

Grove, Goddess, Houseplant, Bride: Ascetic/Domestic Values in Hindu Worship of Tulsi (Basil)

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Abstract: During the Hindu month of Kartik (October-November), Tulsi, the Basil plant, is honoured in Hindu households throughout India. On the eleventh of the bright fortnight of the month, Tulsi's marriage to Vishnu/Krishna is performed in numerous homes and temples. Drawing on both textual sources and field research, this paper explores the various facets of Tulsi as she is worshiped during the month, focusing on the axis of ascetic/domestic values that Tulsi both embraces and transcends. As a grove or forest, Tulsi is associated primarily with spiritual liberation and the values associated with asceticism and wilderness. As the bride of Vishnu/Krishna, she embodies householder values of auspiciousness exemplified in marriage and fertility. As a houseplant, she is hybrid. The worship of Tulsi as grove or forest, Goddess, houseplant, and bride during Kartik exemplifies the interplay and fluidity that exists between ascetic and domestic values in Hindu religious life.