

ISSN: 0976-8165

IMPACT FACTOR 7.86

# THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN  
ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

VOL.14 ISSUE 5 OCTOBER 2023

14 Years of Open Access

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal  
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## Understanding Sacred Symbols

**Anu Rani**

Research Scholars (PhD),  
Bhagat Phool Singh Mahila Vishwvidyalaya,  
Khanpur Kalan (Sonapat).

**Article History:** Submitted-30/09/2023, Revised-18/10/2023, Accepted-25/10/2023, Published-31/10/2023.

### **Abstract:**

Hindu mythology is an integral part of Indian culture and tradition. Mythology is highly symbolic and can be interpreted differently by different people. Hindu mythology is rich in symbolism. There are numerous ancient sacred symbols represent our past, present and future. Symbols allow us to go beyond the unknown. Some Hindu symbols refer to the origins of the universe and the complexities of time, such as the cycles of past, present and future, as well as events. Symbols consider auspicious, expressing the idea of inner purity. There are many sacred symbols in Hindu Mythology.

**Keywords: Mythology, Symbols, Philosophy, Swastika, Sacred Animals, Tilak, Yantra.**

### **Introduction**

Mythology can refer to legends brought together by a group of people. Mythology never dies; it is told with modifications to please readers. Every society creates these myths and transmits them through stories, images, and rituals. All myth brings different types of meaning to society. Abrahamic myth seeks unity and therefore, mutual fulfilment. Hindu mythology seeks diversity and is therefore effectively complex. Western myth is much more realistic in that it creates “villains” and “survivors” and calls “heroes” to action. It is a pattern found in many Indian myths. However Indian folklore is not limited to this. This broadens the horizon and discusses eternity, which is more about knowledge.

Myths are like water, waiting for thirsty people to drink. But whoever is thirsty has a bottle to take. No one can impose it on people. Mythology is the expression of a person's personality, emotions, thoughts and arguments. Within humans, there are no gods or demons, no heroes or villains in the story. Everything is here and now in the minds and hearts, in the hearts and minds of those around us. Mythology is at its best when it deals with the mind, especially emotions and imagination.

Hindu mythology is rich in symbolism. There are many ancient sacred symbols represent philosophy, teachings, gods and goddesses. This symbol comes from the Greek word *Symbolon*, which means "token used in comparison to determine whether something is authentic." A symbol is a sign or word that represents or is understood to represent an idea, object, or relationship. Symbols allow people to go beyond what is known or seen by creating connections between very different concepts and experiences. They can be in the form of words, sounds, gestures, ideas or visual images. In Hindu mythology, symbols are imbued with spiritual meaning, some representing gods, goddesses, philosophies, teachings and cultural traditions. Symbols are cultural assets of society. We know culture itself is a symbol. There are many signs and symbols in Hindu mythology, such as the wheel of time Kalachakra, Aum, Sankha, Nataraja and Swastika. Ananda Coomaraswamy says that "symbolism is the art of thinking in pictures". Over many periods of development, Hinduism has adopted a number of iconic symbols, part of Hindu symbolism, imbued with spiritual meaning based on scriptures or cultural traditions. The importance of any symbol varies according to the region, period, and sect of the followers. Over time, some symbols, such as the swastika, became more widely associated, while others, such as the Aum, became recognized; as idiomatic symbols of Hinduism.

Symbols are unique expressions of human communication. It is the highest form of creative and artistic expression of the human imagination. Through these unique forms of expression, humans have been able to capture divinity and provide the world with unique meanings, forms, identities and philosophies. It has the most tremendous power in capturing the identities of invisible gods, which has simplified the representation of the concept of God to humanity. Symbols have special meaning, position and relevance in human life and are part of human psychology and culture. Symbols have a unique history because they have been popular for as long as humans have existed in the world. To best capture human thoughts and expressions, these symbols are the best form of association and connection and create bonds between members of society.

**Swastika**, the most popular and unique representation in Hindu mythology, achieves uniqueness and glory by creating a design. In essence, this design will be able to attract divine, magical and mystical powers to bring glory and joy to human life. Swastika, by its nature, attracts cosmic energies and resourceful forms and provides a lot of positive energy to human life and existence.

