

PUJA

HOW AND WHY?

Dr. R. Lambotharan
Saiva Siddhanta Peedam, Canada
www.knowingourroots.com

INTRODUCTION TO PUJA

Worship is the way to relate to the Supreme. We do that to establish and affirm our relationship with the Supreme. Hinduism recognizes the following forms of worship.

1. Puja - worship with flowers. Pu - பு - in Tamil means flower. sei - செய் - means do. As it is done with flowers, it is called *pusai* in Tamil, *puja* in Sanskrit.

2. Dhyana - meditation. *Dhyan* means meditate. Needs higher focus and concentration. Done in secluded place.

3. Homa - fire ritual done with the offering of ghee and other materials to the sacred fire officiated with the help of a priest who is expert in sacred chants - *mantras* and sacred rituals - *kriyas*.

Among these three *Puja* is the simplest and easiest way for us to relate to the God. *Puja* is of two kinds.

1. Individual Puja (AanmAarththa puja): Individual *Puja* is done personally by individuals at home. This can be of two kinds. **KaamyA puja** is done with the expected material and or spiritual gains. **Nish-kaamyA puja** is done without any expectations for returns.

2. Congregational Puja (paraarththa puja): Done in the temples for the benefit of the community. It is also of two kinds. **nitya puja** is done daily in temples one to six times a day depends on their resources. **naimitya puja** is an expiatory *puja* done annually for seven to twenty-five days as temple festival. Special *pujas* are done in addition on special days.

Again, *pujas* can be done simply with five steps is called **pancha upasAara puja**. *Pancha* means five.

One of the most complete forms of worship is the sixteen-step puja called **shOdasa upasAara puja**. *shOdasa* means *shad* (six) plus *dasa* (ten) equals to sixteen.

Elaborate *pujas* done with sixty-four offerings during festivals is called **catush-sashti-upasaara puja**.

On special occasions one may invite a priest to perform puja on one's behalf, but for individual daily worship at home and in travel one should perform *puja* by himself/ herself.

In *puja*, which is a physical act of devotion, we invoke the presence of the God in any one of the following three.

1. Bimbha - Idol or picture of the deity.

2. **Kumbha** - the decorated water filled pot capped with coconut and mango leaves

3. **Yantra** - the geometric graphic form drawn usually on metal plates.

After invocation, treats the Lord as an honoured guest, offers worship and with reverence, seeks the Lord's blessings before send off.

PREPARATION FOR PUJA

The following items are needed to perform the sixteen-step *puja*:

- An altar with a *vighraha*, idol, of the deity to be worshipped. If an idol is not available, a picture of the deity may be used.
- An oil lamp, oil and a wick. One lights the lamp at the beginning of the *puja* and makes sure that it remains lit until the *puja* is completed.
- *Aksata*, unbroken rice grains sprinkled with a pinch of turmeric powder if possible.
- *Panca-paatra*, a special cup with water and spoon for offering water. The water may be poured into a tray during the offering.
- Fragrant sandal paste (*chnadana*) and *kunkuma* (vermilion).
- *Dhupa*, incense or incense sticks.
- *Vastra*, a small piece of garment or cloth for the deity.
- *Deepa*, a small oil lamp.
- *Naivedya*, freshly cooked food, fruits or milk for offering.
- *Puspa*, flowers kept on a plate.
- Ghanta, bell.
- Katpura, camphor with a holder for burning it.

The place or the altar should be cleaned and decorated daily. Metal vessels and utensils are preferable. If these are not available, paper plates and cups may be used by the beginners. The utensils for the *puja* should be kept apart and not to be used for other purposes.

If some of the offerings listed above such as *vastra*, *puspa* and so on, are not available, one may substitute them with the offering of *aksatas* instead. *Bilva* leaves can be kept and used until six months. *Thulasi* (basil) leaves can be kept for use for until one year. Dried fruits can be used for *naivedya* if fresh fruits and food are not available, especially when you are travelling. Certain flowers are forbidden for certain deities. *Aksata* for **VishNu**, *ketaki* for **Siva**, *Thulasi* for **Ganesh**, *aruku* and *nelli* for Devi are forbidden in *puja*. Never offer pre-cooked food bought from the stalls.

UNDERSTAND PUJA STEPS

- After lighting the lamp, one performs the *sankalpa*. The *sankalpa* is the resolution of *puja* confirms the person doing the *puja*, place of *puja* (oriented as per Hindu cosmology), the purpose of the *puja* and the time (day, month, year etc as per Hindu timeline).
- A common purpose of the *puja* is '*durita-kshaya*'- the removal of *duritas*, impurities attached to the soul. One may pray for other reasons, but an important element in all prayers is to keep our

mind free from hyper-arousal state of anxiety and stress thus prevent confusion and wrong decisions in our day to day life.

