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President, GOPIO International

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Department of Indian Studies,
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
University of Malaya,
50603 Kuala Lumpur,
Malaysia
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Tulasi in Hinduism: An Overview

Manimaran Subramaniam

Introduction

Over the past thousand years, Holy basil (Ocimum basilicum or Ocimum sanctum) which is commonly known as Tulasi (Tamil) or Tulasi (Sanskrit) is one of the holiest and useful plants of Hindus. Tulasi belongs to the basil genus in the family Lamiaceae. Tulasi is known as Vishnu Tulasi (belonging to Vishnu), Shri-Tulas (fortunate Tulasi) Rama-Tulas (bright Tulasi); Shyama-Tulas or Krishna-Tulas (dark Tulasi) and other names (Simoons, Frederick J., 1998, p. 14).

Tulasi is also called with alternate names viz. Viswavandhnya, Brunda, Pushparasavatar, Krishna Jeevani, Nandini, Viswapavani, Viswapoojitha, and Brundavani. It is called as Sri Lakshmi Swaroopam symbolizing Goddess Lakshmi and beloved to Lord Siva in Maha Vishnu. It is said that where Tulasi is, there Lord Vishnu resides and such place is considered as a Theertha (sacred place) (Sri Krishnaarpanamasthu , 2009).

Overall this article will discuss about the benefits of Tulasi and the importance of Tulasi in Hinduism as well as how Hindus worship Tulasi in their daily life. This article also gathered the information from various sources to explain the important of Tulasi plants among Hindus. The aim of this article is to explain the important of Tulasi in Hindu tradition and the medicinal values that it contains.

Tulasi plant in Hindu Myth and Puranas

Glory of Tulasi is mentioned in several Puranas like Padma Purana, Brahma Vaivartha Purana, Skandha Purana, Garuda Purana, Kartheeka Purana and Vishnu Dhamottara Purana etc. As per Padma Purana it is said that Tulasi came out from the joyousteers of Lord Sri Maha Vishnu that fell on the Divine Nectar (Amrutha) that emerged out during churning of the Ocean of Milk (Ksheera Sagara Madhanam) (Mani, Vetnam, 1975).

Hindus identify Tulasi as goddess Tulasi associated with Vishnu. According to the myth (The story of Tulasi) Jalandhara and Vrinda, Vishnu destroying Vrinda’s chastity to lead to the death of Jalandhara by Shiva. Then Vrinda had cursed Vishnu to become a stone and in return the god transformed her into Tulasi plant (Littleton C. Scott & Corporation, Marshal Cavendish, 2005, p. 1125-6).

There is also a myth which describes that the Tulasi plant is the meeting point between heaven and earth. In Padmapurana (Uttarakhandha, 6-24-31-32), it has stated that Vishnu, the Lord of the Three Worlds, takes up abode in the village or the house where Tulasi is grown. In such a house no one suffers calamities like poverty, illness or separations from dear ones. The Padma Purana declares that a perso

1 Mr Manimaran Subramaniam is a Lecturer in Sociology of Religion at Faculty of Arts and Social Science University of Malaya (Malaysia). His area of expertise includes Sociology of Religion, Culture and Life of T\ Malaysian Indians. He is one of the sought after speaker on Indian cultural issues in Malaysia and has appear in several talk shows telecasted in Malaysian Astro Vanavil Channel. Mr Manimaran has published three book chapters in books, journal articles, conference proceeding and has presented papers at several international conferences worldwide. Email: manimaran23@um.edu.my
who is cremated with Tulasi twigs in the funeral pyre gains moksha and a place in Vishnu’s abode Vaikuntha (Mani, V., 1975, p. 797).

The *Devi Bhagavata Purana* regards Tulasi as an manifestation of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and principle consort of Vishnu. J.A. Dubois, "Brahman reveres Tulasi as wife of Vishnu and believes that nothing on the earth can equal the virtues of the Tulasi" (Gautam Chatterjee & Sanjoy Chatterjee, 2001, p.93).

**Importance in Hindu Ritual and Cultural**

Tulasi symbolises purity in Hinduism. The name ‘Tulasi’ is from Tulasi Devi, who was one of Lord Krishna’s eternal consorts. Hindus use Tulasi for worship purposes and for occasions such as marriage. A Hindu house is incomplete without Tulasi plant because they believe that Tulasi promote longevity and lifelong happiness. According to the ancient texts Tulasi is glorified as the one who helps in bringing people closer to the divine (J. Nat. Prod, 2012, p. 39-48).

According to Srila Prabhupada had stressed that making Tulasi puja a daily part of our morning program because Tulasi-devi is an expansion of Vrinda-devi in this world. There are mantra and sloka to perform the ritual. (Amala-bhakta Dasa, 1997).

To perform ritual for Sri Tulasi Devi Pranama by reciting this mantra.

`vrndayai tulasi-devyai priyai kesavasya ca krsna-bhakti-prade devi satyavatya namo namah` (I offer my repeated obeisances unto Vrnda, Srimati Tulasi-devi, who is very dear to Lord Kesava. O goddess, you bestow devotional service to Lord Krsna and possess the highest truth).

To water the Sri Tulasi Devi, offer incense and flowers, and perfom Pradaksina reciting this Mantra while doing it.

