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The Significance of the Peepal Tree (Ficus Religiosa) in Sanathan Dharma

अत्राह तद्वहेथे मध्व आहुतिं यमश्वत्थमुपतिष्ठन्त जायवोऽस्मे ते सन्तु जायवः।

साकं गावः सुवते यवो न ते वाय उप दस्यन्ति धेनवो नाप दस्यन्ति धेनवः

atrāha tadvahethe madhva āhutiṁ yamaśvatthamupatiṣṭhanta jāyavo'sme te santu jāyavaḥ।
sākaṁ gāvaḥ suvate yavo na te vāya upa dasyanti dhenavo nāpa dasyanti dhenavaḥ

Ride hitherto the offering of soma into the sacrificial fire in the form of the Ashwattha Tree (Peepal), which is surrounded by victorious Priests, who are victorious for us (our benefit). Our cows yield milk, and the grains ripen plentifully. Our cows shall always yield milk for your benefit, O Vaayu.

(Rig Ved M1 S135)

There are a few references in the Rig Veda itself that allude to the sacredness of the Ashwattha or Peepal Tree. This tree is also referred to as the Indian Fig Tree or the Banyan Tree.

Rarely will one find a temple or village in India where there is not a Peepal tree flourishing on its property. The followers of Sanathan Dharma and our scriptures sing the importance of co-existing with Nature. It has aligned human existence to nurture and preserve every life form.

1. The Peepal tree is known for its medicinal qualities. It is one of the few trees that take up carbon dioxide and releases oxygen at night. The sap obtained from its bark contains antibacterial action (Singh et al., 1996).
2. The National Botanical Survey of India (NBRI) Lucknow, has identified numerous trees and herbs, including peepal as pollution fighters, which can reduce several toxic gases and dust from the atmosphere and to increase the oxygen supply. (Rabindra, 1985.)
3. Bhagavad Gita Chapter 15 V 1

   ऊर्ध्वमूलमधःशाखमश्वत्थं प्राहुरव्ययम्।

   छन्दांसि यस्य पर्णानि यस्तं वेद स वेदवित्॥ १५-१

   ūrdhvamūlamadhaḥśākhamaśvatthaṁ prāhuravyayam|
   chandāṁsi yasya parṇāni yastaṁ veda sa vedavit|| (15.1)

   Shri Krishna advises in Bhagavad Gita that, to understand the path of the absolute, one should study the form of the indestructible tree - (Ashwattha/Peepal). He systematically uses each part of the tree to show us the path to Salvation.

3. Chapter 10 of Bhagavad Gita:

   अश्वत्थः सर्ववृक्षाणां देवर्षीणां च नारदः।

   गन्धर्वाणां चित्ररथः सिद्धानां कपिलो मुनिः ॥१०-२६

   aśvatthaḥ sarvavṛkṣāṇāṁ devarṣīṇāṁ ca nāradaḥ|
   gandharvāṇāṁ citrarathaḥ siddhānāṁ kapilo muniḥ||

   “Of all trees, I am Ashwattha; of divine sages, I am Narada; of Gandharvas, I am Chitraratha; and of the perfected ones I am Kapila.”

This verse makes it clear that the Ashwattha is considered as the best among trees and is unique to followers of Sanathan Dharma.

4. During the Great Mahabharat War, Krishna and Arjuna were positioned at the foot of a Peepal Tree, observing the armies, and Shri Krishna then spoke the Eternal Song of Bhagwath Gita to Arjuna. Worship continues at this same tree, even today.

5. The Surya Puraan sings…

   पीपर तरु तर सुनै पुराना पावै लोचन अंध सुजाना।

   pīpara taru tara sunai purānā pāvai locana andha sujānā|

   Listening to the Surya Puraan Katha under a Peepal Tree helps to relieve eye-related illnesses. The eye is related to vision, and therefore it suggests that how we see and perceive our existence can improve by doing this pious act.