- The initial step is invoking the presence of the Lord in the given symbol. Once invoked, the symbol becomes the Lord and is looked upon as such until the completion of the *puja*.
- While offering flowers, one addresses the Lord by the various names (*naamaa vali*) that reveal the Lord's nature or describe his glories. One may chant sixteen, one hundred and eight, or one thousand and eight names of the Lord.
- *Naivedya* is then offered at the altar. For *naivedya*, one may offer fruits (fresh or dried), nuts or cooked foods. It is customary that we do not offer the Lord pre-made food bought from out, pre-cooked leftover foods.
- *Arati* is performed by dimming or switching off the electric lights in the room and offering lighted camphor.
- When visiting a temple, one may go around the deity clockwise three times as an act of salutation. In individual *puja*, one may turn around oneself three times, in a clockwise direction, while remaining in the same spot as the Lord also abides within. Both these acts of circumvallation are known as *pradakshina*
- In performing the *puja*, there may have been errors of omission and commission. One asks for forgiveness of the Lord for these.
- After the *puja*, the Lord is requested with a prayer to return to his original abode, which is our own soul.
- The *prasaada* is then taken from the altar and distributed to all after distributing *vibhuthi*, *chandana* and *kumkuma*.



PUJA VIDHANAM

Pre-puja steps

<p>1.Light the lamp.</p>	<p>Offer flowers to the lamp chanting:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Deepaj yotih param brahma deepaj yothir janardanaha Deepo me haratu papam deepaj yothir namOstu te</i></p> <p>The light of the lamp represents para brahmam, the un-manifest Supreme, and the manifested forms like vishNu. Let that light of lamp remove my sins from my omissions and commissions. I offer my worship to that Light.</p>
<p>2. Acamanam</p>	<p>Sipping water for inner cleansing: Take a sip of water after chanting each of the following mantras:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>om aatma tatvaaya swataa om vidya tatvaaya swataa om siva tatvaaya swataa</i></p> <p>Please reset my aatma tatvas (24 evolutes of prakriti maaya) Please reset my vidya tatvas (7 evolutes of impure / asuddha maaya) Please reset my siva tatvas (5 evolutes of pure / suddha maaya)</p>
<p>3. Guru Dhyaanam</p>	<p>Meditate on Guru:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Sri kaNda parama siva samaa-rambham MeikaNda-achaarya matyamaam asmat aachchaarya paryantam vande guru param paraam.</i></p> <p>I offer my prostrations to the lineage of Gurus Starting from <i>SrikaNda parameswara</i> Sperheaded by <i>MeikaNda achchaarya</i> Unto my spiritual Guru.</p>
<p>4. Vighnesvara puja</p>	<p>Puja to Lord GaNesa: Lightly knock the foreheads with both knuckles while chanting the following mantra and offer a flower for Ganesha.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>suklam baradhram visNum sasi varNam catur bhujam Prasanna vadhanam dhyayet sarva vighnOpa saantaye</i></p> <p><i>May one meditate upon Lord Vignesvara, Who wears the white garment, Who is all pervasive, Who has a bright complexion like the full moon, Who has four arms, Who has a face ever bright For the removal of all obstacles.</i></p>

Actual Puja - Sixteen Steps

<p>1 .Aavaahana</p>	<p>Invocation of the desired form of God in the deity/ picture:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">asmin bimbe **----- (name of the chosen deity) dhyaa yaami. asmin bimbe **----- (name of the chosen deity) Aavaha yaami.</p> <p>I visualise the Lord -----. I invoke his form in this image.</p> <p>Offer a flower or a pinch of <i>aksata at the deity</i>.</p> <p>NOTE: ** <i>select the name of the chosen deity from the list below:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ GANESHA - vigneswara swamin ➤ SIVA - paarwathi sameta parameswara swamin ➤ DEVI - lalitha thiri pura sundari devyai ➤ DURGA -durgaa devyai..... ➤ LAKSHMI- lakshmi devyai..... ➤ SARASWATHI- saraswathi devyai..... ➤ MURUGA - valli devajaani sameta subrahmanya swamin
<p>2. Asanam</p>	<p>Offer a seat for the invited God:</p> <p>Chant the following and offer a flower or a pinch of akshata</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Asanam samarpayaami</p>
<p>3. Paadyam</p>	<p>Offer water for washing the feet:</p> <p>Offer a spoonful of water in the tray in front of the deity for washing the feet by chanting:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Paadyam samarpayaami</p>
<p>4. Arghyam</p>	<p>Offer water on the hands for sprinkling on the head: Offer a spoonful of water in the tray in front of the deity by chanting:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Arghyam samarpayaami</p>
<p>5. Aacamaneeyam</p>	<p>Offer to sip water for inner cleansing: Offer a spoonful of water in the tray in front of the deity for mouth cleansing by chanting:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Aacamaneeyam samarpayaami</p>
<p>4. Sankalpah</p>	<p>Declaration of the resolve of doing the Puja:</p> <p>Males, clasping your ight palm over the left palm holding a flower; place them on your right thigh.</p> <p>Females clasp your left palm over the right palm holding a flower; place them on your left thigh. (Saiva Agama Tradition of Jaffna). and chant</p>

