the branch just above it.

After a longish wait, Gurudruh spied a deer walking up to the lake to quench her thirst. He immediately prepared to shoot an arrow at her. As he drew his bow, he accidentally knocked the pot of water hanging in the branch. Some of the water fell on the Shivalinga beneath, along with a few Bilva leaves.

Thus, Gurudruh had performed a pooja to Shiva, in the first quarter of the holy night, without even knowing he had done so. As a result, his heart was automatically purified a little. In the

meantime, the deer got startled by the movement in the tree, looked up and saw the hunter. She pleaded to the hunter not to kill her and to let her go to her home and take care of her children first. She promised him that she would return after feeding her family. He could then kill her and take her to his family. The hunter, who had softened by now, felt bad for her plight and let her go, provided that she would return to him in the morning to give up her body as food for his family.

Around the second quarter of the night, the deer's sister came looking for her. Once again, Gurudruh took aim at her. Once again, he unwittingly disturbed the water pot and a bit of water and Bilva leaves fell on the Shivalinga. His heart was further purified and this time too, he allowed the animal to go back to her home, provided that she would return in the morning.

The third quarter of the night approached and the deer's mate came in search of her. The same set of events occurred for the third time in a row and the hunter let the deer's mate too leave under the same conditions.

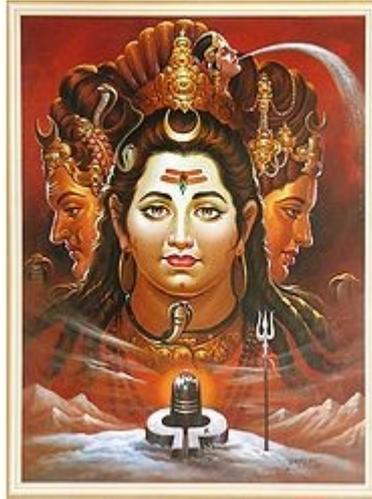
Meanwhile, the three deer met together and they discussed who should go sacrifice their life for the hunter and his family. Even their children offered to give up their lives. After a long discussion, the whole family decided to surrender to the hunter's wishes, as none of them could imagine living without the others. So, they all went up to the lake to look for the hunter.

When they arrived at the spot, Gurudruh was very pleased to see them and immediately prepared to kill them. He took aim and, for the fourth time, and in the same accidental manner, performed his worship to the Shivalinga beneath. This final act brought about a sea-change in his entire character. His heart overflowed with pity, love and compassion for the gentle, selfless animals. Tears rolled down his eyes as he thought of how cruel and selfish he was; only thinking about his family's comforts. He got down from the tree and apologized to the animals, requesting them to go back home in peace. Thus, the cruel Gurudruh was completely transformed and he was released from his past bad karma, by the grace of Lord Shiva and the Bilva tree.

### **Why Bilva is So Dear to Shiva**

The famous Bilvashtakam extols the many virtues of the Bael tree and talks about Shiva's love for it. There are many reasons why Shiva is believed to be closely associated with this tree.

The tripatra or the trifoliate leaves represent not only his Trinetra or three eyes, but also the Divine Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva; the Trishakti of volition, action and knowledge; the three types of Jyotirlingas, that is, Itaralinga, Baanalinga and Swayambhu linga; the three actions of Creation, Preservation and Destruction; the three gunas of Satva, Rajas and Tamas; and the three syllables of AUM, the primordial sound that resonates Shiva's very essence.



Trinity - Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva - Poster

According to the Skanda Purana, the Bilva tree grew from the sweat droplets of Goddess Parvati, which fell on the Mandrachal Mountain. It is believed that she resides in the tree, in all her forms; in the leaves, in the flowers and in the fruit and root too. Goddess Maheshwari resides on its shoulder, Dakshayani on its branches and Parvati in its leaves. It is believed that Lakshmi too resides in the Bael tree. This is why Shiva is so fond of Bilva.

## **Tulsi and Bilva as Pooja Dravya**

There are clear rules as to what types of trees, plants and leaves can and cannot be considered to be pooja dravya (worthy of offering during worship). As far as Bilva and Tulsi are concerned, these rules are as follows:

- Only Bilva patras with 3 leaves qualify as a pooja dravya. However, any type of Tulsi patras can be offered to the deity, irrespective of how many leaves they contain
- If Tulsi leaves are not available, its twigs can also be used for pooja
- If that is not available either, the mud around the plant is considered equally sacred and can be used as pooja dravya as well

### **Is Tulsi Forbidden for the Worship of Shiva?**

There is some degree of confusion regarding the usage of Tulsi for the worship of Lord Shiva. Some schools of thought believe that only Bilva can be used for his worship. However, there is no scriptural reference to prove this. Many experts aver that Tulsi may also be offered to Shiva, as it represents the deity's omnipresent nature. Interestingly, the Shivalinga is sometimes considered to be made from the black soil from the roots of the Tulsi plant. In fact, in the case of the Arunachala Linga, the early morning pooja is performed by offering Tulsi leaves; the mid-day pooja with Amalataasa and Bael flowers; and the evening pooja, by chanting the Aghora Mantra.

Hence, nowhere has it been clearly stated that Shiva should not be offered the Tulsi plant. However, since it is not his favorite, it is not commonly used in his worship.

However, Tulsi is clearly not prescribed for the worship of the Devi, as its pungent smell is believed to anger her. It is also not used for the worship of Ganesha.

This plant is considered an important aspect of Hanuman worship. In Odisha, it represents all local deities and hence, Tulsi is used for the worship of all Gods. The Nayars of the Malabar region in Kerala offer Tulsi to pacify evil spirits and also use it as varamalas (garlands) for the bride and groom during wedding ceremonies.

### Can Used Tulsi and Bilva Leaves be Reused for Worship?

Some schools of thought aver that used Tulsi and Bilva leaves can be reused for worship, after washing them and cleaning them of surface dirt and/or dust.

The Rudrakaamyarchana vidhi states:

*pankajam pancha ratreshu saptaratreshu bilvakam |  
tulasi dasaratreshu pujitah parameshwarah ||*

This means that the lotus can be worshipped for 5 nights, bilva for 7 nights and tulasi for 10 nights. The Tulsi can also be used for Shivalinga worship.

The Shiva Rahasya says:

*ratna svarna vinirmitoru kusumam ya drukcha sankshalitam  
purve dadyuh pratipaditam girisute samyakpunah pujayet |  
tat vakshalita bilvasugaje pankshyalitam pujaye  
tatalabhaavidhou sivarchanavidhou nirmalyatanochita ||*

This means that flowers of gold and bilva patra, once offered, can be reused for worship after prakshalana. If bilva patra is difficult to procure, then the bilva patra can be used for worship again.

The sacred Seer of Kanchi, Maha Periyava, has prescribed the above vidhi (method) as well.

However, this belief is not universal. The Sringeri Bharati Tirtha Mahaswamigal has forbidden the reuse of used Tulsi and Bilva leaves. According to him, it would be most inappropriate to offer the Lord something that has already been offered to him once.

## Conclusion

Irrespective of the several schools of thought and their beliefs, it is an undeniable fact that including sacred plants and leaves, incense and other pooja dravyas in everyday prayer purifies

the atmosphere and brings peace and joy to the mind of the devotee. There is much wisdom in ancient sciences and everything has been prescribed for a reason.

Hence, the right application of certain vidhis and the use of the right material for poojas will undoubtedly prove to be beneficial to the follower in the long run.

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