

Vedic Symbols



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Swastika

- A Symbol of Auspiciousness and Well being

*Om Swasti N~indro Vadhdaśravāḥ, Swasti Naḥ Pūṣā Viśvavedāḥ |
Swasti Nastāksryo~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 *matrikās* - 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 *matrikās* 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 |
Saḍjam Karomi Madhuraṃ Vādayāmi Bruve Vachaḥ | |

The *matrikās* and (hence) the vowels and consonants were generated from the manifestation of the omnipresent, eternal sound (*Nādabrahm̄*). 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 sūryaraśmiktvaṁ*", 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.



The Benefits of Shankha

The *shankha* (conch-shell) is regarded sacred and auspicious in the Indian system. Like the *swastika* symbol [c.f. Akhand Jyoti Jan-Feb 2005], it is an integral part of Vedic sacraments. It is blown to initiate religious ceremonies. God Vishnu is shown with a *shankha* in one hand and a disc (*chakra*) in the other. In the battlefield (Kurukshetra) of Mahabharata, Lord Krishna is said to have wielded a mighty *shankha* called the '*Panchajanya*'. It is believed that when it is blown it announces the victory of good over evil.



Chapter 2

Using tremendous lung-power, stamina and sustained breath control the player blows air into the shell to produce a powerful resounding reverberation that is deemed to match with the primal sound of creation. While the *shankha* has but one note, by controlling the breath, the player can alter the magnitude, timbre and resonance of the note. Though it does not have much application as a musical instrument, the vibrant, sonorous sound of *shankha* inspires valor, courage, enthusiasm and inner spirit. The holy Gurbani of the Sikhs also recognizes these effects as – “*Sankhan ki dhun ghantan ki kar phulan ki barkha barkhavae ...*”. (The conch and the bell produce blissful sounds...).

An adept yogi is said to subliminally hear the *śankhanāda* (sound of perfect blowing of a *shankha*), within himself during the higher stages of trance in *Nadayoga Sadhana*. When the conch is blown with controlled breath, the primordial sound of “*Om*” (*Oam*) emanates from it. This eternal sound is said to be the origin of all Vedas. All knowledge enshrined in the Vedas is an elaboration of the omnipresent sublime sound of *Om*. It was this sound that was chanted by the Lord before manifesting the cosmos. It represents the creation and the Truth behind it. It represents *dharma* or righteousness that is one of the four noble goals of human life.

As per the scholarly analysis of Shastric terminology, that which leads to welfare is called “*shankha*”. It is with the sounding of conch that the doors of temples are opened.

Another well-known purpose of blowing the conch with or without some devotional instruments, known traditionally to produce auspicious sounds, is to ward off negative vibrations or noises that may disturb the ambience or the minds of the devotees.

Some German scientists are reported (<http://mailerindia.com/hindu/veda>) to have experimented on conch shell's sound and found that diseases like those of thyroid and some other hormonal disorders are healed or significantly cured by this sound. Surprisingly the sound waves generated by collective blowing of *shankhas* are also believed to prevent spread of plague, cholera etc in the surroundings. This indicates the existence of an advanced knowledge and scientific use of sound in Vedic India.

In ancient India, each village was presided over by a main temple deity and several smaller ones. During performing the *Aarti* (devotional prayer-song after *pooja* – worship) and before and after all the important sacraments and on sacred occasions, the blowing of conch was a must. Since villages were generally small, the sound of the conch would be heard all over the village. People who could not make it to the temple were enjoined to stop their work, at least for a few seconds, and mentally bow to the Lord. The conch sound served to awaken people's minds to a prayerful attitude even in the middle of their busy daily routine.

The *shankha* is placed at the altar in temples and homes next to the Lord as a symbol of *Nada-Brahma*, *Om*, the

Vedas, Dharma, righteous victory and auspiciousness. It is often used to offer devotees sanctified water (of sacred oblation) to uplift and focus their minds towards nobility and truth.

Like the pyramids, the specific geometry of a *shankha* generates remarkable energy-effects. More remarkable is the fact that these are formed naturally. Different kinds of *shankhas* are therefore used as *yantras* for different purposes in the *mantra*- and *tantra*- based *sāadhanās*. Some adept astrologers also recommend the types of *shankha* and the location where these are to be placed to control negative planetary effects. Several kinds of methods of worshipping the *shankhas* are also described in the Indian scriptures for benefits varying from wealth, success and peace of mind to health, healing and hypnotism.

The *shankhas* that open towards left hand (*vaamavarti*) are commonly available but rare are the ones that open towards right side (i.e., facing South). This kind of *shankha* is called *dakshinavarti*. *Dakshinavarti Shankhas* are available in white color and with brown lines on them. Their sizes differ, starting from the size of a wheat grain to as large as a coconut. Mostly these shells are available only at Kanya Kumari. A completely white colored *Shankha* is indeed rare.

Dakshinavarti Shankha is the symbol of Goddess Lakshmi. Her idols and pictures always depict *dakshinavarti shankha* in one of Her hands. *Dakshinavarti shankha* should be kept

at the place of worship or, after being wrapped in a white cloth, at any sacred place or locker in the house. It is said to bring good luck and prosperity to the individual and his family. In the Puranas, the gods and goddesses are depicted as holding a shell, whenever they are happy or setting out on war against evil forces. Whenever the shell is blown it is said to purify the environment from all evil effects. Even the scientific minded, nonbelievers have experienced it and agree to the fact that the blowing of a *shankha* enhances the positive psychological vibrations such as courage, hope, determination, willpower, optimism, etc, in the blower as well as those around him/her.

As mentioned above, most of the conches or seashells are *Vaamvarti* i.e., their bulge opens towards left side (facing North); only a few shells are *Dakshinvarti* – their bulge opening towards the right side (i.e., facing South) and even their spiral lines run towards the right. South is the direction of Kuber, the God of wealth. Tantra Shastra has also given great importance to such types of shells. These shells are very rare and are found only in a very few places. *Dakshinavarti shankhas* not only bring wealth but also purify the atmosphere. All the negatives energies are swept out of the place.

Shankhas are also classified according to their sizes. *Yavakar shankhas* are very small in size; as small as the size of a wheat grain and are usually dark grey in color. They are quite strong and cannot be crushed easily. *Ellakar shankhas*

are a little bigger, varying between the size of a cardamom, a round beetle nut or a lemon. These are mostly found in lakes. A significant class of these shells is the *Hira Shankha*. These are as expensive as diamonds and are considered very valuable among the shells. *Moti Shankha* (a conch shell that shines like a pearl) is even more rare and difficult to find. It has the luster of a pearl and is generally round in shape. This precious variety of *shankha* is available in all big and small sizes.

The ancient text of Brahmavaivart Purana contains deep knowledge related to the different forms of Goddess Lakshmi. It is mentioned that *Soubhaagya Lakshmi*, the bestower of good luck, is present in *Moti Shankha*. The Jain Tantra describes Padamavati *Sādhanās* in great detail. In this sect Lakshmi is worshipped in the form of Padamavati and *Moti Shankha* forms an important part of many Padamavati *Sādhanās*.

