

# Significance of *Kalash and Deepak*

**T**he *kalash* (*kalaśa*) and *deepak* (*dīpaka*) are prominent Vedic symbols that symbolize respectively the manifestations of Gayatri and Yagya. As Gayatri and Yagya are revered to be the origin of the Vedas and Vedic Science and Culture, the presence and worship of *kalash* and *deepak* in every sacrament, on every auspicious occasion is quite natural in the Vedic Culture and hence in the Indian System of life. Both are essential parts of all the important Hindu rituals and also, in varied forms, in the holy celebrations of other religions - for



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example, *deepak* (as fire or candle) in case of Zarathustrian and Christian and *kalash* in case of Jain and Buddhist worships.

The symbol of *kalash* is physically represented by a metal or earthen pitcher or urn. It is filled with water (preferably the water of holy Ganga, any sacred river or clean, running water). Its top open end holds betel or mango leaves and a red-yellow sanctified thread (*kalāwā* or *mauli*) is tied around its neck. This *kalash* is placed on the *pūjāvedi* (worship dais or table) near the idols or pictures of the deity. It is placed facing the North, in the center. This positioning signifies balance; balance that one needs to achieve success in every walk of life. Often it is topped by a coconut or a *deepak* and kept on the sacred *Vedic Swastika* symbol or a *Vedic swastika* is drawn on it by using wet vermilion, sandal-wood powder and turmeric. The *kalash* has many symbolic meanings and teachings associated with it as described below.

During worship or rituals, leaves from some select trees are used as essential accessories, but among them all the betel leaf (*pāna*) enjoys a place of pride in India. In Hindu weddings, a betel leaf is tucked into the headgears of the bride and the groom. The betel leaf is symbolic of freshness and prosperity. The Skanda Purana says that the betel leaf was obtained by Gods during the grand ocean-churning. The use of betel leaf in India is mentioned in the great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, as well as in Buddhist and Jain literatures.

*Pāna* (betel leaf) has rich herbal properties as well. It is invigorating and energizing, it kills germs and bacteria, and is an anti-cold chewable recipe. The blackish variety is said to be constipating and the whitish green one eliminates cold and is a laxative and helps in digestion. Mango leaf also has many medicinal properties, as cited in AyurVedic scriptures. Mango is regarded as the king of all fruits in India and its wood is used in the holy fire of *yagya*. Mango leaves are described as sacred and are also used in making *toraṇa* (door-string), which is tied on the entrance of the house as an auspicious sign.

The coconut (*Nāriyala*) is a symbol of the Godhead - the three eyes symbolic of the eyes of Lord Shiva. In India, for success in an important undertaking, the beginning is done with the breaking of a sanctified coconut. All religious functions and rituals start with the worship of the coconut, along with the *kalash*, since it is regarded as symbolic of Lord Ganesha, the deity who helps in the successful completion of any undertaking.

Sage Vishwamitra is said to have got the first coconut tree grown on this earth by the power of his *tapa*. Its hard shell inspires one to have tolerance and do hard work for attaining success. Coconut is also broken before a deity in the temple, signifying the soul's breaking out of the shell of the ego. People get strength and improved eyesight by eating its white kernel. The sick and the elderly find its water nourishing and ladies apply its oil for healthy hair. It has glucose, phosphorous and carbohydrates in good

measures and so it is good for diabetics. Germs can't penetrate its hard kernel so it remains intact for months together.

Ancient Indian healers used to burn its outer shell to prepare tooth powder, eyebrow creams and ointments for burns. Every part of the coconut plant is very beneficial to humans. Hence most Indians consider it a good omen to receive or give coconut fruits as gifts. It is also called *shreephala* because it denotes prosperity.

The *kalash*, tied with the *kalāwā*, and having betel or mango leaves atop, symbolizes the cosmos. The water inside the *kalash* represents the primordial waters, elixir of life or the soul filled with love and compassion, abundance, and hospitality. *Varuna*, the Lord of the oceans and the divine source of water element, is invoked while filling a *kalash* with water. In some cultures, the *kalash* is said to represent the body, the leaves the five senses and water, the life-force. Some Vedic scriptures refer it as a symbol of the mother earth and divine consciousness.

