

Swastika

- A Symbol of Auspiciousness and Well being

*Om Swasti N~indro Vadhdaśravāḥ, Swasti Naḥ Pūṣā Viśvavedāḥ |
Swasti Nastākśryo~ariṣṭanemiḥ, Swasti No Baspatirdadhātu ||*

This sacred hymn of the Yajurveda is a *swastivācana* - a prayer, an ardent aspiration, for the highest good and wellbeing of all beings, of everything, of the whole universe.... Heart-felt chanting of this hymn is an integral part of initiating every religious sacrament or important familial ceremony in the vedic cultural rituals. It conveys the core meaning hidden in the vedic symbol of *swastika*. The term *swastika* emanates from the Sanskrit word *swasti* = *su* (good) + *asti* (being).



Chapter 1

As a symbol, *swastika* is a line-design invented by the vedic sages. Its specific geometry is believed to have some relation with certain natural energy fields. It is drawn as a cross with equal arms when all the arms are continued as far again at right angles clockwise. The sublime effects, in terms of the cosmic energy currents superimposed in the unique pattern of *swastika*, correspond to what the *swastika* symbolizes – auspiciousness, wellbeing. The clockwise (*dakṣiṇāvarta*) direction is of significant importance, as it also happens to be the direction of movement (as we see it on the earth) of the sun, which rises in the east and sets in the west. The four sides of the *swastika* thus represent the four principal directions.

The symbol of *swastika* is being used as a holy sign in India since the time of yore. Scriptural descriptions define it as a divine symbol that encompasses (in coded form) several important meanings and mysterious formulae or signs representing specific energy cycles in the universe. The "Halayudh Kosha" regards it as prominent among the twenty-four symbols of significance in the Indian Culture and states – *Chaturvinśanti Chinhāntargata Chinha Viśeṣa*. The same scripture also refers to it as *chatuspatha* - four paths emerging symmetrically in four directions from a common origin. The seed-syllable (sounding like "gam" in the Vedic script) of the Ganapati Mantra resembles the *swastika*. This seed syllable together with the four segments (*chatusṭaya*) of the mantra seems to be encapsulated in the *swastika* symbol.

In some scriptures, four divine powers governing the physical system of Nature are said to be subtly present around its four sides: *Vradhdaśravā Indra* in the east, *Brahaspati Indra* in the south, *Pūṣā-Viśwaveda Indra* in the west and *Ariṣṭanemi Indra* in the north. Scholars of vedic literature also interpret the *swastika* symbol as the coded design of the electromagnetic / magnetic energy fields around the solar system's nucleus.

Valmikiya Ramayana cites the appearance of *swastika* symbol as that of the bluish line-design seen on the crest of the cobra - king of snakes. This simile indicates a deeper meaning - conveying the importance of *swastika* in *tantra* as well. The *matrikāś* - special sounds or 'packets' of eternal sonic energy (*Nāda*) indwelling the cosmos that were realized by the *rishis* in a state of trance - are of fundamental importance in the science of *tantra* and *mantra*. The signs (notations) representing the *matrikāś* are said to be the origin of the syllables of the Vedic Sanskrit script and hence of all the (ancient) languages. Acharya Abhinav Gupt explains this in the "Tantraloka" as –

Prathakprathaktattriyaṃ Sukśmamityabhiśabdyate |
Sadjaṃ Karomi Madhuram Vādayāmi Bruve Vachaḥ | |

The *matrikāś* and (hence) the vowels and consonants were generated from the manifestation of the omnipresent, eternal sound (*Nādabrahm*). The different forms of 'voice' - namely the *paśyanti* (voice of the inner self) *madhyamā* (mental voice or the voice that one hears while thinking)

and *baikhari* (usual voice used in speech) - also originated from the same *Nāda*; each of them was further divided into the perceivable and subtle forms. Thus the six-fold manifestation of the *Nādabrahm* came into existence. The six line-segments of the *swastika* symbolize this occult knowledge. In this context, *swastika* is further regarded as a sign depicting the secret facets of the origin of Nature.

The vocal sound (*baikhari vani*), as we perceive it, consists of both – the vowels and the consonants. Of this, the vowels are fundamental; they exist as natural expressions of sound, namely the *swaras*; the consonants can't be perceived without the suffix of *swaras*. There are six basic *swaras* of musical notes. These are like the six major components of the spectrum of light that is referred in the scriptures as - "*ṣaḍdevatātmakam sūryaraśmiktwaṁ*", and the ensemble of these six *sūryaraśmi* (sunrays) is called "*swastika*".