This shell has great significance in Ayurveda. If water is stored in the shell it absorbs amazing medicinal properties capable of curing several physical defects. Swami Girijananda, a Himalayan Yogi has experimented with several kinds of *shankhas*. Some of the simple health tips vis-à-vis *Moti Shankha* have been prescribed by him as - (i) Store some water overnight in the shell and the next morning rub the water on your skin. This cures all skin problems. (ii) Store water in the shell for 12 hours. Then rub it on white spots on the skin. Do this regularly. After

some days the white spots shall disappear and healthy skin shall reappear. (iii) At night fill the shell with water and in the morning add some rose water to it. Then wash your hair with the mixture. This shall keep the hair black and healthy. The hair of the eyebrows and the beard too could be turned black thus. (iv) If you suffer from stomach related problems or if there is a laceration in the intestines, then early in the morning drink a spoonful of water kept in the shell for 12 hours. This will cure the problem. (v) Mix water kept in the shell for 12 hours in ordinary water and early in the morning wash your eyes with it. Doing this regularly for some time will cure all eye related problems. The eyes would become perfectly healthy and one might not even need to wear spectacles in the future. (vi) If after a bath in the morning the shell is rubbed gently on the skin of one's face, wrinkles would start slowly disappearing and the face will gain a new glow by regular use of this process. (vii) If you have dark circles under your eyes rub the shell gently on those spots early in the morning. This will gradually make the spots disappear.

This *shankha*, like the *Dakshinavarti Shankha*, is said to banish poverty and boost one's profits in business. Placing this shell (after performing some rituals of its worship) at home or in one's shop or place of work is believed to bring prosperity. This shell can also be worshipped on Diwali so as to gain the blessings of the Goddess Lakshmi.

Some rigorous *sādhanās* using *moti shankha* endow one with the power of hypnotizing others. However, practice of such *sādhanās* is risky and it is strictly enjoined that such powers should be used only for healing and helping and not at all for harming others.

Another precious and largely worshiped *shankha* is the *Ganesha Shankha*. Its appearance resembles the idols of Lord Ganesha. Ganapati or Ganesha, the Lord of Ganas, manifested in an elephant faced form, represents the power of the Supreme Being that removes obstacles and ensures success in human endeavors. Ganesha is revered as the son of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati, and is the first to be worshipped and invoked in Vedic worship rituals. He is worshipped for *siddhi* - absolute success in undertakings, and *buddhi* - intelligence. He is also the deity of education, knowledge, wisdom and literature. Ganesha is revered as one of the five deities whose worship was popularized by Adi Shankaracharya; the other four being Vishnu, Shiva, Durga and Surya. The worship of these five deities is called the *Pancayatana Puja*.

According to Vedic astrology, Lord Ganesha is helpful in nullifying the malefic effects of planet Rahu, which are similar to those of *Shani* or Saturn. The *Ganesha shankha* increases the power of will and intelligence and helps in achieving happiness, fame, good health and self-confidence. This is especially used in daily worship. Worshipper of this conch shell is blessed with healthy and

long life of nobility, wisdom, scholarship, resourcefulness, entrepreneurship and foresight.

Lord Ganesha's blessings are invoked, in all Vedic rituals, before any important work is undertaken, be it the starting of a business, the building of a house or the writing of a book or even undertaking a journey. This worship (*Ganesha Pujan*) can be performed through an idol or by using *Ganesha Yantra* or *Ganesha Shankha*. From the view point of 'Feng Shui' this shell attracts business luck from overseas and augments the chances of travel abroad.

This *shankha* is one of the eight auspicious symbols found on the feet of Lord Buddha. It is extremely beneficial for those who are in the export business or those who have gone into foreign business ventures. Placing it in the South sector of the living room helps augment the owner's fame and reputation. To enhance academic achievements the conch can be placed in the North East area; if placed in the South West it harmonizes relationships.

Ganesh shankha should be kept in the Puja-Ghar (place of worship) on all auspicious occasions and during religious festivals. It brings good luck and prosperity to the individual and the family. Some astrologers recommend that every house should have *Ganesha shankha* to gain prosperity and for protection against malefic effects of planets. It is believed that those who keep this shell in their lockers would never face any dearth of money. *Ganesh*

shankha should be kept on red cloth in Puja-Ghar or wrapped in red cloth, if kept in a locker.

Shankha Mudra (shell posture) is of significant importance in yoga. Hands are folded in the shape of a *shankha* here (blowing through which the mouth makes a sound similar to that of a conch shell). This *mudra* makes all the five elements (in the body) join in the fire element, which leads to enhanced and orderly flow of harmonized vital energy.

Similar to other sacred symbols and objects recognized in the Vedic sacramental rituals, use of *shankha* seems to have been derived from a deep scientific observation of sound, geometry and energy fields of Nature. Still deeper investigations on these aspects would unfold newer horizons of knowledge and well-being.



Significance of Kalash and Deepak

The *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



Chapter 3

example, *deepak* (as fire or candle) in case of Zarathustriac 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 *torāṇa* (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 *shreephal* 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 5th 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

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 *āratī* - devotional prayer sung at the end of a worship-ritual or a religious celebration. The *deepak* (*āratī* 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*.



Om

- The Primordial Sound, The Eternal Syllable

Sabdabrahm̄ being generated by the cosmic impulse of Brah̄m̄ is eternal; its physical manifestation in sonic vibrations also continues to exist forever. As per the Vedic scriptures, its first realization was – the self-existent, primordial Nāda (musical sound) of “ॐ” (Om). Physical perception of this sound is described to be similar to what one would hear from the resonant notes of the tinkling vibrations of a big gong struck by a wooden hammer in a consistent manner (e.g. during the devotional prayers - *āratis* in the



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temples). In terms of phonetics, the pronunciation of *Om* is described as - *au..3m*: 'au' stretched with a stress almost 3 times higher than ordinary 'short' or 'long' vowels, followed by the *anuswāra* - sound of the nasal sign (*m̐*). The syllable “ॐ” for this universal sound “*Om*” (often referred as *om* or *aum* by the Westerners) in ancient Sanskrit script is a monogram of this sound. All the activities and the order in this world are said to be generated and harmoniously regulated through the origin of this omnipresent subliminal sound.

The phonemes of the *Vedic* hymns and the seven fundamental notes - *Sā, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni* of the Indian classical music have originated (distinctly recognized by the *Rishis*) from the vibrations of the sublime sound of *Om* in the Nature. The Vedic quote - '*Ekoham̐ Bahusyāmī*' implies that all the sounds, all the energies, all the motions and everything existing in the universe have originated from the vibrations of this single *anāhata nāda*. This is the source of the manifestation of the *Śabda-Brahm̐* and the *Nāda Brah̐m̐*.

Om (*aum*) became the sacred word *hum* of the Tibetans, *amin* of the Moslems, and *amen* of the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and Christians. *Amen* in Hebrew means - sure, faithful. The biblical passage, John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The New Testament declares that in the beginning God was the Word. According to the Bible, then, heaven and earth-the cosmos-issued forth from the Word.

(By “Word” is meant “pure sound” here, because there can't be any language or 'word' in the primordial existence).