The earliest descriptions and manifestations of these symbols are found in the Valmiki Ramayana and Tantric literature. The four arms of the Swastika connected to the four Vedas, four varnas, four ashrams, four lokas and four deities have a deeper meaning, and it is a personification that has a lot of meanings and connections to be made. It also depicts a four-petaled lotus in which Lord Ganapathy sits in contrast Goddess Saraswati sits on the Lotus, which is a symbol of completeness, and the white Lotus symbolizes purity in its most entire form that exists.

**Sankha** is another symbol used in Vedic chants, prayers and rituals to indicate the beginning of all auspicious and auspicious activities. At the most auspicious times and in the most auspicious places, the sanctuary of the gods and existence is rung to mark the beginning of all activity. Lord Vishnu is said to have Sankha in one hand and Chakra in the other. It clearly states that I am the sole factor responsible for initiating all activities and that I am also the destroyer designated by the Chakra. Thus, signs of good and destructive elements are equally present in God. When everything is combined correctly, balance is established. The human form strives to achieve this balance and perfection by being happy in life.

In the Mahabharata, different types of Sankha are used by different warriors on the battlefield; they have their meanings. Krishna uses one, Arjuna uses another, and Duryodhana uses the other. Each form of Sankha is a catalytic agent that brings about results based on one's abilities and efforts, achievements or success. It is one of the few symbols that aim to increase human energy levels and motivate individuals towards happiness and perfection in life.

**AUM** in Hindu mythology is the most pronounced divine sound symbol. All Vedic mantras are products of this monosyllable, which is believed to have existed before the creation of the world. Therefore, AUM is considered the ultimate mantra in Hindu scriptures. The Katha Upanishad has explained the essential nature of the supreme mantra. He said that the aim which all the Vedas declare, the aim towards which all asceticism is aimed, and man desires to live a continuous life. This syllable AUM is indeed Brahman. The person who knows this syllable will achieve everything he desires. To understand the meaning, purpose and mysticism of AUM, we must deepen it philosophically. AUM is considered eternal happiness and truly represents God. Manduka Upanishad has explained precisely the inner meaning of this AUM-Nada Brahman. He said that AUM is the bow; one's self is the arrow; the Brahman, it is said, the target. One should shoot with all attention, and like the arrow, he

will become one with it. The entire Vedas emphasis on the sound AUM, which has an inseparable name and form, is the cause of creation and has a scientific definition of everything that speech of humans can express.

**Kalash and Deepa** are the essential elements that will bring harmony, peace, wealth and happiness to our lives. All the best and fairest things in human life are brought by these two things. Kalash has the ability to hold mystical power and aura for a considerable period of time, which is also found in all Hindu temples. Kalash is a copper jar with a large base and tiny mouth that is considered an auspicious sign in Hinduism. The origin of Kalash is the subject of many legends. Asuras and Devas churned the ocean to discover Amrit, the elixir of life, in the Samundra Manthan. They eventually got Amrit in a Kalash at the end of the procedure. As a result of containing Amrit, Kalash became a symbol of immortality. In essence, Deepa increases the duration of good things, peace and harmony in one's life and existence. Deepa drives away darkness from our lives and brings new light.

**Yantra** is a basic design; it brings auspicious power and most importantly, wealth to the family and owner. It is a design with lines and structures that can attract subtle forms of energy that bring wealth and monetary prosperity. It is also a particular form of sadhana to attain special and mystical powers. These are special tools used for mental concentration and meditation to achieve higher areas in life. Yantra is a design, designed to attract special powers and prosperity, while mantras are said to provide special benefits and prayers. In essence, Yantras are designed to create auras that can bring about divine presence, energy, and form.