	<p style="text-align: center;">mamopaattha-samasta- durita kshayadvara sri paramesvara – prityartham *siva pujaam karisyee</p> <p style="text-align: center;">and Offer the flower at the altar, after chanting.</p> <p>NOTE: * Siva may be substituted by the name of the deity of your choice, such as <i>Maha Ganapati, Maha Subrahmanya, Maha Vishnu, Maha Saraswati, Maha Laksmi, Maha Durga</i> etc.</p>
5. Aasana Puja	<p>Purification of the spot / earth: Sprinkle water on the spot and chant</p> <p style="text-align: center;">prthvi tvaya dhrta lokah devi tvam - visnuna dhrta tvam ca dhaaraya mam devi pavitram kuru caasanam</p>
6. Ghanta Puja	<p>Worship of the Bell to Purify the Atmosphere: Ring the bell while chanting:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Aaga maartham tu devaanam gama naartham tu raksasaam kurve ghantaa ravam tatra devataah vaana laan chanam</p> <p><i>For the arrival of the celestials, the positive good forces and For the chasing away of the demons, the negative destructive forces, I ring the bell, marking the invocation of the deity.</i></p>
7. Kalasa Puja	<p>Worship of the Pot of Water and Purification of all Puja Materials:</p> <p>Offer flowers in the <i>pancha-paatra</i>, the small wide mouth vessel, which has been filled with water and decorated with sandal paste and <i>kunkuma</i>. Cover the <i>pancha-paatra</i> with the right palm and chant:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">gange ca yamune caiva godavari sarasvati narmade sindhu kaveri jalEsmin sannidhim kuru</p> <p><i>O Rivers Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu, Kaveri, may you all be present in this water!</i></p> <p>and sprinkle some water from the <i>pancha-paatra</i> on all the <i>puja</i> materials and on oneself.</p>
6. Madhu parkam	<p>Offer coconut water/honey/sweet juice/ sugarcane juice/ / curd or water: in a cup and chant</p> <p style="text-align: center;">madhu parkam samarpayaami</p>

	<i>offering you sweet drink</i>
7. SnAanam	<p>Bathing the deity: Bath the deity with water, milk, coconut water, honey, water mixed with fragrant herbs etc. Can chant Sivapuranam, Abhirami andhaathi, Vinayagar akaval, Kanthar Alangaara, Kanthar anubhuthi or Sri Rudram during this abisheka .</p> <p>Alternately one may offer water in the tray, chanting: SnAanam samarpayaAami O Lord! I offering you a bath. SnAananantaram aAcamaniyam samarpayaAami <i>After the bath, offering you sip of water for inner cleansing.</i></p>
8. Vastram	<p>Offer clothing and sacred thread to the deity: while chanting</p> <p>vastram samarpayaAami Upaveetam samarpayaAami</p> <p>Alternately one may offer flowers or <i>aksatas</i>.</p>
9. Aabharanam	<p>Decorate with ornaments: while chanting</p> <p>Aabharanam samarpayaAami</p> <p>Alternately one may offer flowers or <i>aksatas</i>.</p>
10. GandhaAm and Kumkuma	<p>Apply Thilak or pottu with fragrant Sandal paste and kumkumam: one after the other while chanting</p> <p>gandhAan dhaarayami</p> <p><i>apply sandal paste</i> gandhasyOpari haridra kumkumam samarpayaaami <i>apply kumkuma</i></p>
11. Puspam	<p>Offer flowers: while chanting</p> <p>PuspAani samarpayaami</p> <p>One may chant namavalih of ten, sixteen, 108 (astottara-sata-namavalih) or 1008 (shartra naamavalih) names of the Lord and offer flowers or akshata with each name. This is called archana. Instead one may sing prayers from ThirumuRai songs.</p>
12. Dhupam	<p>Offer Incense: ring the bell with the left hand and simultaneously show the incense to the deity three times in a circular clockwise motion while chanting</p> <p>dhupam Aaghrapa yaami</p>
13. Dheepam	<p>Showing the oil or ghee lamp: held in the right hand with a circular clockwise motion three times while chanting</p> <p>dheepam sandarsayaami</p> <p>Offer a spoon full of water in the tray, chanting:</p>