Paramahansa Yogananda also mentions of “*Om*” as the 'Word' of the Bible, as the Holy Spirit. According to Yogananda, all aspiring yogis seek to commune with “*Om*” and understand it. Audible utterance of this sound produces a sense of sacredness... However, real understanding of “*Om*” is obtained only by hearing it internally and then becoming one with it in all creation.

The *Om* sound of the self-inspired evolutionary pulse of the omnipresent supreme consciousness force (*Brahm*) has three divine manifestations in the sublime domains of Nature; those of creation (God Brahma), preservation/execution (God Vishnu) and transformation (God Shiva). The vibratory cosmic energy of this eternal sound regenerates the life-force and vital spiritual energy of the one who utters it repeatedly at consistent, rhythmic pace with deep breathing, mental concentration and reverence. As a consequence one feels emotional soothing and rejuvenation of mind - body system. This simple practice also motivates introvert experience.

The syllable and sound “*Om*” is a vital part of the science of yoga. It's a tool, a phenomenon, a mystery. To many people in the modern times, “*Om*” (*aum*) is just a word chanted in meditation or as a closing prayer in yoga practice. However, as translator and *Bhagavad Gita* scholar Barbara S Miller notes, “according to the ancient Indian traditions

preserved in the *Upanishads*, all speech and thought are derived from the one self-existent sound - *Om*. It expresses the ultimate reality."

The Amrita-Bindu-Upanishad states that, "The eternal sound (*Om*) is the supreme Absolute." It is the musical sound (*Nāda*) generated by the cosmic vibration of *Brahm* that resulted in the manifestation of Nature and all creation.

Paramahansa Yogananda called it "the vibration of the Cosmic Motor." The great pioneer of yoga, Patanjali, advised using it to overcome the obstacles and distractions in life that are like stonewalls in the path of enlightenment.

"Om" and The Big-Bang Theory of Modern Sciences:

"Tao of Physics" by Fritjof Capra presents intriguing parallels between Yogic philosophy and Western science concerning the origins and nature of the universe. In "Light On The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali" B.K.S. Iyengar, states - "Sound is vibration, which, as modern science tells us, is the source of all creation".

Contemporary scientific explanation of the creation of universe seems to point in the same direction. And just as exciting, these explanations agree completely with the teachings and philosophy of Yoga. The following report quoted by Shumacher further confirms this interpretation.

Washington Post Staff Writer Kathy Sawyer had presented an interesting review of the research findings of astrophysicists under the title "Calculating Contents of Cosmos". The newspaper article highlighted the current theory that the universe is made up primarily of stuff astronomers call "dark matter" and "dark energy". Only 4.5% is ordinary matter, which the author described as "all the shining stars and galaxies, plus people, computers, cats and so on....".

It further stated that, "Three independent teams of astronomers yesterday presented the most precise measurements to date of the infant universe., exposing telltale reverberations they called *the music of creation....* The research teams reached back across time and space to take precise readings of light emitted about 400,000 years after the Big Bang explosion that gave birth to the universe".

The article quoted John Carlstrom of the University of Chicago as saying, "We're looking back as far as you can go with light - 14 billion years, or roughly the age of the universe... In a sense, 'the ancient knowledge' allow us to 'see' sound in the early universe."

Indeed "*Omi*" is this sound which was realized by the Vedic *Rishis* (the ancient seers, sages and yogis) through their peer search (by the inner eye) of the sublime world and which is now being conceived (with the help of high-tech

telescopes and super computers) by the modern researchers as the '*music of creation*'.

Healing Effects of Chanting “Om”:

Om is a way of deepening the concentration of the mind, which leads to realization of the divine. This mantra may be sounded aloud, whispered, or repeatedly enunciated mentally. The correct pronunciation of “*Om*” is to pronounce it with rhythm so that the “*au*” (*o*) sound is blown out and the “*m*” (*m*) sound is reverberated within. In “The Yoga Book” author Steven Sturgess offers a technique for chanting *Om* (“*om*” or, “*aum*” as the author cites). He suggests - begin meditation by chanting “*Om*” aloud for ten minutes, then chant “*Om*” in a whisper for the next ten minutes, and then mentally chant “*Om*” for ten minutes. Finally, be still and meditate on the spiritual eye (the point between your eyebrows, deep inside the forehead). Surrender into the vibrations of *Om*..... Feel your awareness expanding still further into the field of pure consciousness, become one with *Om* – Sturgess says.

As per the experts like *John Schumacher* and teachers of yoga and mental well-being, while chanting *Om* (*a...u..m* as we hear it, or *aum*) we begin with our mouths wide open and gradually close our lips as the sound progresses, we transition physically as well as mentally from projecting ourselves into the material outer world to redirecting ourselves into the sublime world of the inner self.

It is further mentioned in the science of yoga that the sound 'a' starts in our chests at the heart center (*Anāhata Chakra*), moves upward with the 'o' sound in the throat center (*Viśuddha Chakra*), and ends with the sound 'm' (mmmm), which vibrates the higher centers in the head (*Ājñā* and *Sahasrāra Chakras*). Thus, it represents and enhances the upward movement of *prāṇic* energy along the spine that occurs as we progress in our practice.

The “Self-Realization Fellowship”, founded by Paramahansa Yogananda in 1920, offers instructions on its Website for using the Yogananda's “*aum* healing technique”. Yogananda noted that everything in the universe is composed of energy and that the apparent differentiation between solids, liquids, gases, sound, and light is merely a difference in their vibratory rates. He maintained that by chanting “*Om*”, the divine vibration, we can increase the body's supply of cosmic energy and even direct it as a healing force to any part of the body, mind, and soul.

The thorough research works of Dr. Nagendra et al¹⁻³ at the Vivekanand Yoga Kendra, (deemed university “VYASA”) Prashanti Kuteeram, Bangalore has scientifically signified the healing power of chanting *Om* and meditating upon its syllable.

It is said that 12,000 recitations of *aum* (*Om*) remove all sins, while 12,000 recitations daily for a period of one year bring realization of the Absolute (*Brahm*). If that seems a little overwhelming, the yoga teachers say, simply try

chanting *aum* in your daily meditation and let the incredible power of sound and vibration work for you. This will bring your mind to a singular (yet universal) focus.

If one plucks or strikes one of the strings on a guitar, for instance, the other strings, though unplucked themselves, nonetheless vibrate in resonance with the vibration from that plucked string. In a similar sense, all of creation (in Nature) is nothing more or less than strings vibrating in resonance with the First Vibration or Word. Rhythmic chanting of this word "*Om*" and meditating upon its sound is like attempting to tune our mental vibrations with this divine sound. Greater concentration and deeper feeling with sincere practice resonates this sound silently within our minds at a steady pace, synchronized with the pulse of this Great Cosmic Ooze.

The Syllable:

Omkāra (the symbol representing the sound *Om*) is said to have been visualized by the *rishis* in the state of deep trance. This symbol (syllable of the *Grantham* or *Prākṛit* language - the origin of ancient Sanskrit), in modern scientific terms must have been the spectrograph of the sound realized by the Vedic sages. They had devised the first ever script of syllables based on the 'shapes' of the different acoustic manifestations of this sound.