`yani kani ca papani brahma-hatyadikani ca tani tani pranasyanti pradaksinah pade pade` (By the circumambulation of Srimati Tulasi-devi all the sins that one may have committed are destroyed at every step, even the sin of killing a brahmana).

When picking Tulasi leaves, chant the following mantra:

`tulasayamrta janmasi sada tvam kesava-priya kesavartham cinomi tvam varada bhava sobhane` (O Tulasi devi, you are born from nectar, and you are always very dear to Lord Kesava. Now in order to worship Lord Kesava I am collecting your leaves and marjaris. Please bestow your mercy upon me).

**Tulasi in Malaysian Contact**

The Tulasi worship is a part of Hindu culture which was inherited by Malaysian Indian from India. Tulasi worship is a common practice among educated Hindus, especially among the Vaishavites (One who worships Vishnu). Tulasi plant is not only revered by Vaishnavites, but also Saivites(One who worships Shiva). Observation shows, that almost every other Indian homes in rubber plantation has a Tulasi Plant. In urban area, Tulasi plant worship is still in practices. Tulasi plant had been placing it in a pot or vase at the balcony or veranda of the home.
Tulasi Maadam (An altar with Tulasi for daily worship in a courtyard) also to be seen in many of the Malaysian Hindus homes because it is regarded as are presentation of Goddess Lachumy. Use of Tulasi as a Tulasi Ilai Maalai (garland of Tulasi leaves) and thirtham (holy water given in temples by the priests) is a common practice in almost all the Vaishnavite temple in Malaysia.

Medicinal Value of Thulasi

Thulasi plant in its entirety is extensively used in Ayurveda and Siddha in curing various diseases like allergy, skin infections, cold, cough and respiratory infections, heart diseases stomach disorders, sore throat, ear ache, mouth infections, fever, head ache, sleeplessness (Krishnaarpanamasthu , 2009).

Shankar, Mondal, Bijay R. Mirdha and Sushil C. Mahapatra (2009), claim that “Middle of the 20th century only, scientific explorations of traditional belief of medicinal properties of Tulasi has been popularized” (p. 291). However, until today the Tulasi had become the most important sacred plant in Hinduism. Based on the researches done by many researchers, Tulasi has been well known for use of many purposes. In several ancient systems of medicine including Ayurveda, Greek, Roman, Siddha and Unani, Tulasi (Ocimum Sanctum) has vast number of therapeutic (Gupta S.K., Prakash J. & Srivastava S., 2002).

According to Hindu belief, the fragrance of Tulasi which the place it planted will keep away death and disease.Tulasi is traditionally grown in domestic courtyards, partly for spiritual purposes but also because its aroma is said to purify the atmosphere. Besides that, Tulasi helps to boosts the immune system of human body which makes it to fight against fevers, cough and cold. Basically, humans will get cough and fever when their immune system do not actively function (Sebastian Pole, 2013, p. 280-283).

Tulasi can help diabetic patients. It could control the sugar level. Research has clearly demonstrated Tulasi’s ability to lower blood sugar as well as cholesterol and triglyceride levels (Anne McIntyre, 2008). Ralph Miller (former Director of Research for the Canadian Dept. of Health and Welfare) explain that “Tulasi is especially effective in supporting the heart, blood vessels, liver and lungs and also regulates blood pressure and blood sugar.” (Vimal R. Joshi, Charmi S.Mehta, B.J Pattagiri & P. K Prajapati, 2012).

Stress is a very common problem among human nowadays. Recent studies have shown that the Tulasi leaves afford significant protection against stress (Bakhru H K., 1993, p.196). Tulasi’s Vata reducing properties help calm anxiety, mild depression, insomnia, and a variety of stress-related problems such as headaches and irritable bowel syndrome. (Anne McIntyre, 2008). Tulasi is not only useful for stress relief but also for respiratory disorder problem. Tulasi is commonly known for its use in helping people with respiratoty problems. (Anne McIntyre, 2008).

According to Sukhray Dhillon , antioxidants slow down the process of excess oxidation and protect cells from the damage caused by free radicals. Antioxidants stop this process which means Tulasi stops this process happen. Tulasi is rich in antioxidants and it has been recommended to protect against free radicals and protect from damaging excess oxidation (Anne McIntyre, 2005, p.118). Tulasi also
can be of help for mouth infections. People who are suffering from ulcer and infections can be cured by Tulasi. Besides that, it also helps to solve the insect bites. According to Lalit Mohan, Amberkar M.V. & Meena Kumari (2011), “In Ayurvedic medicine, Tulasi has therapeutic potential either alone or in combination with other plants in various clinical conditions like eye disorders (glaucoma, cataract, & chronic conjunctivitis), catalepsy, snake and scorpion bites etc”.

Conclusion

Tulasi has been known for thousand of years as the most holy and sacred plant in Hinduism. Until today, Malaysian Hindus are still practicing the culture and rituals involving the Tulasi plant. But most of them in Malaysia have little or no knowledge about the medicinal properties of this plant. Hence, further research and dissemination of information about Tulasi plant is crucial. The Tulasi plant is not only a symbol of purity, but a very useful medicinal plant that is available almost everywhere in Malaysia.

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