	dhupa-dheepaa-nantaram Aacamaniyam samarpayAami.
14. Naivedyam	<p>Offering Food:</p> <p>a. Ring the bell and offer the sanctified food with a flower in hand, with a sweeping motion from the food up towards the altar, for each of these six chants:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Om praNaaya svAha. Om apaanaaya svAha. Om vyAanAya svAha Om udAanAya svAha. Om samAanAya svAha. Om brahmanE svAha</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>I offer this to prana. I offer this to apana. I offer this to vyana. I offer this to udana. I offer this to samana. I offer this to the Lord.</i></p> <p>b. Offer food at the feet of the Lord while chanting: naivedyam nivedayAami <i>O Lord! I offer you food.</i></p> <p>c. Offer water while chanting: naivedyanantaram acamaniyam samarpayami <i>O Lord! I offer you water after the food.</i></p> <p>d. Offer betel leaves and nuts, chanting: thAambulam samarpayAami <i>O Lord! I offer you mouth freshener (betel leaves and areconuts).</i> *If you don't have <i>thAambulam</i> you may offer <i>aksatas</i> instead by chanting thAambulaArtham akshatan samarpayAami</p>
15. Karpura- neerAajanam	<p>Showing Lighted Camphor:</p> <p>a. Show the camphor with circular clockwise motion three times; simultaneously ring the bell with the left hand and chant:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">na tatra suryo bhAati na chandra tAarakam nema vidyuto bhAanti kuto' yamagnihi tameva bhantam anubhAati sarvam tasya bhAasa sarvamidam vibhAati</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The sun shines not there, nor the moon and stars These lightnings shine not, much less this fire! After Him, as He shines, doth everything shines, This whole world is illumined with his light</i> .(muNdaka upanishat 2.2.10; translation Ratna Navaratnam, Colombo)</p>

	<p>Offer lighted camphor, chanting: Karpura neerajanam sandarsayAami</p> <p>b. Offer a spoonful of water into the tray while chanting: Aacamaneeyam samarpayAami</p>
<p>16. Vandanam</p>	<p>Salutation</p> <p>a. Continue standing and offer flowers, chanting: mantra puspam samarpayAami <i>O Lord! I offer you flowers with sacred chants.</i></p> <p>b. Circumvallate around yourself three times clockwise while chanting the mantras given below: yAani kAani ca papAni janmAantara krtani ca tAani tAani vinaS yanti pradaksina pade pade <i>May those omissions and commissions Done in this life and also in the previous births and the resulting afflictions perish with every step of my pradakshina</i></p> <p>Offer salutations by prostrating and chant: Pradaksina namaskAaran samarpayAami</p> <p>c. To seek forgiveness, one may chant: mantra heenam kriya heenam bhakti heenam mahesvara Yatpujitam maya deva paripurnam tadAastu te <i>O Lord! may the puja done by me with defects in mantras, defects in rituals, defects in my devotion be received by you as complete.</i></p> <p>Send off the deity by offering flowers and <i>aksatas</i> at the altar and chant: Asmad bimbAad Aavahitam *-----(NAME OF THE CHOSEN DEITY as said in the beginning) yathas thAanam pratisthAapa yAami <i>The Lord Deva (or the chosen deity) invoked at this altar is placed again in his own abode - my soul.</i></p>

	<p>d. Samarpanam - Dedication to the Lord:</p> <p>Take water in the right hand and pour the water in front of the deity while chanting:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Om. hAm. sivO thAthA sivO bokthA siva sarvam itham jagat sivO jajathi sarvatra yachchivas sOhamEva tu</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Om. hAm. The giver who gives is Siva; The receiver who receives is Siva; Everything in this world is Siva as He pervades all; Thus the worshiper who worships is Siva; I am Siva.</i></p> <p>e. Complete the puja with a sipping water three times by Aasamaneeya and wash your hands with a spoonful of water.</p> <p>f. Distribute prasaada:</p> <p>Take and wear vibhuthi.</p> <p>Take the water, flowers and naivedya as prasada.</p> <p>Distribute these to others present.</p>
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END OF SIXTEEN STEP -SHODASHA UPASAARA PUJA

BENEFITS OF DOING PERSONAL PUJA

- Increases our creativity, efficiency and problem-solving skills in our day to day studies, work and personal life.
- Strengthens our relationship with the God.
- Brings mental peace and satisfaction.
- Increases our strength to face the adversities of life.
- Overcomes obstacles both obvious and unpredictable, in our life.
- Purifies our mind and thoughts.
- Helps to achieve the desired goals or objects.