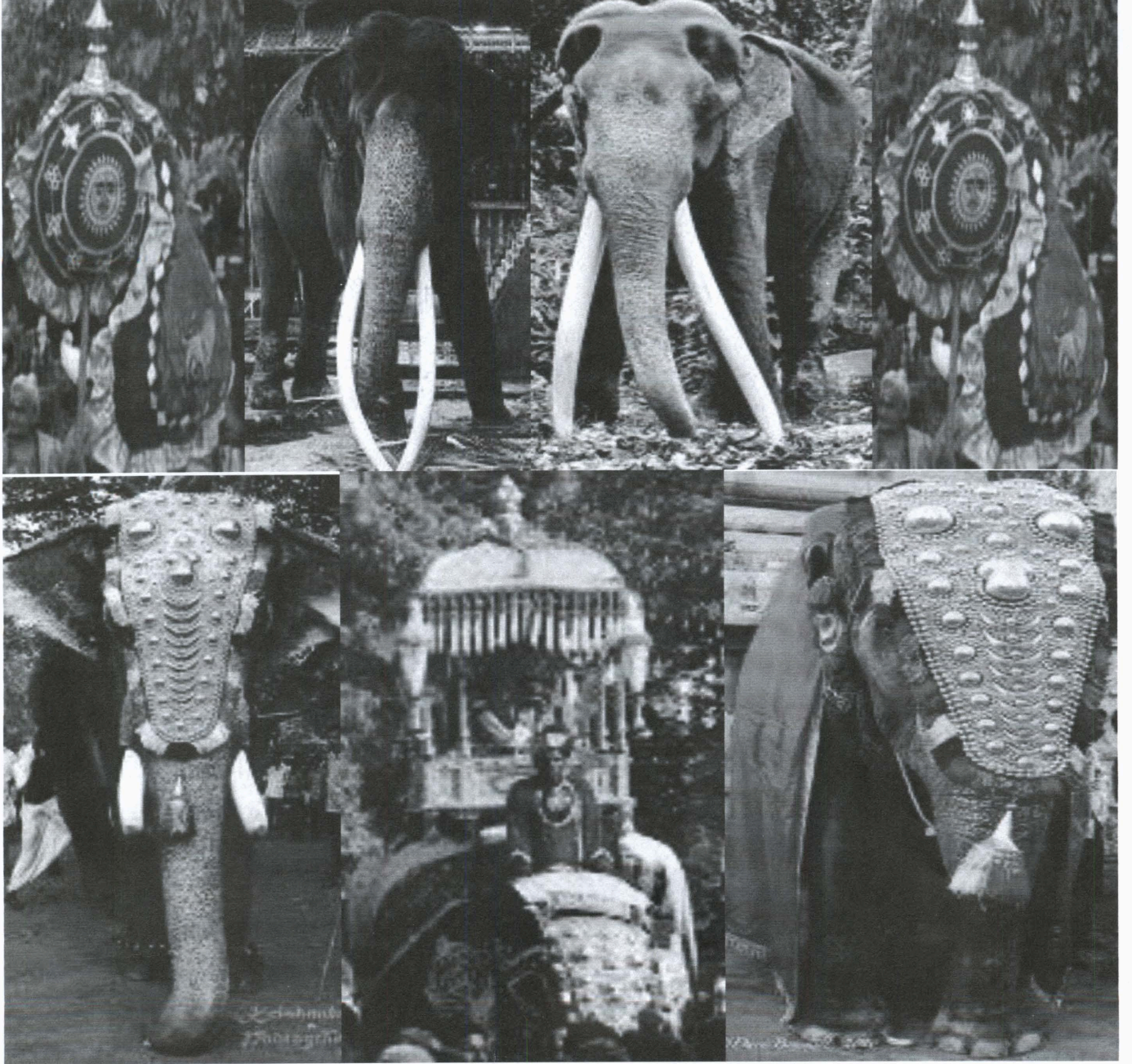


Path to Dharma

தர்ம நெறி (Dharma Neri)

61



Sri Sankar Publications

Kshethra Vinayaka Temple, Sri Munneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka.

