

Significance of Pooja/Puja

A. Introduction

Puja or pooja (Hindi: पूजा, romanized: pūjā, pronounced [puːd̪ʒɑː]) is a worship ritual performed by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains to offer devotional homage and prayer to one or more deities, to host and honour a guest, or to spiritually celebrate an event. It may honour or celebrate the presence of special guests, or their memories after they die. The word pūjā is Sanskrit, and means reverence, honour, homage, adoration and worship.[3] Puja, the loving offering of light, flowers, and water or food to the divine, is the essential ritual of Hinduism. For the worshipper, the divine is visible in the image, and the divinity sees the worshipper. The interaction between human and deity, between human and guru, is called darshan, seeing.

In Hindu practice, puja is done on a variety of occasions, frequency and settings. It may include a daily puja done in the home, or occasional temple ceremonies and annual festivals. In other cases, puja is held to mark a few lifetime events such as birth of a baby or a wedding, or to begin a new venture. The two main areas where puja is performed are in the home and at temples to mark certain stages of life, events or some festivals such as Durga Puja and Lakshmi Puja.[6] Puja is not mandatory in Hinduism. It may be a routine daily affair for some Hindus, periodic ritual for some, and rare for other Hindus. In some temples, various pujas may be performed daily at various times of the day; in other temples, it may be occasional.

Puja varies according to the sect, region, occasion, deity honored, and steps followed. In formal Nigama ceremonies, a fire may be lit in honour of the god Agni, without an idol or image present. In contrast, in Agama ceremonies, an idol or icon or image of a deity is present. In both ceremonies, a lamp (diya) or incense stick may be lit while a prayer is chanted or hymn is sung. Puja is typically performed by a Hindu worshiper alone, though sometimes in the presence of a priest who is well versed in a complex ritual and hymns. In temples and priest-assisted events puja, food, fruits and sweets may be included as sacrificial offerings to the ceremony or deity, which, after the prayers, becomes prasad – food shared by all gathered.

Both Nigama and Agama puja are practiced in Hinduism in India. In Hinduism of Bali Indonesia, Agama puja is most prevalent both inside homes and in temples.

B. Temple Pooja

Temple (Mandir) pūjā is more elaborate than the domestic versions and typically done several times a day. They are also performed by a temple priest, or pujari. In addition, the temple deity (patron god or goddess) is considered a resident rather than a guest, so the puja is modified to reflect that; for example the deity is "awakened" rather than "invoked" in the morning. Temple

pujas vary widely from region to region and for different sects, with devotional hymns sung at Vaishnava temples for example. At a temple puja, there is often less active participation, with the priest acting on behalf of others.

C. Elaborate Pūjā

A full home or temple puja can include several traditional upacaras or "attendances". The following is an example puja; these steps may vary according to region, tradition, setting, or time particularly in ways the deity is hosted. In this example, the deity is invited as a guest, the devotee hosts and takes care of the deity as an honored guest, hymns and food are offered to the deity, after an expression of love and respect the host takes leave and with affection expresses good bye to the deity.

16 steps (shodasha upachara) that are common in all varieties of puja:

1. Avahana ("invocation"). The deity is invited to the ceremony from the heart.
2. Asana. The deity is offered a seat.
3. Padya. The deity's feet are symbolically washed.
4. Water is offered for washing the head and body
5. Arghya. Water is offered so the deity may wash its mouth.
6. Snana or abhisekha. Water is offered for symbolic bathing.
7. Vastra ("clothing"). Here a cloth may be wrapped around the image and ornaments affixed to it.
8. Upaveeda or Mangalsutra. Putting on the sacred thread.
9. Anulepana or gandha. Perfumes and ointments are applied to the image. Sandalwood paste or kumkum is applied.
10. Pushpa. Flowers are offered before the image, or garlands draped around its neck.
11. Dhupa. Incense is burned before the image.
12. Jyot or Aarti. A burning lamp is waved in front of the image.
13. Naivedya. Foods such as cooked rice, fruit, clarified butter, sugar, and betel leaf are offered.
14. Namaskara or pranama. The worshipper and family bow or prostrate themselves before the image to offer homage.
15. Parikrama or Pradakshina. Circumambulation around the deity.
16. Taking leave.

Sometimes additional steps are included:

1. Dhyana ("Meditation"). The deity is invoked in the heart of the devotee.
2. Acamaniya. Water is offered for sipping.
3. Aabaran. The deity is decorated with ornaments.

4. Chatram. Offering of umbrella.
5. Chamaram Offering of fan or fly-whisk (Chamara).
6. Visarjana or Udvasana. The deity is moved from the place.