There are many meanings behind this sacred Vedic syllable. Some regard it as a symbolic representation of the core of

cosmic energy field. George Feuerstein in “The Yoga Tradition” says – The syllable of *Om* is held to be or to express the pulse of the cosmos itself. It was through meditative practice rather than intellectual speculation that the seers and sages of Vedic times arrived at the idea of a universal sound, eternally resounding in the universe, which they ‘saw’ as the very origin of the created world.

In terms of Sanskrit phonemes, the decomposition of the gross (and audible) sound of *Om* is written (in the *Devnagari* script of this language) as – – (a) + – (u) + – (m̐). The experts of the ‘*Akshar Yoga*’ (science of syllables) also attribute the geometrical segmentation of the shape “ॐ” as a combination of the shapes of the above letters/vowels.

In the introduction to ‘*Light On Yoga*’, B.K.S. Iyengar devotes nearly two pages to the various meanings of “*Om*”. In his views, the letter ‘a’ symbolizes the conscious or waking state, ‘u’ the dream state, and the letter ‘m̐’ the dreamless deep sleep (trance like) state of the mind and spirit. The entire symbol, Iyengar says, stands for the “realization of man’s divinity within himself.” An analogous decipheration is also applied to the geometric shape of *Om̐kāra*. Spectral analysis of the gross sound of *Om* and its decompositions and simultaneous analysis of the brain-impulses and bio-energy waves while meditating upon this sacred sound would give new dimensions to modern scientific research, thus unfolding the annals of secret knowledge of the Vedas.

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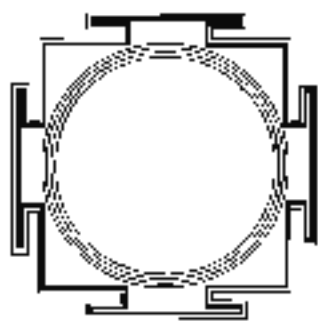
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Yantra

- The Vedic Symbol of Universal Energy

Likewise the Vastu Shastra - Vedic Archeology, the use of "Yantras", especially the *Śrī Yantra*, *Gaṇeśa Yantra*, etc has become quite popular these days. Exploiting the trends of mob psychology, several models of these *Yantras* have surfaced in the market and, in tune with the culture of commercialization some have also become 'logos' of advertisements. It is pathetic to see that a super science scrupulously invented by the dedicated efforts of the Vedic Rishis for the spiritual, intellectual and worldly evolution of mankind is being taught



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and used so superficially and often wrongly through the Internet in the present Age of so called intellectual evolutions with culmination of modern scientific and technological advancement. "Akhand Jyoti" - The Light Divine - is devoted to bring you the righteous knowledge extracted from authentic studies of researchers of this intriguing science. Here we introduce the readers with the subject matter illustrating the rational science behind the mystic designs of *Yantras* and their importance.

Among the sacred symbols compiled/designed by the Vedic Rishis, *Yantras* are predominantly regarded as devises for devotional *sādhanās*. These are used as tools for mental concentration and meditation. Keeping specific *Yantra* in specific direction in home and worshiping it and concentrating upon it is said to have distinct auspicious effects. A *Mantra* is the generator of specific currents of sublime sound and its perceivable manifestation; a *Yantra* is a monogram - a spectrograph, of this sonic energy. In terms of their spiritual effects, *Yantras* are like schematic sketches of the contours or structures of divine energy fields.

Use of *Yantras* as the object of *sādhanā*¹ enables focused use of specific currents of cosmic energy. Incidentally, the Sanskrit word for machines, instruments or technological devises is also "yantra". As we all know, dvanced machines produce large-scale outcomes rapidly; the Vedic *Yantras* are also attributed in the scriptures, e.g. in the following *shloka*, as source of great benefits in short time.... These are like 'super machines' having components as syllables,

symbols and geometric figures that encode cosmic energy currents.

*Sarvāsāmeva Siddhinām Yantrasādhanmuttamam |
Dwāraṁ Śāstreṣu Samproktaṁ Tasmāt Tat Pariśīlyatām ||*

According to Sanskrit Grammar, the word “*Yantra*” is derived from the conjugation of the verb “*yam*” with suffix “*tra*” or with the verb “*trāṇa*”. Both ways its implied meaning is similar to that of *Mantra* and *Tantra*; viz, the protector and liberator (from sorrows and thralldoms) of the sincere devotee....

Likewise the idols of gods in the temples, *Yantras* are revered and worshiped as symbols of divine powers. Devi Bhagvat (3|26|21) states – *Archābhāve Tathā Yantram*; meaning - a *Yantra* symbolizes a divine power. Similar meanings are indicated in Nardiya Puran, Gautamiya Tantra, Yogini Tantra and several other Vedic scriptures.

Some Shastras (ancient Indian scriptures derived from Vedic literature) guide that a *sādhanā* should begin with the meditational worship of a *Yantra* that represents the object of devotion, because it would give quick liberation from negative tendencies like sensual lust, anger, etc, which are major hindrances in the process of self-refinement. *Yantras* are also referred as the abodes of the divine powers of God. This is why most of the Vedic *Yantras* are named after different manifestations of God - such as, *Ganeśa-Yantra*, *Śri-Yantra*, etc. Which *Yantra* is

placed in which direction and how its worship and devotional *sādhana* is to be performed - the knowledge of these constitutes a science in itself that has linkage with the Vedic cosmology and sciences of *Mantra*, *Tantra* and *Vastu*.

Fundamental Aspects of the Designs of Yantras:

The sublime self-existent sound (*Oṃ*) of the cosmic pulse is affirmed in the scriptures as the source of all creation of Nature and the originator of all subtle and audible manifestation of sounds (and hence all the words). It is said to be the root of all *Mantras*. Its syllabic structure () symbolizes the seed *Yantra*. All syllables of ancient Sanskrit, Devnagri and other scripts have emanated from this geometrical representation of the vibrations of the 'first sound'.

In a schema of the atomic structures of a chemical compound, different letters represent single or multiple letter codes of different atoms (e.g. 'C' for carbon, 'NH₂' for ammonia group, etc), digits in the suffixes, straight lines and bars etc, represent numbers of atoms, chemical bonds and valences etc. A more evolved and structured coding system seems to have been used by the ancient Indian sages who invented the designs of *Yantras*. The symbols and codes used here have multiple meanings in terms of physical, mental and spiritual elements and expressions.

A dot (.) in the cryptography of *Yantra* symbolizes absoluteness, completeness: In terms of the manifestation

of Nature in the universe, it is a symbol of the nucleus of cosmic energy and hence represents the power-source of all activities and motion; In the mental (psychological) domain it represents the root of all desires and emotions; Its spiritual implication is – pure knowledge, enlightenment, ultimate realization. The expansions of a dot in circular forms, in a *Yantra*, symbolize related expressions in varied forms. Combining the dots results in a triangle. Different lengths of the straight lines joining the dots, different angles between them and the different triangular and other shapes generated thereby together with free dots, circles, straight, curvilinear, convergent and divergent lines are the basic features/components of the structure of a *Yantra*.