சேஷத்திர (வயல்) விநாயக ஆலயம், ஸ்ரீ முன்னேஸ்வரம், சிலாபம், ஸ்ரீ லங்கா.

Author - B.S.Sarma

hot mail; kshethraviniyaka@yahoo.com; kshethraviniyaka5@gmail.com

January

2013

ஜனவரி (மார்ச்சு/தை)

Editorial

'Path to Dharma' the monthly magazine, published by Kshethra Vinayaka Temple, Sri Munneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka, is presenting the 61th issue this month. The foremost intention of this magazine is to converse the perceptions linked to Hinduism and its ceremonial rituals, customs and dharma, to the anxious readers. The elucidation and investigation from the readers are appreciated.

B.Sivaramakrishna Sarma,

Kshethra Vinayaka Temple, Sri Munneswaram, Chilaw, Sri Lanka, January, 2013

OPINION

Dear Sarma,

I perused the Nov issue of 'Path to Dharma' (Dharma Neri) with joy and contentment. Firstly the flowers adorning the issue in variegated and splendid hues are eye-catching. The Nagalinga flower and the religious significance attached to it are quite readable. The explanations on DHARBA AND KUSA take us to the hitherto unknown regions of preternatural meaning attached to it. The chapter on Mridangam puts a coping stone to the issue. A mentally enjoyable issue.

With regards,

V.Seshadri, Chennai, India

01st December 2012

Dear B.S.Sarma,

With reference to your 59th and 60th issues of Path to Dharma I like to write a few words. It is very fantastic and very high standard ritual scripts, specially you have given descriptions about Nagalinga flower, Nadaswaram, Thavil, Mridhangam etc. are all in a very excellent manner. I think I have no knowledge to comment on the other matters in the Episode. Thank you.

With regards,

R.Suntharam, Victoria, Australia.

14th December.2012

Dear Sarma,

I went through the December issue of Path to Dharma, but could not react immediately due to important office duties. It contains a lot of information about Nagalinga flower, the religious significance of on dharba and kusa, the detailed account on Mridangam with a large number of illustrations on each subject matter. I and my friends convey our kind regards for your services rendered towards the Hindu communities all over the world.

With regards,

S.K.Mannivannan, Canada.

20th Dec.2012

Dear B.S. Sarma,

Went through the 60th December 2012 issue of 'Path to Dharma' and give my approval to that it is an exceptional venture. It was rather a pleasurable experience to read through the subject matters offered. It is quite remarkable the manner in which that this issue of the magazine commenced with the topic 'flower'. I have just seen Nagalinga flower during pujas and other ceremonies in temples but not carefully observed or examined this flower. I had no idea of any sort regarding this flower. After reading the article I gathered a lot of data and information regarding this flower. Thank you very much for supplying the details of Nagalinga plant, flower, fruit etc. The interpretation on the philosophy of Sivalinga is excellent. The topic on 'Dhaba', the sacred grass is dealt in such a manner that no one will have any doubt on this subject. The manner in which the topic explained linking with Puranic evidences, Vedic interpretation. The subject dealt on Chidambaram temple is very useful. Finally the way that the magazine concludes with the topic on the traditional Carnatic musical instrument 'Mridangam' is the masterpiece with a large number of illustrations. Still recollecting the subjects that I enjoyed in the last issue of 'Path to Dharma'

M. J. Sarma, Cranbourne West, Victoria, Australia

23-12-2012

1. What is the importance of elephants in Hindu temples?

The elephant has a fascinating position in South Asian countries from the early days. The representations of elephant in granite, other various forms of stones and paintings are seen universally. The seals from the excavations of the Indus Valley illustrate the elephant in elegant features standing over a manger, forming an idea that the elephant was already a domesticated animal and of artistic and probably religious importance.