   On this day, one is encouraged to offer water at the roots of the Peepal tree. The Peepal tree is, therefore, able to remove negative energy from us. Some Saints say that sitting and praying under a Peepal Tree removes depression.

6. It is believed that Buddha obtained enlightenment while meditating under a Peepal tree. This tree is found in Bodh Gaya. Bodh Gaya is said to be the ultimate Pitra Theertha- a place of pilgrimage especially recommended for performing shraadh to the ancestors. The scriptures say that the performance of shraadh at Bodh Gaya results in salvation for generations before us.

7. In the Ayodhya Kaanda, Ramcharitmanas, Tulasidas says:

जिन्ह तरुबरन्ह मध्य बटु सोहा। मंजु बिसाल देखि मनु मोहा॥

jinha tarubaranha madhya baṭu sohā। mañju bisāla dekhi manu mohā।।

Kevat points out to Bharat, who is seeking Raam, that He (Raam) is residing under the Banyan Tree, which is all pleasing.

8. Vana Parva of the Mahabharat gives an account of a pious woman whose husband had passed away:

   Savitri, an extremely pious woman, was distraught when her husband passed away near a Peepal Tree. Through the power of her tapasya and exceptional intelligence, she convinced Yamraj to return her husband to her.
   This and other similar events have resulted in the worship of the Peepal Tree by the Females followers of Sanathan Dharma.
   Besides the 16 fold worship of the tree, they gather on the Amavasya, more especially, the Somavathi Amavasya and circumambulate the tree 108 times praying for a long and happy marriage.

9. Some texts say that the Supreme Lord resides in the Peepal Tree as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Hence it is seen as a symbol of endless Creation, Preservation, and Dissolution. It helps us to understand that the soul is eternal.

10. Texts on astrology give solutions to the concept of Mahaadashaa and Antardashaa. Once an astrologer does the calculation, he would give sadhana for the yajman to perform so that he may obtain some relief. Depending on which planet is prevailing, a special Hawan is performed with a specific type of wood.

    In the Brihaspati Upaay, (Method to appease Jupiter), in his book Sugam Jyotish, Acharya Rameshwar Das Sharma advises that Peepal Samidha should be used.

11. An easy mantra to chant when in the proximity of the tree is

ॐ महा वृक्षाय नमः। om mahā vṛkṣāya namaḥ।

It is therefore clear that the Peepal Tree is afforded a high position in Sanathan scripture and tradition alike. Followers of Sanathan Dharma have always considered valuable information and experimented with it. When found to work for the benefit of humankind, traditions became well-established.

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अथ अश्वत्थपूजा विधिः

atha aśvatthapūjā vidhiḥ

Worship of the Peepal Tree

A prayer for blessings, long life, good health, intelligence and knowledge of God and the Vedas, salvation, protection, fruits of human exitence, wealth and grains, good fortune, benefit of a pilgramage, removal of sins and forgiveness

1. Preliminaries- cleansing mantra, paithi, chandan, light lamp.

2. Taking paan supari, water, coin, white rice and a flower in the palm of the right hand, and recite the sankalp- you may insert month, thithi, date, gotra, and name before the mantra hereunder.

   मम समस्तपापक्षयपूर्वकाऽभीष्टसिद्धिद्वाराश्रीपरमेश्वरप्रीत्यर्थमश्वथपूजां करिष्ये ।

   mamasamastapāpakṣayapūrvakā'abhīṣṭasiddhidvārāśrīparameśvaraprītyarth amaśvathapūjāṁ kariṣye।

3. Chant dhyaan mantra to Ganeshji and Vishnu ji with flower in hand

4. With flower in hand, meditate on the Peepal tree understanding it to be a manifestation of God and the king of all trees