There are variations in this puja method such as:

1. Pancha upachara pooja (puja with 5 steps).
2. Chatushasti upachara puja (puja with 64 steps).

The structure of elaborate puja also varies significantly between temples, regions, and occasions.

Archana puja is a brief intercessionary puja on behalf of an individual that can be undertaken after the main puja.

D. Quick Pūjā

A quick puja has the same structure as acts ordinary people would perform for a quick reception, hospitality and affectionate interaction with a beloved guest. First the deity is greeted, acknowledged by name and welcomed, sometimes with a diya or lighted incense stick. The devotee proceeds to connect with the spiritual manifestation by meditating (a form of darshan), or chanting hymns and mantras, then personal prayers follow. After the prayer is finished, the spiritual visitor as the guest is affectionately thanked and greeted goodbye. A quick meditative puja is sometimes offered by some Hindus without an idol or image. According to Chris Fuller, an anthropologist, Hindu texts allow flexibility and abbreviated puja according to the occasion, needs, and personal preferences.

E. Guru Puja

In the case of great spiritual masters, there is also a custom to perform puja for a living person especially in Guru Purnima. Gurus are sometimes chosen as objects of puja and honored as living gods or seen as the embodiment of specific deities. Gurus are sometimes adorned with symbolic clothes, garlands and other ornaments, and celebrated with incense, washing and anointing their feet, giving them fruits, food and drinks and meditating at their feet, asking for their blessing.

F. As a social and human rights event

Pūjā in Hinduism has served as a means for Hindu communities outside India to gather, socialize, discover new friends and sometimes discuss ways to address social discrimination.

Pujas offered a way for people to meet, socially organize and petition their human rights. Over time, pujas became as much a social and community recreational event as a religious event.

G. an Alternative Explanation

Our religion and culture is a complex system of beliefs that bind together our faith and our values. It is unique in every way and is a source of peace for a lot of us. Puja or Pooja is an integral part of this faith, something that's been done since ever. In many ways, it is symbolic of our values and what they mean in our lives.

On special occasions like Diwali, Baisakhi, Rakhi, birthdays, etc. you perform special Pujas using Pooja Thali , that makes the occasion not only memorable but also auspicious. But at a young age, it can be difficult to understand why we do Puja during all these times, especially if it's significance has never been explained. On knowing the reasons behind the foundations of your faith, the bond becomes all the more stronger.

What is Puja?

Essentially, Puja is a ceremony or ritual during which we make offerings to a deity in order to receive blessings or good fortune as prasad. During a Puja, we often repeat sacred stotras or verses or mantras that help us to connect to God and make our mind peaceful.

The entire act of Puja is a symbolic means of showing devotion to a deity and surrendering oneself at the altar, as a mark of true worship.

Pooja thali with puja set

Who performs Puja?

In truth, anyone who has a faith and believes in a deity or scripture or Guru can perform Puja at their home. So you really don't need any qualification to do puja. Just your faith is enough.

But there are individuals called Pujaris or priests, who have studied the scriptures and gained knowledge by which they guide us to perform certain rituals. They help us understand the significance of these rituals, pooja items, pooja mandir and why is puja important so that we perform them with utmost faith. They are aware of certain rules for each ritual, like which Puja to perform during an occasion or which puja should be conducted at a certain time. Also, they know what are the sacred objects that are required to perform a Puja. So, taking guidance from them is helpful.

These Pujaris devote their entire lives to the service of God. They pass on their knowledge to worthy students, who too want to follow this path.

Why perform Puja?

The reason is in the word itself – “Pu” means ‘to purify’ or ‘to cleanse’ and “ja” means ‘birth’. So, as you perform Puja, you cleanse your body, mind, and intellect and essentially take a new birth each time. So, if you feel that you need to reset your inner self and start anew, a Puja is what will help you get there.

While performing a Puja your body, mind, and intellect are all aligned and focused on one thing – your deity. While you are performing the actions with your hands, you are chanting or reciting His name with complete faith and reverence. It’s a great way to discipline yourself and make your mind single pointed.

If one is overwhelmed with negative thoughts, burdened with pressure or problems, or simply cannot understand which way to turn, then a Puja will also help in clearing up the mind and seeing a path that was previously hidden. Your negativity can have an adverse effect on your house and your loved ones too. So not only does a puja help you but also your environment. Read about significance of lighting a diya during puja.

You actually don’t need any specific pooja materials to pray, just your availability. But to perform puja, you may need a few essentials. These can be as simple or as elaborate as you may like, makes no difference. What makes a difference is your faith. If you are looking for options for Pooja Thali or Puja Items we can offer you a beautiful set with hand-beaten copper and brass items.