Airavata is the name of the elephant of Lord Indra which serves as his mount. Indra is also known as Abhranu or Abhramatanga, "the one who knits or binds the clouds".

Rig Veda hymns of 1.64.7 illustrate that the massive strength of the elephant, as when they sang of Indra, filled with Soma, smashing the cities of his enemies "as a wild elephant rushes on this way and that, mad with heat". These hymns further exemplify that, huge and gray, that elephant resembled the dark clouds of refreshing and violent rain that fed and replenished the parched land.

The myth of the appearing Lakshmi Gajalakshmi, at the time of the churning of the ocean of milk where Lakshmi rose out of the ocean seated on a lotus, Ganga and the other sacred rivers stood there performing ambulations. The elephants of the quarters of the sky took up their pure waters in golden vessels and poured them over the goddess, the queen of the universe.

One mythology shows that Lord Indra, who rides the elephant Airavata when he defeats Vrta, Airavata, the mighty elephant reaches down his trunk into the watery underworld, sucks up its water, and then sprays it into the clouds, which Indra then causes to rain forth cool water, thereby linking the waters of the sky with those of the underworld.

A Hindu mythology shows that during "Sagar Manthan" the Gods (Deva) and the demons (Asura) churned the ocean for the elixir of life called "Amritham" (holy nectar) which make them immortal, the 'navratnas' (nine jewels) floated up. One of the nine jewels was the elephant. Since that time elephant is considered enormously precious to be preserved and protected like the way jewels are.

For long period of time, elephants have been a source of interpretation in art, sculpture and literature. According to a mythological narrative, Buddha's mother has dreamt of a white elephant in one of her dreams. After that the prophet of peace Gautama Buddha was born. Evidently, for that reason, a white elephant in Indian culture is considered a sacred animal.

Further, elephants occupy a significant position in Sanskrit literature. **Gaja-shastra, (elephant science)** was studied and recorded in several texts that are based on oral traditions.

After that, what comes the 'Airavat' (elephant) - the greatest of the all 'vahanas' meaning the carriages of Gods. God Indra possesses the Airavata as his vahana. Although other gods were shown riding on the elephants, Airavata Indra's vahana was specifically known among them. Unlike the ordinary elephants having two tusks, the Airavata had ten tusks with regal size.

The epic Mahabharata glorifies a well-known account of an elephant known as 'Ashvatthama' and there was the similarity of the name between him and the name of the revered teacher Guru Dronachariyar. In the middle of the battle at Kurukshetra which was between the Pandavas and the Kauravas an innocuous lie was announced that Ashvatthama was dead. It was intended to upset the Kauravas by the impression that the guru's (teacher's) son was dead but in fact, it was the elephant that was killed.

The most commonly worshiped Hindu divinity is Lord Ganesha who is universally known as 'elephant-headed' god who has an wide-ranging myths. He represents "perfect wisdom" and is highly loved and worshiped by his devotees. The main use of the elephant in eastern religious art is in the representation of Lord Ganesha.

The elephant represents royalty, power, wisdom, fertility, longevity. The elephants are associated with water and rainfall. The shape size, and color of the elephants are symbolic of clouds and rain. This connection paved the ground for the development of a cult around the elephant who was worshipped as a folk god.

In most art forms, the elephant is the object of worship or it appears with a god who is worshipped. In countries such as Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, elephants were believed responsible for watering the fields. Lord Indra, The Rain and Storm God, is sometimes depicted riding on an elephant with a lightning bolt on his forehead.

The elephant is the largest mammal has a special place in the Hindu religious rituals and temple worship. Many large temples possess their own elephant-farms and nurture their own elephants.

The elephant taxonomic order of the elephant, is proboscidea, has only three species (but it used to have over forty) today namely;

1. the Asian elephant *Alphas maximus*
2. the African bush elephant *Loxodonta Africana* (also called the savannah elephant)
3. the African forest elephant *Loxodonta cyclones*.