Everything that exists in the cosmos has some size and structure - perceivable or conceptualized - in subliminal, astronomical or intermediate dimensions. Even the invisible subtle entities have 'shapes' which could be 'seen' through mental eyes. Mathematical genius visualizes abstract concepts; this is how one Mathematician is often able to grasp the half-expressed and half-imaginary ideas of some other Mathematicians of high caliber and communicates in the abstract language of Mathematics. The sagacious minds of the Vedic Age had deeper insight to 'see' the invisible or sublime elements of Nature and express them in a universal language of symbols. They had thus invented a coding system of symbols, signs and alphabets (including digits) to represent – the syllables of the seed Mantras associated with the sublime fields of divine powers (*devatās*), natural tendencies of

stone carvings at Khajuraho (in MP - India), which due to lack of knowledge are misinterpreted by many people as artistic forms of erotic postures, are in fact sculptural designs of these kinds of mystic *Yantras*. One of the reasons for designing *Yantras* in the human and animal forms was – most people find it easier to understand gestures rather than symbols or to focus attention upon familiar objects rather than abstract or geometrical complexities. (Look for example, the emotional linkage and reverence the masses have with the graceful, inspiring pictures and idols of manifestations of God in human forms!)

Another reason for designing *Yantras* in this form is that – the scriptures like *Varnanighantu* regard every syllable as a symbol of manifestations of God :-

Samātrakaḥ Sarephaścha Varṇastatsānunāsikaḥ |
Sānuswāra-Visarga Hi Pūrṇa Devatvamachhati | |

Meaning: A syllable (of Vedic Sanskrit - Prakrat) combined with a vowel, nasal sound [*am*], *visarga* [*aḥ*], or any phoneme, becomes a symbol of a god.

As a *Mantra* is created by conjunction of letters with phonemes, etc it is regarded as the source (or, an abode or carrier) of divine powers. Therefore a *Mantra* should also be represented - in the associated *Yantra* - like a sketch of a divine idol enshrined in a temple while also taking care of correct positioning of each syllable and symbol according to the symbolic and geometric language of *Yantras* and also

in consonance with the fundamental notion of 'energy fields' coded by them.

Illustrative Example – The ॐ (Hrīm) Yantra:

In the standard geometric syllabic design of the ॐ (*Hrīm*) Yantras Yantra looks as shown below in Fig 1(a) below.



Fig 1(a)

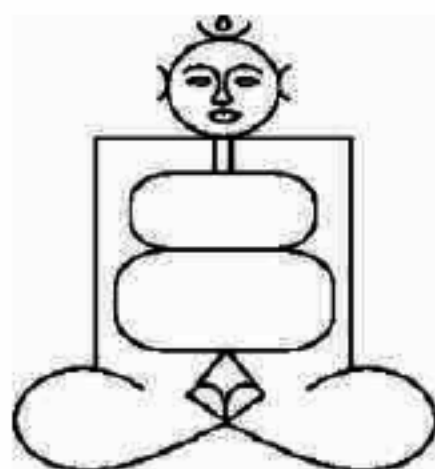


Fig 1(b)

The primitive sketch in human-like form of this Yantra corresponding to its seed mantra is shown in Fig 1(b). It is constructed as follows:

The syllable (*H*) symbolizes Lord Shiva; (*R*) corresponds to HIS Power, which is also the source of the immense vital spiritual force (*Kuṇḍalini*) hidden in the *Mūlādhāra Chakra* in the human body. These together – *Shiva* and *Shakti* are represented in (*H*); the vowels (*i*) and (*ī*) are the two 'arms' of the Absolute Being symbolized by it; the manifestation of Shiva-Shakti in the regulatory powers of

Nature becomes possible by means of these 'arms' (sublime causal forces). The vowels ए (e) and ऐ (ai) correspond respectively to the symbols of the 'nose' (the root of the flow of *prāṇa* - vital energy in Nature) and the 'eyes' (which make expansion and perception of Light possible in this creation) of this Absolute Being. The half moon with a dot {representing the nasal sound ऋ (am̐)} on the top depicts the moon on the head of Shiva and the holy Ganges emanated from there.

Similarly, as in the human-form sketch of other *Yantras*, the vowels उ (u) and ऊ (ū) are the two legs folded round in Padmasana (the sublime basis or axis for balancing the ever-expanding and dynamic cosmos); ओ (o) and औ (au) correspond to the two 'ears' (which symbolize the cosmic channels for transmission and sensing of sound). The *visarg* sign ः (ah̐) maps onto the 'mouth' of the Absolute Being; it symbolizes the origin of sound and also the inlet for reception and transformation of cosmic energy. *Om̐kāra* the symbol the cosmic music of creation – *Nāda Brahm̐*; is the 'voice' of this *Yantra*-symbol of *Shiva-Shakti*.

Most of the *Yantras* enshrined in the ancient temples or the places of worship under the Vedic System are of the above type. The “Kheda Brahma” temple and the “Shree Yantra” temple of Dakorji in Gujarat stand as live memories of these in the present times.

Broadly, the *Yantras* used for various beneficial and spiritual purposes are classified according to – the geometric

elements, syllables, and symbols used in their design, the substances used in making a *Yantras* as a physical objects from these conceptual designs, kind of place where it is to be positioned, etc. In the next issue we shall discuss these aspects in with guidelines on methods of using *Yantras* for auspicious effects.

Notes:

1. *Sādhanā*: Devout endeavor of self-transformation and spiritual elevation through self-discipline.
2. *Pancha Tatvas*: The five basic elements of the gross manifestation of Nature. Namely, *prithvī* (all solid matter on or inside the earth), *jala* (water, liquids and fluids), *vāyū* (air, gaseous states), *agni* (source of fire and energy) and *ākāśa* (the subliminal etheric expansion and also the domain of existence and expression of mental and emotional faculties).



The Foundational Emblems of Indian Culture - Shikha and Sutra

The Vedic sages had emphasized the importance and necessity of the devotion and worship of God for the psychological and spiritual upliftment of mankind. Worshipping the idols of deities is an integral part of the Hindu religious practices. Multiple representations of divine manifestations in the idol forms were visualized by our *rishis* of the Vedic times. The specific forms symbolize specific divine qualities and powers of the manifestations of God and also incorporate ethical teachings for us. The Arya Samajis do not believe in idol-



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worship, but they also respectfully place the idols and photographs of Swami Dayanand Saraswati in their *yagyshalas*, community halls and offices and pay due regards before these symbols of his memories. The followers of Islam are against idol-worship. But, paying reverence to the sacred black stone (*sange avsad*) at Kaba by kissing it is essential for making their holy pilgrimage to Makka-Sharif complete. So, the rectangular sacred black stone is for them what a round, smooth black idol of Shiva is for a Hindu – a sacred symbol of God. Every religion has its holy symbols and rituals of worship.

The communists deny all religions and even deny the existence of God. Worshiping His idols is therefore a mark of blind faith and absurdity in their views. But, what if somebody burns their red flag, or tears off the manuscript of the manifesto of communism? They would certainly feel hurt and insulted and react furiously against any such attempt. But why should they? After all, as per the so-called 'rational thinking' the flag is 'only a piece of cloth' and there must be several copies of their manifesto available in print. Well, it is not the physical entity, but the sentiments, the faith in the implications associated with it that count. So many of our freedom fighters had dared to risk their lives for protecting our national flag; great revolutionaries had sacrificed their lives by placing this mark of our national prestige in place of the British flag those days!