ॐ अश्वत्थाय वरेण्याय सर्वैश्वर्यप्रदायिने अनन्तशक्तिरूपाय वृक्षराजाय ते नमः ॥

ॐ अश्वत्थे वो निषदनम्पर्णे वो व्वसतिष्कृता ।गोभाजऽ इत्किलासथयत्सनवथ पुरुषम् ॥ॐ अश्वत्थाय नमः ॥

om aśśvatthāya vareṇyāya sarvaiśvaryapradāyine anantaśaktirūpāya vṛkṣarājāya te namaḥ||
om aśśvatthe vo niṣadanamparṇṇe vo vvasatiṣṣkṛtā|gobhāja' itkilāsathayatsanavatha puruṣam||om aśvatthāya namaḥ||

5. Offer a flower as a seat

ॐ मूलतो ब्रह्मरूपाय मध्यतो विष्णुरूपिणे अग्रतः शिवरूपाय सुस्वप्नफलदायिने ॥ॐ अश्वत्थाय नमः ॥

om mūlato brahmarūpāya madhyato viṣṇurūpiṇe agrataḥ śivarūpāya susvapnaphaladāyine||om aśvatthāya namaḥ||

6. From a lota of water- pour some at the foot of the tree near the roots

ॐ अग्निगर्भः शमीगर्भो देवगर्भः प्रजापतिः ।

हिरण्यगर्भो भूगर्भो यज्ञगर्भो नमोऽस्तुते ॥

om agnigarbhaḥ śamīgarbho devagarbhaḥ prajāpatiḥ
hiraṇyagarbho bhūgarbho yajñagarbho namo'stute||

7. Add some flower, rice, perfume, chandan to a lota of water and pour again

आयुर्बलं यशो वर्चः प्रजाःपशुवसूनि च । ब्रह्मप्रज्ञाञ्च मेधाञ्च त्वन्नो देहि वनस्पते ॥

āyurbalaṁ yaśo varcaḥ prajāḥpaśuvasūni ca| brahmaprajñāñca medhāñca tvanno dehi vanaspate||

8. Pour water from the lotta again

त्वं मुक्तिफलदश्चैव शीतलश्च वनस्पते। त्वामाराध्य नरो विंद्यादैहिकामुष्मिकं फलम्।

चलद्दलाय वृक्षाय सर्वदा अश्रितविष्णवे।बोधतत्वाय देवाय ह्यश्वत्थाय नमो नमः॥

tvaṁ muktiphaladaśvaiva śītalasca vanaspate। tvāmārādhya naro vindyādaihikāmuṣmikaṁ phalam।
caladdalāya vṛkṣāya sarvadā aśritaviṣṇave।bodhatatvāya devāya hyaśvatthāya namo namaḥ।।

9. Tie raw cotton around the tree, walking in a clockwise direction

एकादशात्मरुद्रोऽसि वसुनाथशिरोमणिः। नारायणोऽसि देवानां वृक्षराजोऽसि पिप्पल

ekādaśātmarudro'si vasunāthaśiromaṇiḥ। nārāyaṇo'si devānāṁ vṛkṣarājo'si pippala

10. Tie another piece of raw cotton around the tree, walking in a clockwise direction

क्षीरदस्त्वञ्च येनेह येन श्रीस्त्वां निषेवते। सत्येन तेन वृक्षेन्द्र मामपि श्रीर्निषेवताम्॥

kṣīradastvañca yeneha yena śrīstvāṁ niṣevate। satyena tena vṛkṣendra māmapi śrīrniṣevatām।।

11. Using the ring finger apply some chandan mixed with perfume

श्रीखण्डं चन्दनं दिव्यं गन्धाढ्यं सुमनोहरम्। विलेपनसुरश्रेष्ट गृह्यतां देव पिप्पल

śrīkhaṇḍaṁ candanaṁ divyama gandhāḍhyaṁ sumanoharam|
vilepanaṁsuraśreṣṭa gṛhyatāṁ deva pippala

