

= Kalyanasundara =

Kalyanasundara (कल्याणसुन्दरा , literally " beautiful marriage ") , also spelt as Kalyansundar and Kalyana Sundara , and known as Kalyanasundara @-@ murti (" icon of the beautiful marriage ") , Vaivahika @-@ murti (वैवाहिक @-@ मूर्ति , " nuptial icon ") and Panigrahana @-@ murti (पानिग्रहण @-@ मूर्ति) (" icon related to panigrahana ritual ") , is the iconographical depiction of the wedding of the Hindu deities Shiva and Parvati . The couple are often depicted performing the panigrahana (" accepting the hand ") ritual of a Hindu wedding , where the groom accepts the bride by taking her right hand in his .

The couple , depicted in the centre , are accompanied by a host of divinities and other celestial beings . The god Vishnu and his wife Lakshmi are often pictured as giving away the bride to Shiva . The god Brahma is shown as the officiating priest .

The Kalyanasundara icon is not the object of popular worship and is usually used only in the celebrations of the divine marriage in annual temple festivals . However , Kalyanasundara scenes are found across India in caves , sculptures and on temple walls .

= = Legend = =

Various Hindu scriptures narrate the story of the union of Shiva and Parvati , with some variation . After the death of his first wife Sati , Shiva withdrew from society and engrossed himself in deep meditation . Taking advantage of the situation , the asura (demon) king Tarakasura secured from the god Brahma the boon that he could be killed only by the son of Shiva . Believing himself effectively immortal , Tarakasura terrorized the beings of the universe and defeated the gods . Meanwhile , Parvati , the reincarnation of Sati , was born to Himavan , the god of the Himalayas and his wife the apsara Mena . She underwent severe austerities to compel Shiva to marry her . The gods , desperate to hasten the birth of Shiva 's son , sent Kamadeva , the god of love , to disturb Shiva 's meditation . Though Shiva was awakened , Kamadeva was burnt up by Shiva 's fury . Implored by the other gods to marry , Shiva agreed , but decided to test Parvati 's devotion first . The Saptarishi (the seven sages) approached Parvati and mocked Shiva to dissuade her ; however Parvati remained resolute . Then Shiva himself , disguised as an old ascetic , visited Parvati and vilified himself in her presence . As an angry Parvati was about to leave , Shiva revealed his true form to her and promised to marry her , pleased with her love and devotion . The couple married and produced a son , Kartikeya , who subsequently slew Tarakasura .

= = Iconography = =

= = = Textual descriptions = = =

The Agamic texts like the Amsumadbhedagama , the Uttara @-@ kamaikagama and the Purva @-@ Karanagama prescribe the iconography of the Kalyanasundara icon .

A young four @-@ armed Shiva and a beautiful two @-@ armed Parvati should be the central figures , performing the panigrahana (" accepting the hand ") ritual of a Hindu wedding , where the groom accepts the bride by taking her right hand in his . Shiva stands in tribhanga posture , with one of his legs straight and firmly on the ground and the other one slightly bent . Shiva wears a jata @-@ mukuta (a headdress formed of piled , matted hair) on his head , adorned with a crescent moon . He wears serpents as earrings , as a waist band and as a necklace . Various gold ornaments adorn his body . His back hands carry a parashu (axe) and a mriga (deer) . His front left hand makes the varada mudra (" blessing @-@ giving gesture ") and his front right hand is stretched ahead to receive the hand of the bride . A dark @-@ complexioned Parvati , adorned in silk and gold finery , stands to the left of Shiva , blushing with her head bent slightly as she extends her right arm to hold Shiva 's right hand . She holds a nilotpala (blue lotus) in her left arm .

The god Vishnu and his consorts Lakshmi and Bhudevi should be represented as taking the place

of Parvati 's parents in the ceremony . The four @-@ armed Vishnu should be shown in the background in between Shiva and Parvati ; in one of his front hands is a golden pot from which he pours water over the hands of the couple , symbolizing giving away the bride to the groom . He holds his usual attributes , the sudarshana chakra (discus) and a shankha (conch) , in his back arms . Vishnu 's wives , dressed in royal finery , stand behind Parvati and hold her waist , symbolizing the handing over .

The four @-@ headed god Brahma should be shown seated on the ground in the foreground officiating as the wedding priest and making offerings to the homa (sacred fire) in the kunda (fire @-@ altar) . The four @-@ armed god holds a sruka and sruva (sacrificial ladle and spoon) in his front arms and a kamandalu (water @-@ pot) and akshamala (rosary) in his back arms . The presence of the fire also indicates another important ritual of the Hindu wedding , saptapadi (" seven steps ") where the bride and groom go around the fire seven times .

The figure of Shiva should be tallest , followed by that of Vishnu , Parvati and Vishnu 's wives . Various deities like the eight guardians of the directions , the eight Vasus , the seven Matrika goddesses , celestial beings such as Yakshas and Gandharvas , sages and siddhas may be depicted standing with folded arms in the background .

= = = Depictions = = =

The complete scene of the wedding is not always depicted . Sometimes , only the principal participants are shown . Chola bronzes featuring only Shiva and Parvati as described in the wedding scene are found . South Indian sculptures , like those from Madurai , feature only the couple and Vishnu . In this configuration , Parvati is depicted in the centre with Vishnu on the left giving away her hand to Shiva on the right . Sometimes as in the Elephanta Caves , Parvati 's biological father Himavan , instead of Vishnu , is depicted giving away his daughter to Shiva .

Other deviations from the texts may appear in the attributes held by the divine couple . Parvati may hold a mirror , instead of the lotus . Shiva may be shown holding the trishula (trident) and damaru (drum) in his back hands . Regional variations in iconography may also occur . In Bengal , Shiva holds a karttari (knife) , the ceremonial weapon that a Hindu groom from Bengal is expected to carry in a wedding .

Various wedding guests are depicted in the scene . Shiva 's attendant ganas enjoy the festivities ; playing drums or dancing . The vahanas (vehicles) of the couple , Shiva 's bull Nandi and Parvati 's lion , are sometimes pictured in the scene . In vertical panel depictions , the celestial guests are often shown flying over Shiva and Parvati . While the gods are pictured flying on their respective vahanas (e.g. Indra on his elephant , Agni on a ram) and with their consorts ; semi @-@ divine beings like Vidyadharas fly without vehicles . An anachronism found in a few Kalyanasundara scenes is the presence of the yet @-@ unborn children of Shiva and Parvati , Ganesha and Kartikkeya . Examples of this anachronism are found at the Rameshvara Cave of Ellora , and in a 9th @-@ century sculpture from Uttar Pradesh now housed in Los Angeles County Museum of Art .

= = = Worship = = =

Though Kalyanasundara icons are found across India in caves , sculptures and temple walls , no sect is centred on their worship . The icon is a popular feature on temple gopurams (temple towers) .

In South Indian Shiva temples like those in Tiruvenkadu and Chidambaram , the bronze Kalyanasundara images of Shiva and Parvati are used in annual temple festivals to commemorate the divine union . Special halls are reserved for the annual ceremonial wedding of the deities . The Kalyanasundara bronzes are used only in this festival and kept unused the rest of the year .

At the Meenakshi Amman Temple , women worship the Kalyanasundara sculpture to find husbands .

Kalyanasundara is worshipped in Thirumanancheri as god of Marriages . The idols of Lord shiva in the form of Kalyanasundara and Parvathi is worshipped by the unmarried men and women for early

marriage . There are also people who have completed the marriages come here to complete rituals .