The idols we enshrine in the temples, the Holy Scriptures like the Vedas, Bhagvad Gita, the Ramayana, and the Guru Granth Sahib are symbols of deities for us. We worship them. The symbols of our faith, our reverence for them are the source of light in our lives. Many times people also place the photographs of their ideal heroes, their guides, their gurus, in their houses and at their place of work. Many disciples also place the photographs of their Gurus to get instant inspiration and support while being away from the latter.

Indeed, emblems carry within them a message, an effect and have great importance in our lives as sources of inspiration and moral support and guidance. They have intimate linkage with sentiments and create immense impact on human psychology. It is in this regard that symbols of divine powers are enshrined in the form of idols, pictures and other models. Apart from the temples of Goddess Gayatri at Shantikunj and Brahmvarchas there is also a grand model of the Himalayas in a special temple like meditation hall. It reminds the devotees of the pristine, spiritually vibrant ambience of the Himalayas and helps good mental concentration.

However, the saints and sages have also warned us against remaining stuck only to the symbol and learn nothing from it. If one regards an idol as omnipotent and believe that just bending head and praying before it will solve all problems, then one is living in a fantasy, in blind faith. Then, for some people Lord Krishna sitting in the temple of Badrinath would

be superior to that in the temples of Mathura or Vrindawan; while the latter would be mightier for some others.... Does it have any sense?

Prophet Hazarat Mohammed had opposed idol worship because of the sinful customs that were propagated and practiced through it during his times. The place where he was born was dominated by the blind rule of “might is right” those days. Dacoits and hoodlums used to rob the villages and take away all the crops, cattle and young women for their pleasure; some of them used to possess ten to fifty women. Some of the children born by them were allowed to grow to serve as bonded labors or work in the dacoit gangs. As it was found a waste to raise the rest, those kids were killed in the name of sacrifices before the giant idols made in the lands occupied by the dacoits. The angelic soul of Hazarat Mohammed was born in human form to eliminate such heinous acts and insane customs. He destroyed the roots of such evils by opposing the mindless and cruel 'rituals of worship'. It was the necessity of that time and that place. But he did not advocate anything against the philosophy behind the role of idol-worship in inspiring human mind towards virtuous spirit.

We must remember that all the idols of Divine manifestations are simply the source of reminding us of God. We may, for example, go to the temples of Lord Krishna and also bend our head and offer prayers. But we should know that this “*pranam*” and prayers are not for the stone that is enshrined in

the temple. Rather, these are for Lord Krishna, whose divine incarnation in human form had taken place about five thousands years ago to bestow the light of divinity, to establish the law of righteousness, to give new direction of enlightened progress to the world. The idols simply help awakening our devotional sentiments. These may activate the linkage of our inner mind with Him during meditation or emotionally engrossed prayers, if we have really purified our mind and have adopted the true meaning of devotional faith in our lives.

Our worshipping the idols is no better than kids' toy game if we do not have any living aspiration to imbibe divine attributes and values and make no efforts to materialize our worship by following the disciplines and teachings of the divine incarnations in real life. What is the point in saluting the book of Bhagavad Gita or lighting a lamp near it, if we don't read it and learn from what Lord Krishna had taught to Arjuna?

The blind attachment to the gross symbol with a desire of gaining favor from this inert 'God' in return for the offerings of worship make a mockery of the deep philosophy and psychological intensity underlying idol-worship. It is this superficial devotion and emotional excitement of 'affinity' with the symbols of deities that correspond to blind faith and superstition, which are criticized by the savants. These misconceptions and associated insane customs were at their peak in the medieval times. The real meaning and importance

of the emblems of Indian Culture, founded by the *rishis* (the seer-sages of the Vedic Age), were also lost in the mists of this dark phase of ignorance and religious anarchy.

Origin of Religion and Culture:

If we are to revive the glory of religion, we will have to look into its origin. The varieties of communes and sects mushroomed in the field of religion since the post Vedic Age need to be converged towards their fundamental unity. Recalling the emblems (and the associated knowledge) of this origin could be one effective way of achieving this goal. Our national flag is the symbol of our national unity, strength and prestige; we all, irrespective of whether we are Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians or someone else by faith, respect it. See how a symbol unites us!

What is the origin of the Vedic Religion and the Indian Culture? It is the ultimate knowledge, the preeminent force of spirituality, the divine light, and the eternal values, embedded in Gayatri Mantra. The Vedic *rishis* had therefore motivated the disciples towards the *sāadhanā* of Gayatri Mantra. This mantra is the root of the Vedas. One might be a follower of any incarnation of God. That is fine. For example, one may chant “*Śri Kriṣṇāya Namō Namaḥ*”; very good, continue with that. But that won't lead to universal unity. The incarnation of Lord Krishna is said to have occurred about five thousand years ago; was there no religion before that? Then, what was the mode of devotion at that time? In fact Lord Krishna himself

was a devotee of Gayatri Mantra. Look at the Valimiki Ramayana; it mentions of Lord Ram also having given the *dikṣā* of Gayatri Mantra. Further back, this mantra has been described in the Vedic scriptures as also being the root of inspiration and activation of the powers of the eternal Trinity: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. It is said to be the source of all creation and existence in the gross and the subliminal realms of manifestation.

We all should also adopt the spiritual devotional practice of the Gayatri Mantra together with whatever other mode of worship we are used to. For this we may keep the written script of the mantra at our place of worship or enshrine an idol or picture of the deity Mother Gayatri as symbolized by the *rishis* to represent the divine power of this mantra. Collective efforts from all of us will lead to convergence and unity of all cults/faiths and revive the glory of the divine culture, which emanated from the universal (Vedic) religion in the Age of Truth.

Shikha (Śikhā) and Sutra (Sūtra):

What are the emblems of this divine culture (the Rishi Culture or the original Indian Culture) that remind us of its principles and disciplines to be followed in human life? These are – *Śikhā* and *Sūtra*, the idols of Gayatri that are enshrined in the temple of the human body. *Śikhā* is a knot of hair, tied at the crown-point (right above the suture) on the central top of the

head; this point is given distinctive importance in the science of yoga and spirituality as the point of contact with the brain-centre of intellectual and emotional sensitivity. *Sūtra* is the sacred thread, also called *yagyopavit*, which is worn on the shoulders and the chest after the sacrament of *upnayana* or thread-ceremony.

Śikhā symbolizes the presence of discerning intellect, farsightedness and the deity of knowledge upon our head. It is a flag of human culture. It reminds us of the religious principles of morality, righteousness, responsibility and dutiful awareness. The moral and social duties of human life are worn on our shoulders and kept attached to our hearts in symbolic form as the sacred thread of *yagyopavita* (*Sūtra*). It also hangs on our back. It has tied us from all sides, as a reminder of the moral disciplines and ethical duties as human beings. With the advent of different religious doctrines and diversities in the religious practices *śikhā* and *sūtra* might have gotten confined only to the Hindus, but the principles and teachings associated with them are eternal and universal. Seer sages of the modern age have written several articles and booklets to elucidate these facts with historical evidences.

