

Hindu worship in the home

In most Hindu homes there will be a special **shrine** for family prayer. There is sometimes a separate room set aside for worship but in most cases, a part of a room, or a shelf or a unit where their religious symbols are kept is used as a focal point.

The form of worship at family shrines varies, but it will often consist of **puja** (the offering of prayers to the family's favourite deity - god or goddess) followed by **arti** which is an offering of light. Both include singing and chanting sacred songs (**bhajans**) and the recitation of prayers as well as readings from Hindu holy books.

Puja means 'worship' or 'devotion' and is a way of reminding the worshipper of the divine in everyday life. Puja also builds good **karma** by performing this good action. Special items are used to perform puja which takes place both in the home and in the mandir.

A **puja tray** consists of:

a **bell** - to summon the deity;

a **water-pot** - water represents purity and life;

an **incense-holder** - sandalwood is often used - it smells fresh and pleasant;

an **arti-lamp** - with five cotton wicks which burn as prayers are offered;

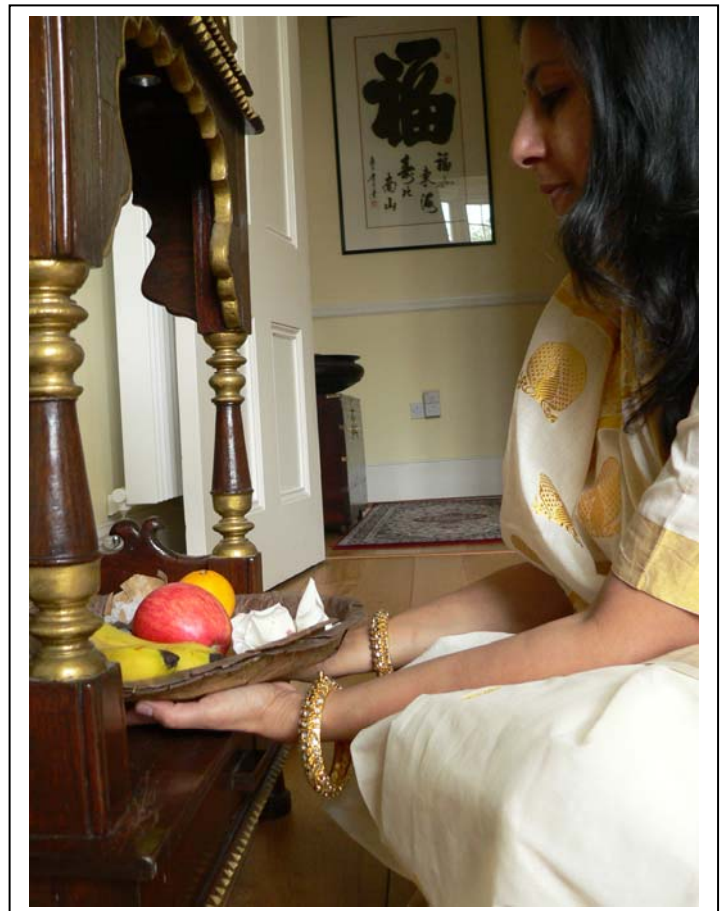
a **spoon** - used for giving water to the worshippers after it has been offered to the gods/goddesses;

container for kum kum - which is a red powder - symbolises good health and

prosperity - used for the **tilaka** mark on the forehead;

haldi (tumeric) container - haldi purifies and cleanses and therefore makes a suitable offering;

prashad - food that has been offered during puja and is subsequently shared among the worshippers. Suitable foods include fruit, rice, sweets, nuts, honey, sugar and coriander seeds. Such foods are said to be '**satva**' - that is they promote balance in the body which makes them a suitable offering.



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Before performing puja worshippers must be clean (many will bathe or shower and put on clean clothes).

The bell is rung to alert the deity's attention to the worshipper's intention to perform puja.

The *Gayatri Mantra* is recited, as are several other prayers. Water is sipped and sprinkled around the murtis. The worshipper symbolically touches six parts of the body (to place the deity symbolically in the body).

A **murti** is a consecrated figure or statue of a god or goddesses into which it is believed that the spirit of god has entered. They act as a focal point for devotion and are highly symbolic (colours and materials used, positioning of hands etc.). A murti is also known as **pratima** which in Sanskrit means 'going towards' as it is a conduit through which the devotee moves towards the divine.

Puja rituals vary widely and can be as simple as lighting incense in front of a murti to much more elaborate rituals. Most puja broadly follows this pattern:

- the murtis are bathed, first in water and then in **panchamrit** (milk, yogurt, sugar, honey and ghee) and then washed again in water and dried with a special cloth (often made of silk);
- **kum kum** or **haldi** are put on each murti as a symbol of devotion;
- **food offerings**, such as rice or fruit are placed before each murti and often brightly coloured and sweet smelling **flowers** are also offered.

Sandlewood paste is also offered and **incense sticks** lit;

- the **arti lamp** is lit and circled in front of the image and prayers are said. (In the mandir whilst this is taking place worshippers ring bells, beat drums, blow a conch shell or clap their hands);
- worshippers **receive arti** when it is held in front of them by passing their hands lightly over the flame, and then upwards over the face and head;
- in the mandir each worshipper, hands together in devotion and respect then turns three times, starting from the right - a reminder that God is everywhere. The worshippers then bow low before the murtis and then share prashad.



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Slide 1 - Title slide

Slide 2 - Introduction for the teacher

Slide 3 - Introduction for pupils

Slide 4 - 3 key words.

Use slides 3 and 4 to introduce the presentation to pupils or if you prefer begin at slide 5.

Slide 5 - Picture of shrine in Ushma's home. The area has been cleaned in preparation. On the wall is a framed silk tapestry. It shows scenes from the life of **Krishna** when he was young.

Slide 6 - Ushma begins her devotions by washing each murti. There are three she will place in the shrine. These are of:

Vishnu - the preserver - his consort is Lakshmi. He is often worshipped in the form of one of his ten avatars of which Krishna and Rama are the two most common.

Ganesh - the deity of knowledge and the remover of obstacles. The son of

Lakshmi - the goddess of wealth and good fortune.

Slide 7 - Here she gently and respectfully pours water over the murti of **Ganesh**. The murtis in her shrine are quite small. The size of the murti does not matter - some are small some are huge. What matters is that they act as focal points to help the worshipper concentrate on and think about God.

Slide 8 - She mixes **kum kum** paste which in Slide 9 she places a **tilak** mark on the forehead of each murti and in Slide 10 on her own forehead. On the

forehead, above the nose and between the eyes, is the 'point of consciousness' and therefore the point where God resides in each individual. The tilak mark signifies this. Sometimes **sandlewood** paste can also be used. Sometimes the mark is a single dot and sometimes it is a more elaborate pattern, depending on the deity being worshipped.

Slide 11 - Ushma then places a flower in front of each murti. Colours are symbolic in Hinduism:

White = purity

Red = prosperity

Slide 12 - Incense sticks are lit and waved in a clockwise direction in front of the murtis. All the senses are engaged in Hindu worship - sight, sound, touch, taste and smell.

Slide 13 - A plate of fruit is offered to the deities. Once offered it becomes **prashad**.

Slides 14, 15 and 16 - Ushma lights the **arti lamp** and offers this by moving it gently in a clockwise circle in front of the deities.

Slides 17, 18 and 19 - Ushma concludes her devotion by receiving **arti** - she passes her hands, palms down, gently over the flame and then moves her hands over her face and head - this is a symbolic way of receiving **blissing**.