The tusks, of the elephant are astonishing characteristic, which are elongated incisors to the highest degree (elephants have no canine teeth). Roughly one-third of their entire length lies buried inside the skull. The largest tusk ever recorded weighed 214 pounds and was 138 inches long. Both male and female African elephants have tusks, although only males in the Asiatic elephants have them. Tusks grow for most of an elephant's lifetime and are an indicator of age.

There are 170 known fossil elephant species that inhabited the whole Earth, except for Australia and Antarctica. The elephants' ancestors appeared 50 million years ago in North Africa.

2. What is the significance of Panchagavyam?

Panchagavyam is the most revered abhisheka dravyam for all deities. Dharmasaasthras, clearly explains the procedure of the preparation of Panchagavyam for the Hindu religious rituals. These scripts refer to the, correct percentage of the ingredient of the mixture of the Panchagavyam.

The constituents for the formation of Panchagavyam is measured as "Phalam" ('One Phalam' is roughly equivalent to the weight three Indian one rupee coin made of silver). The preparation of panchakavya mixture should be accompanied with chanting the appropriate religious hymns.

There are several inscriptions written by many Kings which show that they have donated numerous herds of cows to various temples, particularly to prepare Panchagavyam. These sculptors mention the cows as "ever-living cows".

Following are the prescribed hymns to be recited while mixing each ingredient to prepare Panchagavyam.

- 1. Urine of the cow** - One phalam;

“Aum Bhur Bhua Swaha Thath Savithur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi Dhiyoyona Prashothayath - Half-thumb measured

2. Dung of the cow - One phalam;

“Gandhathdwaaraam dura dharshaam nityapushtaam kareeshineem. Ishwareegm sarvabhoothaanaam
thaamihopavvaye shriyam”. Half-thumb measured

3. milk of the cow - Seven phalam;

“agne naya supaThaa raaye asmaan.vishvaani deva vayunaani,vidvaan. yuyodhyasmajjuhuraaNameno
bhooyishTaanthe namaukthim vidhema.”

4. Yoghurt (curd) of the cow - Three phalam;

“darithraa dadhikrAvaNNo akArisham. jishNo rashchvasya vAjina: surabhino mukhasta. praNa AyUshi
tArishath. Aadadhrikra:shavasA panchakrushtI:soorya iva jyotiShA pastatAna . sahasrasA: shatasA
vAjyarvA prUNakthu madhvAsamimA vachAgumsi. dadhna snapayAmi.”

5. Ghee of the cow - One phalam:

“shukramasi, jyothirasi, devo vassavitotpunAtvachchidreNa ,pavitreNa vaso: sooryasya rashmabhi:. Ajyena
snapayAmi.”

dharpai (grass) juice - One phalam - two edges of Dharpai to be bent and scanned through the milk or juice to be added.

Cow is considered a prominent position in Hinduism "Rig Veda", refers to the importance of the devoted to the cow. This section of Rig Veda is known as "Gosooktham". In the ancient past elders of the family never take their daily food until they have recited this "Gosooktham" and performed "Go pooja". The Gomuthram, Gomiyaam and the Panchagavyam are considered most sacred in the rituals as also for treatment of certain ailments in the early days.

As the spark of fire destroys entire woods, Panchagavyam has the effect to burn away human sins. Panchagavyam is derived from five different cows with five different substances. Namely;

- i. Urine of the cow from black colored cow,
- ii. Dung of the cow from white colored cow,
- iii. Milk of the cow from copper colored cow,
- iv. Curd (Yogurth) of the Cow from blood colored cow,
- v. Ghee of the cow from 'kapila' colored cow.