Apart from the scriptural descriptions, the archeological findings, especially inscriptions in the ancient caves indicate the popularity of *swastika* design in ancient times. The paintings and stone carvings found at Singhanpur area in Raigardh, Baniya Beri in Pachmari and several caves in the Chambal and Sagar-Bhopal regions are among the authentic proofs available today in this regard in India. Many of the designs depict both the *dakṣiṇāvarta* (clockwise) and the *vāmāvarta* (counterclockwise) *swastikas*. Both the types are found engraved on the coins of the Age of Indus-civilization as well. However, only the clockwise *swastika*, which we have referred so far, is found in the

pictures or inscriptions showing signs of religious rituals; it is indeed this type - the (vedic) *swastika* that is used and worshipped in the Hindu religious sacraments.

The counterclockwise *swastika* is supposed to be used in some *tantrika* practices; incidentally, the 'swastika' symbol adopted by the Nazis is also of counterclockwise type. As per renowned scholars like Prof. Maxmuller, this anti-clockwise design of *swastika* was also favored in some orthodox Christian churches and was popular several hundred years ago in England, and then in some varied forms in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. For example, the related symbol in Sweden had the arms of the counterclockwise *swastika* design expanded and connected to each other along a circular contour; which appears like a cross embedded in a circle. It should be noted that in this article the main focus of our discussion is only the vedic symbol (the clockwise *swastika*).

Another scholar Mrs. Murray remarks in the volume entitled "Symbolism of the East and West" that the vedic symbols encompass deep and important meanings. It is mostly these symbols, which were propagated in different parts of the globe; some changes and diversions occurred and got adopted with the flow of time. These variations are reflected in several symbols used in different religions of the world. *Swastika* is a vedic symbol which has acquired a rich global tradition and significance.

According to Indian Philosophy, the four arms of *swastika* symbolize the four Vedas, four *Varnas*, four *Ashrams*, four *Lokas* and the four deities - Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh (Shiva) and Ganesha. Eminent vedic scholar Pt. Ramchandra Shastri further cites that the design of *swastika* resembles a four-petalled lotus (*chaturdala kamal*) which symbolizes the abode of Lord Ganapati and is therefore worshiped in religious ceremonies and also enshrined at the places of worship. Several savants also regard *swastika* as the symbol of the Kaustubh Mani present on the chest of the embodied-manifestations of God Vishnu.

In Jainism, *swastika* is revered as the symbol associated with the seventh *tirthankar* Suparshvanath. The followers of Jain religion regard the four sides of the *swastika* as symbolizing the four possible places where one could be reborn or reside after death. These abodes are described as - the animal or plant kingdom, the earth, *jīvātmā* (soul in the subtle body that awaits rebirth) and the hell. Imprints of *swastika* are found inscribed in the Buddhist Monasteries as well. It can also be found in the houses of the Lamas and in some temples in Tibet. In the views of George Birdwood, the Buddhist symbol of the wheel (lifecycle), the cross of Greece, and the *swastika*, all symbolize the sun. He further refers *swastika* as among the most ancient symbols that contains sublime implications.

Prof. Maxmuller is among the noted European scholars, who had studied Sanskrit language and the vedic literature and also written commentaries there on. Commenting on the global propagation of the *swastika* symbol, he once

wrote in a letter to Dr. Schloman indicating that – this vedic symbol could be found in Rome, Milan, Pompia perhaps in almost every part of Italy, in some ancient cities of England, at several places in Hungary, Greece, China, and in many other parts of the world. He has also supported the views of E. Thomas, where the latter has described *swastika* as a symbol of the continuous motion of the sun (and the solar system).

Prof. D. A. Mackenjee throws light on several other implications of this vedic symbol. His studies indicate that apart from being an important sign or code in the ancient Indian astrological and astronomical formulae, the *swastika* was also used as a symbol describing multiple meanings, such as – the birth-cycle, a flying bird, and all-round progress. It was a useful sign in commercial records in the ancient times and a symbol of fire, electricity, lightening, water, magnet, etc. Yet another western researcher opines that *swastika*, the symbol of auspiciousness and well-being, as designed by the Indian *rishis* (sages) of the Vedic Age, was well received and recognized by the different civilizations across the globe who adopted it in various forms of similar designs. He views that this symbol, likewise the other marks of the Vedic Culture, carries the spirit of enlightening thoughts and wisdom, the flow of which is eternal like that of the divine values of this culture.

Many more aspects of knowledge, deeper meanings and philosophical teachings and feelings and effects might have been folded in the distinctive and comprehensive design of *swastika*. But at the core of it lies the spirit of

auspiciousness and wellbeing of every individual, every family, society, nation, and the whole creation. It therefore continues to be of universal significance and reverence. What is required is that we grasp its implications and adapt them in all walks of life. Let the auspicious sentiments and teachings encoded in the *swastika* be expressed in our aspirations, thoughts and deeds. Let *swastika* not only be worshipped in our shrines, let it also be enshrined in our hearts and minds as the spirit and light of saintly sentiments, knowledge and wisdom.

