

## The plants used in Shri Ganapathi Homam in Pondicherry and their values

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### SUMMARY

In Hindu religion there are several homams performed on the name of God for various obligations such as good health, wealth, prosperity, marriage, children, good welfare of people and the country. Lord Ganapathy is considered as power of Supreme Being that removes obstacles and ensures success in human endeavor. So the homam is performed on the name of Shri Ganapathy. In Ganapathy homam sixty-five plant species are used in Pondicherry. They belong to fifty-eight genera and thirty-six families. Of them sixty-four are angiosperms and one is gymnosperm. Thirty nine are cultivated and twenty six are wild. All the plants used in homam are highly medicinal, nutritive and antimicrobial. The smoke emitted while burning the plants in homam has curative properties. It is supposed to purify the atmosphere. It also drives away the poisonous insects.

**Key words :** Ganapathi homam, Values of plants, Pondicherry

The plants are intimately associated with human civilization. Lots of Vedic actions which are performed by our ancestors are not only based on the rituals but they have close connection with the scientific explanations. They believed in supernatural powers and use of folk medicine in the treatment of diseases and ailments (Pradhan *et al.*, 2006). They have related the medicinal value of the plants with the social and religious beliefs. One of such socio-religious beliefs is performing homam. There are hundreds of homams in India which are classified into two main groups namely Kaamya homam and Naimithika homam. Kaamya homam is performed on a particular person for his health and wealth. This can be done at home by inviting archakars who are skilled in performing various homams. Naimithika homam is performed for the enrichment of the world and peaceful life. This is performed at the temples or in the midst of the city and is done for the betterment of whole human life. Some of the familiar homams are Ganapathy homam, Sudharsana homam, Suktha homam, Gayathri homam, Maha Mrithyunjaya homam, Sri Lakshmi homam, Navagraha homam, Karuka homam, Santam Gopalam homam, Ayusha homam etc. Specific homams are performed for marital bliss, children, health, wealth and prosperity. Lord Ganapathy is considered as power of

Supreme Being that removes obstacles and ensures success in human endeavor. So the homam is performed on the name of Shri Ganapathy.

While performing homam a number of plants or plant products such as fresh fruits, dried fruits, seeds, leaves, woods, roots, barks, spices and cereals are put in fire. All the plants used in homam are highly medicinal, nutritive and antimicrobial. The smoke emitted while burning is supposed to cure a variety of diseases such as cough, bronchitis, asthma, kapha, pita and vatha. It also kills the microbes in the near vicinity and drives away the poisonous insects (Subramanyaprasad and Raveendran, 2006). The unscrupulous collection of the nutritionally and medicinally important plants leads to the loss of their diversity and environmental degradation. Our understanding of the plants used in homam may pave way for the protection of the wild plants by cultivation. The present work has been taken up to reveal the botanical names, names of families, medicinal and food values of the plants used in Shri Ganapathi homam in Pondicherry and the importance to conserve them.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Pondicherry is a Union Territory bounded by the Bay of Bengal on the east and by the South Arcot district of Tamilnadu on all other sides. It is at the north between 11°46' and 12°3' latitudes and 79°36' and 79°53' of eastern longitude. The area of Pondicherry is 290 Square Kilometers of which 25832-hectare land is under cultivation. The total population of the enclave is 7,35,000 of which the urban population constitutes 5,06,000 (68.84 per cent) and the rural population is 2,29,000 (31.16 per cent). The climate is dry except during the Northeast monsoon. The average annual rainfall was 170 mm for

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