12. Offer flowers

यं दृष्ट्वा मुच्यते रोगैः स्पृष्ट्वा पापैः प्रमुच्यते यदाश्रयाच्चिरञ्जीवी तमश्वत्थं नमाम्यहम्

yaṁ dṛṣṭvā mucyate rogaiḥ spṛṣṭvā pāpaiḥ pramucyate yadāśrayāccirañjīvī tamaśvatthaṁ namāmyaham

13. Light and offer agarbathi

वनस्पतिरसोद्भूतः सर्वाषधिविजृम्भितः । आघ्रेयः सर्वदेवानां धूपोऽयं प्रतिगृह्यताम् ॥

vanaspatirasodbhūtaḥ sarvāṣadhivijṛmbhitaḥ| āghreyaḥ sarvadevānāṁ dhūpo'yaṁ pratigṛhyatām||

14. Light and offer a ghee lamp

साज्यञ्च वर्तिसंयुक्तं वह्निना योजितं मया ।दीपं गृहाण देवेश मम ज्ञान्प्रदो भव ॥

sājyañca vartisaṁyuktaṁ vahninā yojitaṁ mayā|dīpaṁ gṛhāṇa deveśa mama jñānprado bhava||

15. Offer some prasadh or naivedhyam

नैवेद्धयं गृह्यतां देव भक्तिं मे ह्यचलां कुरु । ईप्सितञ्च वरं देहि परत्रेह परां गतिम्

naiveddhyaṁ gṛhyatāṁ deva bhaktiṁ me hyacalāṁ kuru| īpsitañca varaṁ dehi paratreha parāṁ gatim

16. Offer paan and supari

आयुःप्रजां धनं धान्यं सौभाग्यं सर्वसम्पदम् देहि देव महावृक्ष । त्वामहं शरणं गतः ॥

āyuḥprajāṁ dhanaṁ dhānyaṁ saubhāgyaṁ sarvasampadam dehi deva mahāvṛkṣa। tvāmahaṁ śaraṇaṁ gataḥ।।

17. Offer a coin and a piece of camphor

ऋग्यजुः साममन्त्रात्मा सर्वरूपी परात्परः । अश्वत्थो वेदमूलोऽसावृषिभिः प्रोच्यते सदा ।

ṛgyajuḥ sāmamantrātmā sarvarūpī parātparaḥ। aśvattho vedamūlo'sāvṛṣibhiḥ procyate sadā।

18. Taking flowers in your cupped palms, offer onto the tree as pushpanjali

ॐ अश्वत्थ यस्मात्वयि वृक्षराज नारायणस्तिष्ठति सर्वकालम् । अतः श्रुतस्त्वं सततं तरूणां धन्योऽसि चाऽरिष्टविनाशकोऽसि ॥

om aśvattha yasmātvayi vṛkṣarāja nārāyaṇastiṣṭhati-sarvakālam। ataḥ śrutastvaṁ satataṁ tarūṇāṁ dhanyo'si cā'riṣṭavināśako'si।।

19. Do pradakshina- walk around the tree 3 times in a clockwise direction

ॐ ये तीर्थानि प्रचरन्ति सृकाहस्स्ता निषङ्गिणः तेषा ꣳ सहस्रयोजनेऽवधन्वानि तन्मसि ॥

ॐ यानि कानि च पापानि ज्ञाताऽज्ञातकृतानि च । तानि सर्वाणि नश्यन्तु प्रदक्षिण पदे पदे ॥

om ye tīrthāni pracaranti sṛkāhasstā niṣaṅgiṇaḥ teṣā ṁ sahasrayojane'vadhannvāni tannmasi।।
om yāni kāni ca pāpāni jñātā'jñātakṛtāni ca। tāni sarvāṇi naśyamtu pradakṣiṇa pade pade।।

20. With flower in hand, meditate once more appealing for blessings and forgiveness

आवाहनं न जानामि न जानामि विसर्जनम्। पूजाञ्चैव न जानामि क्षमस्व परमेश्वर ॥

āvāhanaṁ na jānāmi na jānāmi visarjanam| pūjāñcaiva na jānāmi kṣamasva parameśvara||

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