The word meaning of the scriptural hymns of the *kalash*'s worship describe the mouth, throat and base of the *kalash* as seats of Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva and Lord Brahma respectively whereas the belly represents all goddesses and Divine-mother's power streams. Thus in this small urn the presence of all gods and goddesses is symbolized. This exemplifies that all the gods are essentially one and are emanations of the same Supreme Power.

Because of its uniformity and symmetry in all directions, the *kalash* is a symbol of the entire universe and of that omnipresent *Brahm* which is the uncaused cause of all. It can also be taken to be a harbinger of creativity and peace. All the gods in their microcosmic and macrocosmic subliminal forms are meditated, during devotional worships, as to be present in this symbolic form of the universe. Thus, through the medium of the *kalash* we are made aware of all the gods in one place, at one time and in one symbol.

Lord Dhanvantari is described as having four arms carrying various healing instruments in each hand, viz., a *chakra* (divine wheel) to defeat the devil forces, *shankha* (conch shell) to make the atmosphere free of viruses, bacteria and evil effects; *jalouka* (leech) used for curing all the diseases caused by vitiated blood and a *kalash* containing *amrita* (the elixir of life) to rejuvenate the sick.

### **Architectural Importance of *Kalash*:**

*Kalash* is of great significance in Vedic Architecture (*Sthapatya Veda* or *Vastu Shastra*). In ancient times, the sages of India placed copper pots atop temple pinnacles to escape the calamity of lightning. In order to avoid the development of fungus that might reduce their efficiency, they enameled the *kalashas* with gold.

Likewise the pyramids, the distinct geometry and symmetrical design of the *kalash* play an important role in storage and dissemination of natural energy currents. It is

the *kalash*, which crowns the Vedic shrine (temple) or a building constructed as per the Vastu design. Its size and positioning adjusts the height of the building to a proportion consistent with the specific Vedic plan for the structure. This is aimed at adjusting the environment for holistic living; with more energy, more joy and increasing success.

The architects of the famous Hardin's house - a masterpiece of a building at Houston, USA, constructed according to the *Sthapatya Veda* - point out that you don't need to practice meditation to have a *Sthapatya* Vedic home. Anyone can use this knowledge to align naturally with the elements and healthy home technology. Their purpose is to provide deep security that the order and stability of having one's very own space aligned with nature generates. May be this is what a dream home really is. *Kalashas* are there in the Hardin's house as well.

In our series on Vastu Shastra (*Akhand Jyoti* - The Light Divine, Issues 1 to 6, Vol. 2, 2004), we had discussed about the important rooms (kitchen, bedroom, study room etc) in the house with respect to the location in different geographic directions etc. In terms of the modern interpretations of the ancient Vastu Science, the Earth has an energy grid and the house has an energy grid. When we construct the Vastu-based design of a house on the Earth's grid, the house comes in congruence with the latter and the energy of the Earth freely flows into the house. The directions specified in Vastu Shastra are regarded to have the orientation optimized (in 2D) for this purpose.

However, the third dimension, along the height and hence the coherence of geomagnetic energy as well as suitable reception of cosmic energy, is equally important and hence the shape and design of the roof-component.

A house or building is treated in the *Sthapatya* Veda as a living being: having feet, legs, torso, neck, head and top of head in the form of the foundation, floor, walls, room-space, rooms etc. *Kalash* is the top piece (apex) of the house. It completes the form. The mental peace one finds in the heart of a temple whose top is a dome shaped like *kalash* and having a *kalash* placed on the peak most obviously testifies the importance of the roof-component of Vedic architecture.

### **Kalash in the Tajmahal:**

Renowned historian P. N. Oak has cited several architectural proofs in his book entitled “Taj Mahal - The True Story” arguing that the great wonder of the world - “Tajmahal” is originally a 5<sup>th</sup> Century Shiva Temple “Tejo Mahalay”. The following facts are worth noting here in the context of Vedic symbols - especially, the '*kalash*' in the Hindu Temples.

