

Why do we regard trees and plants as sacred?

Hindus have worshipped plants and trees and regarded all flora and fauna as sacred. Some would say this is 'old fashioned or uncivilised practice.' However this very act reveals the sensitivity, foresight and refinement of Indian culture.

In the Rig-Veda, 6.48.17 it states:

“Do not be like the devilish buzzard that troubles other birds by grabbing their necks and killing them. Do not trouble the trees. Do not uproot or cut them. They provide protection to animals, birds and other living beings.”

WHY?

The divinity within us pervades all beings, be it humans, plants or animals; we as Hindus regard all forms of life as sacred. As humans, we are very much dependent on plants and trees as they provide

us with food, oxygen, clothing, medicine etc. We can truly see how they are the perfect epitome of sacrifice. And when a stone is thrown on a fruit laden tree, the tree in return gives a fruit!

The flora and fauna owned the earth before humans appeared. For millions of years, so many species have evolved and depended upon the vegetation, including ourselves. However at present, the callous attitude of man has left the world seriously threatened by the destruction of forestland and the extinction of many species of vegetation. Being Hindus, we take it as our Dharma to protect the divinity

of the trees and plants.

WHAT?

There are many trees which hold special significance amongst Hindus. As Lord Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita 10.26- 'Amongst the trees I am the Peepal Tree.' This is one of many examples as to why Hindus believe respect is in itself worship. More so, the Peepal tree is mentioned in the Taittiriya Samhita along with six other revered trees.

The Padma Purana states that by offering prayers to the Peepal tree and performing circumambulation, one attains longevity. Whoever



offers water to the tree is absolved of all sins and attains heaven. It is believed that our forefathers find comfort in the Peepal tree and that all pilgrimages reside in the tree, therefore, when one cannot go on pilgrimage for a religious ceremony, it is customary to conduct the same under the shade of a Peepal tree.

The Tulasi plant is also seen in many Hindu homes as it is known to bring plentiful benefits. In the Skanda Purana we are told one can get rid of accumulated sins by growing numerous Tulasi plants – the more grown, the closer you move to liberation. Tulasi is seen as a consort of Lord Vishnu and is exceptionally dear to Lord Krishna, and is therefore used regularly in worship.

When offering prayers to Tulasi, one automatically prays to all Gods and it is akin to a pilgrimage, with benefits accruing accordingly. It is customary to offer prayers to the Tulasi plant in the evening along with lighting a lamp. The Brahmvavartpurana, Prakritikhand, 21.40 states,

“Lord Hari is not so pleased after being bathed with thousands of pots filled with celestial nectar, as he is when even a single leaf of Tulasi is offered to him.”

Our ancestors and scriptures had realised not only the environmental and medicine importance of plants, but also their spiritual value. Whilst we believe that our foremost Dharma is ahimsa (minimal harm), trees and plants should also be protected because of their significance spiritually. Different plants are sacred to different deities,

and offering leaves and flowers is the most natural and organic of all oblations to God. In many Vedic hymns, God is described through the beauty in nature, and so we see that Bhagavan resides in the plants and trees as much as He resides in you and me.

Mentioned in

Padma Purana, Brahmvavartpuran, Skanda Purana, Bhagavad Gita

Examples

Tulasi and Peepal

For

Longevity, removal of sins, prayer, medicine and spiritual value

Represents

All forms of Gods and ancestors.