This body is the fort of the individual self upon which the flag of *śikhā* is hoisted as the mark of the dignified values and virtues of humanity. The foreign invaders, the crusaders against the Vedic (Indian) Culture had attempted to eliminate the roots of this divine culture by first cutting the *śikhā* and removing the *sūtra* from the bodies of the followers of Hindu

religion. Thousands of innocent heads were cut off just for protesting against this attack. It was for protecting the glory of these universal emblems of human religion that Maharana Pratap, Vir Shivaji, Guru Govind Sigh, and other great martyrs of India had dedicated their noble lives. Today, we have forgotten their sacrifices and done what even the foreign invaders of the medieval times could not do. We have let ourselves be swept away from our roots by the storm of cultural pollution coming from the West. We have lost faith in our own values. We feel ashamed in wearing the *sūtra* and keeping the *śikhā*.

If we go to some college and ask the students – whether they wear the *sūtra*, they would look at us blankly. They would not have even heard about it. It is not their fault. We have never bothered to tell them about these things. How will we explain the meaning and purpose behind these symbols when we ourselves don't know it? We have just shunned such things as signs of superstitions, blind faith and backwardness. The braided or tied hairs of women have at least preserved the custom of *śikhā*. But look at the boys; they may have long hair as per the fashion but maintaining the *śikhā*! Just don't talk about it!! On one hand we are running blindly after 'modernity' and on the other, we have let ourselves entrapped in blind customs in the name of religion – for example, in many parts of the Indian society, girls / women are deprived of chanting or even knowing the Gayatri Mantra; they can't wear or even touch the *yagyopavit (sūtra)*.

stars/stripes/badges as signs of their rank; the police uniform also has different kinds of badges stitched on it, which reflect the identity of the rank/post/ state, etc of the wearer. If any police or army personal is found guilty of deviating from his duties, the first punishment is that his medals and badges are taken away. This is like wiping out his identity. No penalty would be more painful to him than losing his uniform. The Christians wear a cross; few people would know that even the custom of wearing necktie had begun as a mark of wearing the thread-symbol of the holy cross. The Sikhs keep *kirpan* (tiny sword), comb and maintain their hair uncut; they also wear a turban. Then what do the Hindus have as a sign of their identity of being the followers of the Vedic religion? If a Hindu has left *śikhā* and *sūtra*, should not he/she be regarded as someone who has disowned his religion?

Please note this in no way should make of any one of us a fundamentalists. The point being made is that we should be aware of the importance of the symbols of cultural dignity, which our forefathers – the great seers and sages, the scientists of yoga and spirituality – had invented. These are not only the symbols of the eternal values and disciplines suitable for men and women of all ages, in all eras, but also have scientific and spiritual relevance. These teachings should be propagated in scientific light with logical justifications during the *yagyas* and other religious ceremonies. If one explains the meaning, purpose and importance of these sacred symbols of one's faith, there is no reason why others,

including the younger generations would not respect and adopt these basic symbols of the Vedic culture.

Many people have great faith in doing *havan* (*yajña* or *yagya*). This faith is inculcated in their minds since the childhood. *Havan* is generally performed on every religious ceremony in the Hindu families; but nobody knows about the intimate relation between *yagya* and *yagyopavit*. *Yagya* symbolizes noble deeds and *yagyopavita* (*sūtra*) indicates noble qualities that should be integral parts of a Brahmin's life. Who is a Brahmin? The one who strives for his inner enlightenment; who expects minimum from the society; and gives his best to the society. The commencement of wearing of the *sūtra* and tightening of the *śikhā* at the time of initiation (*dikṣā*) into Gayatri *sādhana* is referred in the *shastras* as *dwijatva* – the second birth, and the one who wears the sacred thread (*sūtra*) and keeps the *śikhā* is called a *dwija* (born anew - as Brahmin). That means: whatever family one may be born into, wearing the *sūtra* is his second birth, which is that of a Brahmin. What does that imply? It conveys that the beginning of wearing the *sūtra* symbolizes the initiation into the life of a true Brahmin.

The *japa* of Gayatri Mantra with devotional meditation is carried out twice a day; preferably around the times of sunrise and sunset (this is also called *sandhyā vandan*) but the *sūtra* (*yagyopavit*, the symbol of Goddess Gayatri) is enshrined on the body all the twenty-four hours. (This being a thread of cotton needs to be changed as a practical necessity; women

change it once a month on any auspicious day after their menses and men usually change it once with the change of season on auspicious days like Vasant Panchami, Shivratri, Shravani Parva, etc).

Doing *japa* or *yagya* etc, has become a superficial ritual for most of us today – partly because we are not aware of their underlying philosophy and science and partly because of our extrovert, selfish attitude which always looks for materially gainful results. We feel that doing this or that will bring worldly benefits, eliminate our sins, and what not! Is this rational thinking? Nothing will be bestowed upon you by doing all this. Remember, Vedic scriptures do mention of miraculous effects and supernatural potentials associated with these sacraments but this materializes only when we adopt the essential disciplines of *sādhana* connected with them.

What we now see everywhere and also follow in practice is mostly a mockery of our religion. Look at the *Kumbha Melas* for instance! Lots of crowds and commercial fan-fares! Hordes of people bathing in the rivers without even taking minimum care of hygiene; and instead, dirtying the holy rivers in an effort of purifying themselves! Or the hordes of the so-called *sadhus* and *sanyasis* fighting with each other to have the 'honored' privilege of taking the first dip into the sacred waters... and so on! In their original form, the *Kumbha Melas* used to be the truly rare and auspicious occasions of the majestic gatherings and conferences of the great saints, sages

and sincere devotees from all parts of India. Disciples and other people used to reach there despite all difficulties in traveling far distances, to be blessed by the nectar of knowledge, spiritual light and affectionate guidance from the discourses and meetings of these noble masters – the saintly scholars and accomplished *sādhakas*. Personal and social problems of the pilgrim-devotees used to be resolved by their eminent guidance; these altruist seers also used to focus on global problems and find amicable solutions for the welfare of the whole world, of all beings – men, women, birds, animals, plants, trees, rivers, mountains....., every thing in Nature.

This is the age of intellect, scientific thinking. We should learn to adopt religious teachings not just by convention, but by prudent thinking through an open mind. Many a times it is seen that neither the elders in the family nor the priests are able to explain the meaning or purpose of the rituals during any religious ceremony. Instead of satisfying the queries of the youngsters, they would often either scold them or simply 'declare' that it was our tradition. There in an interesting incident worth citing in this regard. The daughter of a rich advocate in Mathura was getting married to a foreign-returned, well-educated young man. The girl had also completed her M. A. The wedding ceremony was organized gorgeously. In the *lagna-maṇḍap*, the priest (Pandit) kept on asking the bride and the bridegroom to do several things one after the other as part of the ceremonial rituals. He was

chanting some mantras in incomprehensible Sanskrit. He never bothered to see whether anybody was listening to him or not.