The Tajmahal has a trident pinnacle over the dome. The dome is a grand and enormous onion shaped structure that proudly wears a pinnacle at the top. The simple flower pattern softly hugs its bottom and brightens up the white marble. Inside the dome jewels dance melodiously with one another in such a way that one must hold great self-discipline and power in order not to get lost in its

exquisiteness. The various colors easily captivate the human eyes and seize them in admiration. It is a magnificent structure of the lotus flower, a holy symbol of Vedic Culture, the divine seat or symbol of Lord Brahma.

A full scale of the trident pinnacle is inlaid in the red stone courtyard to the east of the Taj. The central shaft of the trident depicts a *kalash* holding two bent mango leaves and a coconut. This is a sacred Hindu motif. Identical pinnacles have been seen over Hindu and Buddhist temples in the Himalayan region.

### **The Importance of Deepak (oil or ghee lamp):**

Together with the *kalash* the lighted *deepak* is also placed on the *pūjāvedi* and worshiped. As a physical object, a *deepak* or lamp is an earthen (or metallic) saucer- like tiny pot filled with *ghee* (clarified butter) or refined oil with a twisted cotton tape (*bātī*) immersed in it. It is lighted in every Hindu household and temple in India. The cotton tape keeps sucking the *ghee* to yield a soothing bright light, a flame. In nature, the flame is considered to be the source of heat and light. The heat of the fire and hence the flame is also a good germicide.

Modern theories affirm the origin of lamp during the Stone Age, as early as 70,000 B.C. According to these theories, in the Mediterranean region and the East, the earliest lamp had a shell shape. The body of the lamp, to begin with, was of stone or shell. Later came the innovation of terracotta or earthen lamps followed by metal lamps. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata, two great Indian epics, make extensive references to lamps of gold and of precious stones.



The sages (*rishis*) of Vedic India worshipped fire and hence the  *jyoti*  (flame) or the  *deepak*  as a whole, was considered the purest of the pure because it consumes all impurities but yet remains pure by itself. The flaming of sacrificial altar (*yagya* or *homam*) in the Ashramas of the *rishis* was the focus of faith during the Vedic times. It has witnessed great philosophic seminars, which produced the Brahmanas, the Upanishads and the Samhitas. The cultural tradition of ancient India has thus its genesis in the spark of *yagya*. This spark later assumed the form of a *deepak*.

The importance of *deepak* in Vedic India is obvious from the following (translated) scriptural hymn:

*Among the light of fire, the light of the Sun, the light of the Moon, this lamp is the best of lights* – Skanda Purana

The *deepak* is worshipped as the symbol of the all-pervading Light of all Lights. Some scientific models and theories today also agree that all matter has emanated from the light of consciousness-force. This great Effulgence is worshipped through the medium of the *deepak*. Meditation on the standing bright yellow flame of a *deepak* during the *trātak yoga* improves mental concentration and induces sublime energy of positive currents emanating from this symbol of cosmic consciousness.

A *deepak* is also used in *ārati* - devotional prayer sung at the end of a worship-ritual or a religious celebration. The *deepak* (*ārati* flame) is moved around the idol to symbolize

the divine aura and also to help the devotees to have a clear look of the deity; in the end the devotees put their palms on the *āratī* flame to receive the *āratī* aura.

The standing deepak (*Samai* or *Kuttuvilaku*) symbolizes the dispelling of ignorance and awakening of the divine light within us. Its soft glow illumines the temple or the shrine room, keeping the atmosphere pure and serene. The lamp is also a symbol for the Hindu festival of Diwali, an Indian festival of lights. One of many interpretations of Diwali is a celebration of the light of knowledge that chases away the darkness of ignorance.

Visualizing the *kalash* as a symbol of the cosmos and *deepak* as a symbol of cosmic energy may not be so easy for us. But we should at least assimilate the teachings apparent from them - the soothing coolness (calmness) and uniformity (impartiality) of the *kalash*, and the radiance, energy (activeness) and steadfast uprightness of the *deepak*.

