

Sacred articles in Hinduism by A.C.Sekhar

In the Hindu way of life, based on the oldest religion Sanathana Dharma , there are several articles like Rudraksha, Saligram etc. which are considered very 'sacred'. In fact in other religions also there are articles designated as sacred. It will be interesting to understand the origin and cause of such perceptions It looked that the ancient wise men realised that to achieve a specific objective in life it is necessary for Man to make his efforts not only through material tools at his disposal but also to employ some spiritual tools originating from the Mind and Intellect of human beings. They realised that Life Force in a human being which is responsible for putting in the required efforts to achieve his goal is an integrated whole of material and spiritual tendencies which fact may not be normally so apparent to many. It is the common experience often Man feels that there are forces beyond his own powers that control the ultimate outcome of his efforts, and he attributes this generally to the will of 'God'.

To have an understanding and even a sort of control on the unknown forces, the spiritual tools conceived by ancient wise men seem to be necessary. Of the several methods available for them to obtain the needed spiritual tools the wise men conceived association of material objects which can direct the Mind to the required level of spirituality. The thought processes which go into the physical efforts through the means of specified material objects seem to be directly related to the strength of one's Mind and Intellect and which form the strength of the spiritual content of his efforts. That seems why some articles have been chosen as sacred and several stories and religious ordains are wound around their interaction with man. They declared them as sacred to instill the necessary awe and reverence and develop the required strength of Mind.

Those articles are so chosen and their association with man is so designed because of their specific qualities, shape and size, and availability etc which leave a permanent imprint on human Mind. Some of the articles which are generally considered sacred in the Hindu way of life are discussed below.

Saligrams:

These are highly valued and passed on from generation to generation in many Hindu families. They are stones formed thousands of years ago and of peculiar shapes, sizes, and colors and even with some markings on them They are considered to be embodiments of Lord Vishnu and some of the markings may resemble Sankha and Chakra the two important weapons of Lord Vishnu.

The different shapes , colours and markings are attributed to different types of spiritual powers they are said to possess. They are found in the river Gandagi or lake Manosarover in Southern Himalayas. They are generally worshiped in houses only and their value increases with generations . No elaborate pujas are performed but their mere presence in a house for generations is believed to bring prosperity to the family. They are not worshiped in temples though in some temples of northern India there are some idols said to have been carved out of these stones.

Rudrakshas:

These are seeds of a tree popularly known as Rudraksha tree grown mostly in Himalayas. Some rare trees are also found in some parts of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Western Ghats of India They are generally of dark brown to light golden colour of different sizes. .They are considered as abodes of various Devas and some mythological stories are built around their occurrence , use and powers. These powers vary according to the shape, size, colour and the number of the beads .that go to make a Mala, or Rosary which is worn round the necks or wrists

and arms of devotees .Some medical experts believe they have some medicinal properties also to control blood pressure, jaundice etc.

Vibhuti:

This is sacred ash obtained from Yagnas, Homums, or even burning of cowdung cakes. Mostly the worshipers of Shiva apply the ash on their forehead and other parts of their bodies. Several attributes are made to the smearing of Vibhuti as a reminder of the final disposal of one's body and worldly possessions, irrespective of the power and wealth acquired during one's whole life.. Some small scale industries have sprung up to sell sticks and cakes made of Vibhuti particularly near Saivaite temples. Medically the application and use of Vibhuti is also supposed to be a good disinfectant and protects the body from polluted air around.

Tulsi:

Most of the houses in South India have Tulsi plants (*Ocimum sp*) in the backyards .They are daily worshiped. The aromatic plant keeps the surrounding air pure and drives away harmful insects and animals. The leaves are used in Pujas and also immersed in Thirtha water for developing appropriate devotional attitude. Beads are made from dried stems and made into japamalas (Rosaries). Garlands of leaves are made for decorating some deities in temples. Some medicinal values of the leaves have been recognised to cure respiratory problems. Similarly there are leaves, flowers and fruits of some other plants which are considered sacred and used in Pujas etc. These are supposed to be favourite articles of different gods. The Bilva leaf is the favourite of Lord Shiva, Lotus is of Lakshmi, Parijata (Harisingani) is that of Vishnu,. Lord Vinayaka is worshiped by a variety of leaves, flowers, fruits and even grasses

Yagnopavith:

Some communities in India, like Brahmins and Kshatriyas, perform a religious initiation ceremony for their boys between the ages of 9 and 15. During the ceremony the most important part is to put a sacred thread round the shoulder and body invoking the Goddess Gayatri. This remains on the body throughout the life as sacred and constant reminder of the ultimate source of all knowledge the man acquires from time to time during the course of his life. He indirectly invokes the goddess to give him the power of right thinking. There are prescribed hymns and religious procedures for changing the thread once annually or so.

Mangalasutra:

At the time of marriages some communities tie a thread with gold beads and pendants around the neck of the bride. This is given the character of sacredness and is supposed to give good health and long life to the husband, as it serves a constant reminder to the lady of her responsibilities towards her husband and vice versa. Also it serves as a constant reminder of the oaths they have taken during the wedding ceremonies. This also serves as an indication to the society that the woman is married.

Sankha:

Sankha or Conch is a kind of sea-shell available in several sizes on coastal regions. The larger ones are used to blow sounds symbolising OM to drive away evil and unpleasant sounds at the time of Pujas and auspicious ceremonies. The smaller ones are used to serve thirtham water which is received respectfully and devotionally in the right hand palm and a few drops put in the mouth and the rest sprinkled on the head. The right -hand spiraled or clockwise sankhas are

supposed to be more auspicious than the left-hand spiraled or anti-clockwise sankhas. The original Sankha is supposed to be one of the very powerful tools of Lord Vishnu. There are stories of conches of different names used by the heroes of Mahabharatha. By their mere possession and use, many beneficial attributes are reported depending on the size, colour, and softness of surface of these conches. They are also said to cure the Pitha and Vatha of human bodies when used as water containers for bathing etc.

Poorna Kumbha:

A pot full of water decorated with Swastik, leaves, and flowers is considered very auspicious for decorating doors, pillars, temple sikharas, etc. Reports are available that this symbolic representation to invoke goddess of wealth is very ancient and perhaps one of the easiest way in the perceptions of the most common people.

Thus there are many more objects considered as sacred in the Hindu way of life. Some more details of them would be available in literature pertaining to Hindu scriptures. These objects have apparently some relative spiritual and material benefits, but an intensive research may also help to bring out their full impact on the normal and daily life of human beings.