With reference to Dharmasastras, if all these different cows are not available, subsequently all the ingredients mentioned for the preparation of Panchagavyam, can be acquired from 'kapila' colored cow. Panchagavyam is the major abhisheka dravyam (substance of holy bath of the sacred idol) . These five holy ingredients have one each Athi Devatha. Namely;

- i. Milk : Chandran
- ii. Curd (Yogurth) : Vaayu
- iii. Ghee : Suryan
- iv. Cow Urine :Varunan
- v. Cow Dung : Agni

Hence, Panchagavyam achieves significance when Abhishekam is performed to the Lord. Suryan, Chandran Vaayu, Varunan, Agni - all these celestials bless through Panchagavyam.

3. What is the significance of Abhisheka in a Temple?

Abhisheka or Abhishekam is the practice of holy bathing the deity. Abhisheka is also a special form of puja prescribed by Agamic injunction. According to Siva Agamas (script on rules and procedure pooja) abhisheka

is regarded as as one part of the 'shodashopachara' pooja. Siva Agamas provide great significance to abhishekam in Siva pooja.

Yogis attain (Siddhi) by moving up their **Kundalini Sakthi** from Moolaadhaaram, through Manipoorakam, Swaadhistaanam, Anaagadham, V... and Sahasraaram and the Naadham and Bibdu Unites (Yogam), it is said a "**Divine Nectar**" (Amrutham) flows from the head to the toes through all the parts of body, giving an amusing sense of bliss called 'Aanandham'. It is plainly expressed as "Abhisheka". The Abhisheaka performed by religious ritual is an symbolic representation of this "Abisheka" for those normal devotees who cannot realize like that of a Yogi.

The types of materials (Dravya) and their sequence are all given in "**Pooja Vidhaanam**". According to this script, the type of materials and the order are based on Dravya Gunam (property) namely, Rasam (taste), Veeryam (hotness or coldness). For example,

- i. Sugar cane juice is Madhura rasam
- ii. Lemon juice Aamla rasam
- iii. Chandhanam may be Seetha Veeryam
- iv. Vibhuthi may be Ushna Veeryam

After performing Abhisheka with each substance (dravya) pure water abhishekam (Suddha Udhaka Snaanam) is carried out.



Abhishekam could be carried out by basically using only holy water or performed magnificently with pancha gowvia, panchamrutha, milk, curds, honey, ghee, , cane sugar, coconut water, holy ash, cooked rice, sandal paste, different kinds of fruit juice etc.

Annabhishekam is held on full moon day in the seventh month of every year - i.e. Aippasi (Tamil calendar) **Asvina** (Hindu calendar) (October/ November), for Siva Lingam, presiding deity of all Siva Temples in South India.

The seventh month in the calendar is the holy month. According to astrology Sun resides in the house / rasi Libra. The harvesting of paddy in Tamil Nadu would have got completed by this time.

Siva Lingam is an abstract form of Lord Siva. Since Lord Shiva is widely worshipped in the form of the Siva linga as well as presiding deity, annabhishekam will be performed only to Siva lingam. Siva linga form has three parts. The four-sided lower-most part forms the base and is known as avudai. The 'Yoni' or octagonal eight-sided pedestal (mid-part) is provided with a passage for draining away the water or other liquids poured on top by devotees. The 'Lingam' or cylindrical shaped top most part remains on the pedestal. The height of lingam is one-third of its circumference. The three parts of lingam symbolize the trinity of Hindu pantheon i.e. Brahma (the creator) resides at the bottom, Vishnu (the preserver) resides in the middle and Shiva (the destroyer) resides on the top.

