
Puja at Home and in the Temple

Puja the Hindu meaning of worship is the core ritual of popular polytheistic Hinduism (Fuller, 2004, p. 57). It primarily means paying respect or homage to one or more Gods through numerous actions that express the wish to please the chosen deity and offer service to them and hope for the blessing of God in return. The same basic rituals of Puja are performed at the shrine in the home as well as the temple, one being simple, the other more elaborate and dramatic (Fuller, 2004, p. 63). Puja can be described as an individual act of devotion and each person performs it in their own way. Some Hindus perform Puja daily while others may practice less often. Everyday puja usually involves making offerings to a god and reciting mantras (Symmons, 1998, p. 38). For special occasions for example giving thanks to God for a new baby, in memory of a loved one who has died or to celebrate a wedding anniversary. In some cases, families may request a priest to perform a special puja depending on the occasion.

Hindus perform puja in a wide range of settings mostly at home or in a temple. In temples, priests or pujari are normally responsible for performing the ritual before the images of the deities. Temple puja is more extreme and is performed several times a day. In addition, the temple deity is considered a resident rather than a guest, so the puja is adapted to reflect that. When Hindus visit a temple, just looking on the images for a "sight" or "vision" of the deities is one of the most vital things that they do (Fuller, 2004, p. 59).

Temple pujas differ widely from region to region and for different sects, for example with devotional hymns sung at Vaishnava temples (Hatcher, 2016, p. 24). At a temple puja, there is often less active participation with the priest acting on behalf of the congregation. Worship at public temples is said to be "for the benefit of the world" because it is addressed on behalf of all to the deities who protect the entire population (Fuller, 2004, p. 62). At private temples belonging to families, kin groups, castes, or other social units, worship is mainly intended to benefit those who own the temple. One could argue that these forms of worship take on macro and micro properties. Macro being for the common good and the micro, private prayer, being more individualistic.

When worship is performed by priests, specifically in public temples, ordinary devotees have no active role and the value of the ritual is unaffected by the presence or absence of the congregation (Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2000, p. 232). The congregation is there in an almost observational capacity. In all communal temples, however, worship of the deities can be conducted through communal worship or private devotion. In congregational worship the priest acts on behalf of the faithful. However most ordinary people are usually content in simple acts of worship through greeting the deities with the gestures of respect and to have darshama of them.

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The rituals that take place as part of the daily life in the temple revolve around the daily worship of the deities, and, so they are dressed, bathed and garlanded, given food offerings and put to rest (Anon, 2016). When Hindus visit a temple, it will be for a special purpose or intention or a festive occasion. They will perform their own individual puja or join in congregational worship (Luke and Carman, 1968, p. 201). The worshipper must be in a state of ritual purity to receive the divine blessings. Men and women wear traditional dress rather than western clothes. They will remove their shoes on entering and ring the bell near the entrance and then perform some or all the above-mentioned ritual actions (Kuman, 2013, p. 77). The purpose of temple worship helps the worshipper to withdraw from the outside world and reflect on the inner self and on the divine nature within. This meditation helps the devotee to become fully aware of the presence of Krishna in their lives. They can then return to the world spiritually renewed and afresh.

Furthermore, beside temples, puja is performed in many other institutions, such as monasteries, and in Hindu homes. Where at the household shrine contains images or pictures of the deities (Fuller, 2004, p. 63). In every Hindu Home there will be a place set aside for a small shrine to their chosen and favourite family deity, typically in a small room or a specially fitted cupboard or shelf. Ideally, worship at home is done regularly, daily or perhaps weekly; although men do participate, especially during the more important festivals, domestic worship is often the responsibility of women (Fuller, 2004, p. 63). Often this responsibility would include taking care of the family shrine each morning, performing puja, and offering some of the family breakfast to Krishna. Some of the food is then taken back into the kitchen and mixed with the food that the family will eat. In many Hindu households, women pray at least three times a day, and at the end of the day a curtain is drawn around the murti so that it can rest.

There are several objects found on a shrine in the home these would include, a small vessel containing water from the holy river Ganges, red kum-kum powder, yellow turmeric powder, sandalwood paste, flowers and leaves, food offering of sweetmeats and fresh fruit, incense, a small ghee lamp usually a small dish with a cotton wool wick placed in ghee or clarified butter, an Arti lamp and lastly a small bell (Mayled and Ahluwalia, 2003, p. 32). Before puja in the home, those participating will bathe and dress in clean clothes. This shows respect and the desire to clean not just the body but also the soul, and to clear away ignorance.

Although children grow up following family beliefs, they are encouraged as young adults to make their own choices of which gods or goddesses they find personally inspiring (Huyler, 1999, p. 31). Consequently, household shrines contain images of deities that relate to the belief systems of all a home's inhabitants, and it is not uncommon to find several small individual shrines in one household.

In many respects there are parallels to be drawn between Hindu and Christian worship. Just as Hindus offer food to their deities, at the offertory of the mass we offer God bread and wine as

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signs of our labour. Just as the Hindu rings the bell and withdraws into the inner self, at the beginning of mass, the Christian has an examination of conscience. The purpose of both of these acts is spiritual, purification and renewal. Hindus have shrines in their homes just as Christians have sacred images of Our Lord and maricon icons such as the mother of perpetual help. The religious scholar A.L. Basham view of Hindu rituals in the home is re-echoed through the Christian adage of “a family which prays together, stays together” (Hays, 2013). The ceremony performed while an unborn child is still in the womb is played out on numerous occasions in Clonard Monastery each day as expectant mothers offer prayers at the shrine of St. Gerard Majella. Also, just as ancestors being cared for in the afterlife is reflected when we pray for the faithful departed at mass.

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