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CORRESPONDENCE

Worshipping: Whether Useful or Harmful

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Introduction

In India Hinduism and Islam are two mainstream religions. Agarbati burning is a daily practice at the sacred places like Temples and Dargas (sacred place of Muslims). The burning of Agarbati in religious and social functions has been practised in India since early times. Majority of Agarbati sticks manufactured are of cheap quality containing only charcoal powder and low quality wood powder. In India diethylphthalate is used extensively in Agarbati stick industry as a binder of perfumes. It is emitted into air during Agarbati burning and alters the respiratory system of the inhaler (Eggert and Hansen 2004).

The present investigation was carried out for the period of six month and during the present study it was estimated that on an average about hundreds of people are visiting Temples and Dargas each day and every individual burns at least five Agarbati sticks, which calculates about 180500 sticks consumed per year in a single Temple or Darga. Besides that the people also burn Agarbati sticks at their homes for worship; the shopkeepers around the Temples and Dargas also burns Agarbati sticks for whole day which on accounts has hazardous effect to the surrounding environment and to the people inhaling the smoke. Various hospitals have been visited and according to the officials of the visited hospitals that about hundred cases of patients suffering from respiratory disorders are registered every month in the hospitals.

The gases produced from burning Agarbati sticks include CO, CO₂, NO₂, SO₂ and other volatile organic compounds such as benzene, toluene, xylene as well as aldehydes and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (Lofroth et al 1991, Lee and Wang 2004). These gases have very harmful effects on our environment as well as on human health. Inhalation of CO₂ in low concentration causes headache, dizziness, weakness and nausea while high concentration can be fatal (Merck 2006). Exposure to SO₂ and NO₂ can include reduced work capacity, effect on pulmonary function and respiratory illness (Bernard et al 2001).

In India temples and Dargas are heavily polluted by Agarbati burning especially during special festivals like Diwali, Navratra, Holi and Eid and on few celebrations like Independence Day, Republic Day, New Year or Birthdays functions.



- (a) People burning agarbati sticks at Shuni Temple Indore.
(b) Flames of smoke of agarbati sticks at Darga indore.
(c) Ash of agrabati sticks burning at Ganesh Temple Indore.
(d) Heaps of Agarbati packets consumed.

The main purpose of the present study is that the Agarbati burning should be checked at the earliest as it very has drastic ill effects on our social, economic and physiological aspects of health. Thus extensive use of Agarbati sticks should be minimized while worshipping otherwise the time is not far when worshipping may prove fatal to human health. In addition to this, future studies should be undertaken to manufacture the Agarbati sticks with least harmful effects. The government should organize awareness camps, debates at all levels to check this. More Electronic and Print Media should be brought in action as soon as possible. Otherwise we may remain mere spectators in this modern era and go unconsciously harming ourselves.

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