Eleven Ingredients Prescribed for Abhishekam

The Shiva Linga abhishekam is done with the following prescribed items:

- i. Gingely oil (Sesame oil / til oil)
- ii. Pancha kavya (mixture of five ingredients i.e. milk, curd or yoghurt, ghee and cows urine)
- iii. Panchamrutha (mixture of five ingredients i.e. fruit, jaggery, ghee, honey and sugar candy)
- iv. Ghee
- v. Cow milk
- vi. Annabhishekam
- vii. Curd of the cow
- viii. Honey
- ix. Sugar cane juice
- x. Juice of different fruits
- xi. Tender coconut water
- xii. Sandal paste

'Sri Rudram' (hymn at chapter 16 & 18 of Yajurveda part of veda) is chanted. Rhythm chanting of the Sri Rudram will purify the entire atmosphere. Sri Rudra has eleven sections. Similarly Lord Siva has eleven forms (Ekadasa Rudra).

Benefits of Different Abhisheka

The ritual of 'abhisheka' (showering) of the deities is of great significance. Various substances and items are used for the abhisheka of the idols. A comprehensive list is given in a script of ritual of worship of some of the precise benefits of performing abhisheka with the mprescribed items.

- i. Water - To purify the soul and to remove all evil thoughts from the mind
- ii. Oil - To have respect/devotion to god and parents
- iii. Turmeric powder- To usher in prosperity to the household
- iv. Milk - To reduce anger/frustrations and get peace of mind
- v. Curd - To enhance health
- vi. Ghee/Butter - To have a wholesome life
- vii. Rosewater - To get fame
- viii. Bhasma/Vibhuti - To gain knowledge/wisdom
- ix. Panchamritha - To atone for all sins
- x. Tender coconut water - To beget good children

The temple worship and related ceremonies are guided by its appropriate Agama texts. 'Prana Pratistha' a complex ceremony invoking the immanent Divine in the granite or metal to get energetic to receive the worship of the devotee. 'Aavahana' is invoking the god-ness to the idol.

During Prana Pratistha, the idol is said to be given life, eyes and other organs. Devata (holiness) is invoked in the idol by the process of Prana Pratistha. The process of performing Prana Pratistha invokes the spiritual 'prana' (life) to enter the statue. As Vighram has life after Prana prathista, the Deity is treated like Humans and given bath as we do first applying oil and then other powders.

Another script of the ritual gives the significance of Abhisheka of some of the items as follows;

1. Panchagavya - Removes all sins of mankind
2. Panchamrutha - Gives wealth Ghee- Gives state of Moksha
3. Cow milk - Gives lengthy healthy life
4. Curd of cow milk - Gives good healthy children
5. Honey – Gives melodious voice
6. Rice - powder - Frees from debts
7. Sugar cane juice - Gives good health and removes enmity

8. Lime juice - Removes fear of death
9. Tender coconut juice - Gives enjoyment and full satisfaction in life
10. Cooked- rice (Annam) - Gives majestic life
11. Sandal paste - Gives prosperity
12. Sugar - Removes enmity

Various kinds of abhishekams are given as follows in scripts of rituals:

1. Shuddhodakabhishekam (using fresh water)
2. Panchamrutabhishekam (using the ingredients viz.- Milk, Curd, Honey, Ghee, and Khand)
3. Gandhodakabhishekam (using sandalwood paste mixed water)
4. Shankhodakabhishekam (using water from a blowing conch)
5. Haridrabishekam (using Turmeric paste)
6. Kumkumabhishekam (using Kumkum powder)
7. Sindoorabhishekam (using vermilion)
8. Phala-rasabhishekam (using variety of fruit juices)
9. Pushpabhishekam (using various types of flowers)
10. Ratnabhishekam (using precious stones and gems)
11. Kanakabhishekam (using gold coins)
12. Akshatabhishekam (using unbroken rice)

4. What is the significance of Flowers in Hindu temples?

Flowers take an important role In Hindu religious worship. The term puja in Hinduism refers to the rituals, performed with flowers.

In temples, Nandhavanams 'Poonthotam' Flowers Park are maintained to produce the necessary flowers for the use in pujas, and compose garlands at the ceremonies. During Bramhotsavam, the Uthsava murthy of idol is taken out in Pallakku which is constructed and designed with great flower which is referred to as "Pushpa Pallakku".

