

SPOTLIGHT

FLOWERS FOR MY GODDESS



They are one of Mother Nature's best gifts. So much so, the love for flowers is not limited to us mere mortals. Gods and goddesses too, adore blooms.

In Hinduism, flowers hold immense significance, being mentioned numerous times in the scriptures and embedded in symbolism and iconography.

The lotus, for example, is held very dear. A bunch of 'padma' that has grown lavishly elevates the beauty of a pond. It also reminds us that we - just like the lotus flowers that rise above clay and water -

should elevate above sins and the pleasures of the world:

"One who performs his duty without attachment, surrendering the results unto the Supreme Lord, is unaffected by sinful action, as the lotus is untouched by water" - Bhagavad Gita.

Many gods and goddesses, such as Saraswati and Lakshmi, are seen standing or sitting on the lotus. Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune and prosperity, is known as 'padmapriya', or 'one who like lotuses'. She is as beautiful as a lotus, and that's why she is also called 'padmamukhi'.

Maa Durga, the highly revered goddess for Bengalis, also holds a lotus in one of her hands. In Ashtami, a puja involves offering the goddess 108 lotus flowers. Jyatish Chakrabaty, who is a priest in several temples, explains the level of intricacy of the ritual. "There are 108 mantras to read and 108 flowers to give," he informs. "The mantras are set in a sequence. For example, you can't read the 3rd mantra when you are providing the 10th flower. The series needs to be maintained and there is no room for making mistakes."

Indeed, there are many rules and restrictions to abide by. It is not permissible to sniff the flowers that are to be offered to a deity. The fragrance is for them to enjoy. In general, one must not pluck flowers, or even leaves, at night.

Anjali is another act of worship where you are likely to require flowers. "Anjali essentially means offering something to a deity with devotion," Chakrabaty explains. "With the offering, you ask for blessings from the divine and forgiveness of your sins."

For example, you can offer water. Similarly, you can also pour flowers at the deity's feet - pushpanjali.

Gifting flowers is a fabulous gesture, of friendship, of love, and of romance. When you go to a local flower shop to buy flowers for your loved one, what do you think of? Perhaps it is her smile - how her face would light up when you hand over the flowers.

What's her favourite flower? Everybody has their favourites. You should find it out so that when you present them, she is the happiest.

Even deities have their favourites. The destroyer of the universe, Shiva, prefers 'datura'. Kali loves hot-red 'joba' (hibiscus). Durga is commonly offered red flowers, including 'joba'.

Nature has endowed us with numerous flowers, of different shapes, sizes, colours and fragrances. And such is the beauty of its creation that even the gods and goddesses have fallen in love with it.

By M H Haider
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Do you know what the word 'puja' actually means? The origins of the term are quite unclear. One of the theories suggests that it is derived from 'poochei', which literally translates to 'to do with flowers'. Whether this