All this had really bored the couple. Unaware of this, the Pandit continued with – “Keep these many *paise* here with flowers, these many rupees there with rice grains”, and what not! Finally, the bridegroom interrupted him and humbly said that he was unable to understand what the Pandit was saying or doing and why? The 'smart' Pandit tried to pose as a guru and warned that interrupting him would be inauspicious, etc. The young man then said; “Anyway if you could pray to the God on our behalf, why don't you also complete the rituals on our behalf. In the mean time we both will go out and take care of the guests who are waiting for us since long?” Everybody around just laughed... This incident makes us think seriously about the pitiable state of our rituals and customs. What kind of social reformation and progress we would make if we can't even maintain the grace of important sacraments and convey the underlying teachings to our younger generation? Why boast of our cultural heritage when we don't have the dignity to follow its values?

The awakened souls should take up this task of social reformation and cultural awakening through the religious platform. It is good to see that the Gayatri Pariwar has given boost to pioneering efforts of saint-seer Pt. Shriram Sharma Acharya in this regard and has been able to eliminate, to a great extent, the misconceptions about Yagya and Gayatri. It

has been able to remove the barriers of so-called caste, creed and discrimination on the basis of gender and social status. Anybody interested in religious philosophy, humane culture and desirous of self-refinement and enlightenment can participate in social and religious programmes of the Gayatri Pariwar.

Now we should also understand and propagate the importance of wearing the *sūtra* and keeping *śikhā*. Initially when Acharyaji used to explain some points on its underlying philosophy and science while conducting a *yagya*, people used to find it very unusual. They would request him – “Why don't you just complete the rituals; we have come to offer the *ahutis* in the sacred fire of *yagya*; what have we to do with all the teachings and scientific effects...?”. There was strong opposition from several swamis and pandits to my allowing women and people from all castes and cults to chant the Gayatri Mantra and participate in *yagya*. But one can see the impact of his teachings now!! Truth and righteous attempts cannot be checkmated by anyone for long.... Now we see thousands of women priests ably conducting and guiding Gayatri *Yagyas* and the Vedic sacraments under the banner of this mission. People from all walks of society, all creeds live together, work together like members of a large family in this organization. We have just lit the torch of truth and knowledge; humbly attempted the renaissance of the divine *rishi* culture. You all have to spread its light across the globe. Do this with the spread of the disciplines of *śikhā* and *sūtra*.

The *śikhā* represents the *śīrṣa* (top) of the Gayatri Mantra. It reminds the devotee of the subtle presence of the pure divine intelligence in the human mind. Tightening the hair knot right above the suture induces marvellous psychological benefits. It helps in harmonious blood circulation in the brain in normal conditions and augments alertness. As described in the yoga-scriptures, it also lends support in increasing mental concentration and meditation. In terms of its sublime spiritual effects, the *śikhā* works like an antenna in the outer domain of the *sahasrāra cakra* (topmost extrasensory centre) to link the individual consciousness with the cosmic consciousness in the elevated state of Gayatri *sādhanā*.

The *yagyopavit (sūtra)* has nine threads and three knots. The knots are symbols of the three *granthis* (extrasensory roots of ultimate realizations) – the *Brahma-granthis*, the *Vishnu-granthis* and the *Shiva-granthis*; these also represent the three segments of the Gayatri Mantra that encode the sublime streams of manifestation of the omnipresent eternal sound of “*Oam*”. The nine threads symbolize the nine planets and the nine divine-powers (manifestations of *śakti*, called the *nav-durgās*)–implied in the nine words (after the *śīrṣa*) of the Gayatri Mantra. The *yagyopavit* is like an idol of the deity Gayatri. You enshrine the idol in the temple of your body by wearing it. Wearing this sacred *sūtra* on the shoulders, keeping it near the chest, should remind you of the nine duties, nine virtues,

nine principles that are taught and inspired through the nine words of the Gayatri Mantra, which are industriousness, humility, austerity, orderliness, cooperation, wisdom, integrity of character, sense of responsibility and courage.

These nine qualities open the door to a bright, happy and successful life. Inculcation of these qualities induces eminent transformation of personality. These are also the most desired virtues for social and global welfare and progress. The first five of these deal with behavior and deeds. Industriousness means constructive utilization of time and potentials with diligence and enthusiasm for the work in hand. Humility implies modesty, etiquette, and balanced and humble behavior with due respect for the self as well as for others. Austerity includes piety of mind and body. It also means adopting the principle of “simple living & high thinking” in daily life. You must note that foresighted, constructive and altruist use of the resources becomes possible by observing austerity in personal life.

Orderliness corresponds to ideal management and disciplined organization of time, talents and other mental, physical and materialistic resources; punctuality and neatness and tidiness of the body, house and workplace, are primary necessities of orderliness. Cooperation means wholehearted sharing of joys and pains with family, friends and colleagues. As some of you might have experienced in family-life or on social fronts, it requires a good amount of patience and tolerance to work

harmoniously in any collective setting. Benevolence and zeal to work for collective welfare of the society are its obvious reflections.

The remaining four qualities pertain to the mental and emotional spheres of life. Wisdom incorporates thoroughness and maturity of attitude, and thinking. Refinement of thoughts and aspirations are essential steps towards sagacious development of mind. As you all know, integrity of character is a must if you are to gain the respect and cooperation of others and achieve something worthwhile in life. Sincerity, honesty and moral purity of the character, authenticity and trustworthiness in every aspect of personal, professional and social life are the yardsticks of the integrity of a person. Gratitude for all the (direct or indirect) help received from Nature and society at every step of your life is what motivates you towards bearing your share of responsibilities. Happily transact your duties towards the physical, mental and moral progress of your dependents and associates. Do take care of contributing to and participating in the earnest activities of social welfare as well.

Many a times people think of courage and valor as some qualities required only in the battlefield. Listen my children! We all need to have these qualities to struggle and overcome our own vices first. We should also have courage to oppose immoral practices around us; raise our voice against corruption, injustice and exploitation of the weaker sections

of society in our areas of interactions. If we can't do that individually, at least we must have the courage to join collective and organized efforts against the wrongs in the system.

I advise the parijans in Gayatri Pariwar to talk about these positive effects and teachings associated with *śikhā* and *sūtra* whenever they perform a *yagya*. You should yourself adopt them in life and then tell others that one cannot perform *yagya* or practice the *sāadhanā* of Gayatri unless one wears the *sūtra* and ties the *śikhā*. These are the prime emblems of the great Vedic culture. Having them with us is a sign of our being the inheritors of the great *rishis*, the followers of the divine culture. These remind us of the values and disciplines of human dignity.

Let people come and ask us about the necessity of these symbols of Hindu Religion. People's discerning quest should be always encouraged. Unless religious philosophy justifies its relevance in logical ways in the light of prudence, it cannot serve the real purpose. It has to shed off the superstitions and unwise customs that have clouded and veiled its true light. It has to spread the sagacious light of its eternal power, the divine values hidden in its core. We all, the believers, the theists need to resolutely work for this reformation and reconstruction on the religious and social fronts. Let us begin this march with a revolutionary propagation of the culture of *śikhā* and *sūtra*.

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