

Ocimum Trnuiflorum, better known as tulsi, or holy basil, has been in existence since the earliest dated Hindu scriptures. As one of the first plants of cultivation in India, its countless uses have defined it to be the panacea it is considered today. From throat-soothing herbal tea, to a medicinal plant commonly used in Ayurveda, to its worship in the Vaishnavite tradition of Hinduism, the tulsi plant's uses are endless.

Considered to be an auspicious, purifying, life and health-enhancing herb, tulsi has significant religious importance as shown throughout our history. Starting with the ancient scriptures such as the Skandapurana, it has been mentioned that tulsi was formed out of the drops of nectar that fell onto the earth during the process of Samudramanathan, or the churning of the ocean. Composed of the particles of Shakti, or divine energy, tulsi is known as the abode of all deities, and is therefore always emitting the principles of these deities and purifying the surrounding atmosphere. In Chapter 9, Verse 26 of the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says to Prince Arjuna, "if one offers me with love and devotion a (tulsi) leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it." In this excerpt, Lord Krishna explains how anyone, by offering the a simple leaf of tulsi, can please the Lord. Hence even the poorest man can engage in the devotion of Lord Krishna.

Even today, the common Hindu family generally has the auspicious plant gracing the entrance to their home. It is said in the Puranas that planting tulsi in a household gives it the equivalence to a pilgrimage centre because death in the form of "Yamadootha," or the god of death, can never approach that particular home. Tulsi is especially prayed to in the Kartik month, through the religious practice of Kartik vrat, which commemorates the fast that Tulsi undertook to attain Vishnu as her husband. On the 11th day of Kartik, Tulsi's wedding is celebrated by giving water to the tulsi plant in the morning and lighting diyas (lamps) in front of the tulsi plant at night. Seeing her devotion and righteousness, Lord Vishnu blessed her and said that she would be prayed to as a goddess and that all offerings would be incomplete without tulsi.

In one story in Dwapara Yuga, Queen Satyabhama tried to weigh Lord Krishna with all the jewels and valuables that he had given her, but the more she piled onto the scale, the lighter her side became. Lord Krishna's other wife, Rukmini, instead removed all the jewels and placed herself a tulsi leaf on the scale, which tipped in her favor bringing Lord Krishna back to Earth to live with his two wives which again proves that a tulsi leaf is more valuable than all the riches in the world. Since then, people use the leaf of tulsi in gifts and in Kanyadan during a Hindu wedding ceremony.

The tulsi plant has the utmost medicinal significance in the practice of Ayurveda as well, which dates back over 5000 years ago. The countless list of examples of its uses include: In paste form, tulsi helps cure the parasitological diseases of the skin; A tulsi leaf tea keeps blood pressure normal and facilitates the elimination of worms and parasites, and helps reduce maladies related to indigestion, heartburn, vomiting and diarrhea. The combination of tulsi oil with garlic and mustard oil can increase motor activity and sharpen memory. Seeds of the tulsi plant soaked in water are beneficial in treating inflammation in the intestines and colon, or dysentery. Also the leaf juice of tulsi taken with honey has proven to eliminate kidney stones.

So what exactly is the science behind this miraculous plant? Tulsi has several scientific properties that makes it the universal remedy it is today. An example of these properties is explained in "The Science Behind the Sacredness of Tulsi," which in one section explains tulsi's adaptogenic or anti-stress properties, which is the plant substance that increases the state of resistance against stress. Tulsi has proven to be a successful anti-stress agent after exposing mice through a battery of stress tests which include physical challenges, as well as aspirin

induced ulcers. In the end, the treatment of ethanol extract of tulsi given orally showed an increase in the amount of adrenaline, and monoamine oxidase produced within the body, as well as a decrease in dopamine and serotonin, all of which can be attributed to the decrease of stress. Another property discussed in the scientific article is the tulsi plant's anti-diabetic property. Through the testing and research on rats, it has been proven that tulsi leaves can reduce blood sugar levels by 43%, thereby providing a clear indication that the leaves possess hypoglycemic properties and is beneficial to patients with diabetes mellitus. In a similar study, oral administration of ethanol extract of tulsi on rats with diabetes showed reduction in serum glucose level by 70.43%. These are only two of the countless examples of chemical properties found in the catholicon.

In conclusion tulsi is not just a part of Hinduism because of its religious significance, but also a part of its ancient history in the practice of Ayurvedic medicine which together keeps the environment sacred and the human body healthy. In the present day, we currently use artificial drugs to cure different diseases, when there is always the option of using Ayurvedic practices which through further research, could prove to be just as effective. This is just one example in which our Hindu dharma is helping preserve such a vital flora of nature that we are blessed to have on this earth today.

"Tulasi is auspicious in all respects. Simply by seeing, simply by touching, simply by remembering, simply by praying to, simply by bowing before, simply by hearing about or simply by sowing this tree, there is always auspiciousness. Anyone who comes in touch with the Tulasi tree in the above-mentioned ways lives eternally in the Vaikuntha world."

Skanda Purana, Nectar of Devotion, Chapter 11

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