

folk song:

Lāhuredāi kahā jāna dhalkeko?
Bāramāse phul tipna palkeko.

Where is the romantic adventurer [*lāhure dāi*] going?
 He loves to entice the beautiful girls [*bāramāse phul*].

Some tukkā are popular and lasting; others appear, then go out of fashion. For example, the patriotic *Jaya deśa, jaya nareśa* (Hail to the Country, Hail to the Crown) went out of fashion in 1990 when the sovereignty of Nepal was transferred from the king to the people.

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TULSI (BASIL)

Virtually every account of popular Hinduism mentions the cultivation of the *tulsi* or sacred basil plant (*Ocimum sanctum*, linn.). Tulsi, “the incomparable one,” is worshiped as a goddess in various regions across the length and breadth of India and is also known by more localized names as Hāriprīya (Hāri: a name of Viṣṇu; *prīya*: beloved), Viṣṇuprīya, Vṛṇḍa, Bruṇḍabati, Brīṇḍa Devī, and Saili. (Here *tulsi* indicates the plant; Tulsi indicates the Goddess.) In addition to having ritual, purificatory uses, tulsi leaves are also thought to have medicinal properties, which include remedies for cough, asthma, malarial fever, and stress. Juice of the tulsi plant is also believed to keep away mosquitoes.

Tulsi is a consort of Viṣṇu and thus is a form of Mahalakṣmī—the Goddess of Good Fortune. Devotees of Viṣṇu may wear necklaces made of tulsi seeds. There are many mutually contradictory myths in Sanskrit Purāṇas and in local folklore about how Viṣṇu and Tulsi came to be paired. While some of the Purāṇic myths describe Tulsi as originally having been the wife of a demon who was tricked by Viṣṇu, in women’s oral variants she may be depicted as a virgin girl who chooses Viṣṇu (or Kṛṣṇa) as her spouse.

In many parts of India, the cultivation of the plant is associated with upper castes; the presence of a tulsi plant in the courtyard may thus be an index of caste status or aspirations. Often, women tend the household plant with regular watering, the muttering of incantations, and the lighting of lamps at specified times

of year. Rich women’s oral traditions cluster around the plant. In Kārttik (October–November) pious women may celebrate Tulsi’s marriage. Though Tulsi is associated with the deity Viṣṇu in his form of a *sālagrāma* or sacred ammonite stone, married women are not supposed to touch this stone because, for them, their husband is their lord. In women’s rituals the *sālagrāma* is substituted with other iconic forms of Viṣṇu. For the wedding, the plant may be dressed up as a bride, with a small image of Kṛṣṇa (a form of Viṣṇu) as her groom. This divine marriage opens the winter marriage season for humans.

References

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SEE ALSO

Gender and Folklore; Goddesses, Hindu; Marriage Ceremonies; *Purāṇa*

TURMERIC

Turmeric is the root of a plant (*Curcuma longa*) from the ginger family that is widely cultivated in India for its use as a dye, spice, and stimulant. Its name may be derived from the Sanskrit *kunkuma* (saffron), a belief supported by its application as an alternative to saffron for yellow dyes.

Because of its yellow color, turmeric is a sacred plant in Hindu beliefs and rituals. It plays a very important role in women’s life cycle ceremonies in south India. The puberty ritual is a turmeric bathing ceremony. Because of its erotic significance, turmeric is used in wedding rites. Among the Tamils, married women wear *tāli*, a string smeared with turmeric and tied with a piece of turmeric, but widows are prohibited from using turmeric. On all occasions when *pūjā*—worship of the gods—is made, turmeric is a necessity. During an adoption ceremony, the new parents drink turmeric water as an important part of the ritual. Many south Indians customarily apply a bit of turmeric paste at the corner of a garment upon wearing it for the first time because