All the flowers offered to the divine are considered holy and equal in significance. But according to some Puranic narrations, there are some flowers regarded as special to certain deities, and some flowers are considered, prohibited to some deities.

Flowers that are prohibited to certain deities;

1. Vinayaka - Tulsi is prohibited
2. Sivan - thazampoo, Oomaththai, erukkampoo are prohibited
3. Vishnu - Akshathai, Oomaththai, erukkampoo are prohibited
4. Ambikai - Arukampul, Oomaththai, erukkampoo, are prohibited
5. Lakshmi - Thubaipoo is prohibited
6. Sarasvathi - Pavazamalli is prohibited
7. Hayagrivar - AraLi is prohibited
8. Bhairavar - Nandiyavattai is prohibited

All the other flowers are allowed.

Flowers that are considered special to some deities:

- 1) Vinayaka - Arukampul, erukkam poo
- 2) Muruga- also all good smelling flowers.
- 3) Siva- vilvam White nandiyavattai
- 4) Lakshmi - arali, malli jaadi,javandi,roses
- 5) Bhairava -Red arali
- 6) Vishnu - tulasi, pavazhamalli
- 7) Anumar Anjaneya- Tulsi, vetheley malai
- 8) Lakshmi- Lotus, arali, malli jaadi,javandi,roses
- 9) Durga - Red arali

All the flowers have special significance in offering at the puja rituals. Significance of Lotus flower is taken here as an example;

The lotus is primarily the sign of loveliness, magnificence, prosperity, exquisiteness and productiveness. Hindu dharma shows that, the spirit of the sacred lotus exists in each human. The lotus symbolizes eternity, purity, divinity, life fertility. In literature the lotus is shown as an example to describe feminine beauty, female eyes softness etc.

A Puranic narration shows that the holy lotus arose from the navel of Lord Vishnu, and Lord Brahma sat at the core of this flower.

Padmasana (the lotus position) which is the postures of hatha yoga, is practiced to reach the highest level of consciousness of a human being. The chakra of the shape of a lotus with thousand petals is situated at the top of the head of a person.

The great epic Bhagavad Gita, shows that “a human is adjured to be like the lotus; they should work without attachment, dedicating their actions to God, untouched by sin like water on a lotus leaf, like a beautiful flower standing high above the mud and water”.

Metaphysical resemblance contrasts the persistent rise of the lotus to faultless beauty from a miry environment to the evolution of consciousness, from instinctive impulses to spiritual liberation.

There are specific flowers and leaves that are to be offered to a particular deity, in particular numbers. The details of the spiritual benefits of different flowers are mentioned in scriptures which deals with the rituals of Hindu ceremonies.

There are delicate frequencies of deities in the temples which are energetic in the atmosphere. These frequencies are converged or attracted towards certain flowers. These frequencies are later emitted in reverse into atmosphere which is known as '*pavitrak*'. The subtle principle of deities attracted to a flower from space is called frequencies while the same deity principle when gets emitted into atmosphere is called as *pavitrak*.

There is a concept that a deity is to be offered only a certain type of flower that is recommended in the scriptures. A flower has a particular shade of colour and a unique fragrance of its own. On a subtle level the colour and the constituent fragmental parts of the fragrance present in the flower have a ability to attract the values of a specific deity which in turn is transmitted to the devotee.

With reference to rituals the religious scriptures on the science of spirituality, inform that the use of dried out flowers or those contaminated with insects are prohibited in the ceremonial ritualistic worship of a deity.

- We should not offer a flower which we have touched to the body, have handled with left hand or have taken smell of it.
- We should not offer a flower which is without any fragrance or has very strong fragrance has fallen on the ground or on unclean surface.
- A flower which is not bloomed up fully, or has its petals withered should not be offered.
- It is not advisable to offer flower buds to deities as per spiritual science. Offering the flower which has already been offered (*nirmalya*) is prohibited.

