

Om Sri Sai Ram

Symbolism of Pooja

Short essay written for Bala Vikas children, Ghatkopar, Bombay, around 1970

As part of our spiritual education, the custom of worshipping God is suggested. It is like honoring a guest invited to our house. After offering initial seat and comforts, we offer the guest some refreshing drink, and then entertain the guest with a meal. We offer our respects to the guest, and bid a fond farewell on the departure. This is the worldly equivalent but the spiritual meaning of Pooja is “unconditional surrender to God”.

As part of performing Pooja, we usually include the following items: *Dhoopa* – some form of flavoured incense sticks, *Deepa* – lighted lamp, *Pushpa* – offering of flowers, *Naivadya* – offering of a meal, and *Karpooram* – lighted camphor offered at the end of the Pooja.

Each item, after participating in the ritual, leaves behind some leftover. For instance, lighting of *dhoopa*, incense sticks, leaves behind the burnt ash. A lighted lamp leaves behind some burnt residue. Flowers lose their fragrance and then decay. Food offered as *naivadyam* remains with us, and is later consumed by those performing the Pooja.

Only *karpooram*, camphor, leaves no residue behind and it is completely burnt off.

In our quest for unconditional surrender to God, which is the stated purpose of performing Pooja, we must strive to be like the camphor. We must surrender ourselves fully to God so that nothing is left behind.

Story presented to *Bala Vikas* students, early 1970s, Ghatkopar, Bombay.