**Nataraja** is a combination of art and science. In God's endless dance of creation, preservation, destruction, and synthetic grace lies a profound understanding of our world. Nataraja has four arms. The top right- hand holds the drum from which creativity is born. The lower right- hand is raised in blessing, indicating preservation. The upper left- hand holds the fire of demolition, the dissolution of form. The right leg symbolizes; hidden grace, standing on Apasmarapurusha, a soul temporarily bound to earth by its laziness, un-sureness and forgetfulness. The raised left leg shows grace, helping to free the mature soul from bondage. The lower left-hand points towards the sacred feet assuring that Shiva's grace are the refuge for everyone, a path to liberation. The circle of fire represents the universe and especially consciousness. The looming figure above is Mahakala, "the great moment." The snake around Nataraja's waist is Kundalini Shakti, the universal power that propels the soul that

exists within each person. Nataraja's dance is more than just a symbol. This is happening within each of us, at the atomic level, right now. "The birth of the world, its maintenance, its destruction, the obscuration and liberation of the soul are the five acts of its dance," Agamas declared.

**The Lotus Flower** is one of the most popular symbols in the Hindu religion. Lord Brahma is said to have been born from the navel of Lord Vishnu, sitting on a lotus flower. Goddess Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning, is depicted sitting on a lotus. The lotus is a symbol of eternity, abundance and good fortune and Goddess Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, is often depicted with a lotus flower. The symbolism of the lotus is mentioned in the 5th chapter of Lord Krishna's Bhagavad Gita:

*One who does all work as an offering to the Lord, abandoning attachment to the results, is as untouched by sin (or Karmic reaction) as a lotus leaf is untouched by water (5.10). Thus, Lotus is a symbol of purity and enlightenment amid ignorance (the smutty swamps in which it grows).*

He who does all his work as an offering to the Lord, abandoning attachment to the result, will be as free from sin (or karmic reaction) as a lotus leaf from water. Therefore, the Lotus is a symbol of purity and illumination in the midst of ignorance. So, we can see that there are many different symbols and shapes carry unique meanings and expressions that bring added value and success to our lives.

**Tilak** is a mark made on the body, usually on the forehead but sometimes on other parts of the body like the lower end of the neck, chest or arms. The art of making patterns on the forehead is very ancient and dates back to the Aryans. Over time, this custom became a ritual among Hindus and grew in scale and diversity as each Shiva and Vaishnava sect. This practice continued through the ages, and the tilak remains a symbol of all Hindus. Shaivites make three horizontal lines on their foreheads. These lines are called Tripaundra. Some use Bhasm or Vibhuti on their foreheads. Sometimes, the midline is also marked with a red dot in the middle, symbolizing the Lord Shiva's third eye. These three lines described the three Gunas: Rajas, Tamas and Sattva. Viashnavas often apply tilak using sandalwood, clay or a mixture of both in a vertical line, connecting near the upper part of the nose to form a 'U' shape called Urdhvapundra. This sign includes both physical and spiritual reality. Material reality is represented by the colour red, the colour of life-sustaining blood as it flows through the veins. Spiritual reality is represented by white, the colour of bones that sustain life with

stillness. The red line in the middle and the adjacent white lines point upward, indicating growth. In other words, Vishnu is the deity who honours infinite growth, both materially and spiritually. Devi's Shakta worshipers use Kumkum to draw a red vertical line or place a red dot as a symbol of her divine energy or power. Tilak is made on the forehead, between the eyebrows, where the Ajna chakra is located, Ajna means awareness. The Ajna Chakra is considered the intuitive eye through which a person can perceive information that may otherwise be absent.

**Sacred Animals** play an important role in Hindu mythology. Usually, they serve as “Vahanas” or vehicles of such deities.

**Elephant:** The elephant named Airavata is Indra's Vahan. The elephant in Hindu mythology is considered Gaja, meaning God. The word Ga means the goal to be achieved, and Jay means the origin or birthplace of the universe. It signifies the royal mount and power.

**Bull or Nandi:** Nandi is the bull that Shiva rides. It represents masculinity and strength. In Hinduism, Bull symbolizes positive and negative qualities; on the positive side they symbolize masculinity and fighting spirit. Negatively, they symbolize darkness, raw power, anger and aggression.

**The cow** symbolizes wealth, maternal sacrifice, purity and goodness. Lord Krishna grew up in a cowherd family and personally took care of cows. Hindus worship cows as mother goddesses. In Hindu religious texts, the cow has been associated with Aditi, the mother of all gods. Gods do not use cows as a vahan but only as a source of goodness and prosperity.

**Lions and tigers** are symbols of royalty, strength and ferocity. The lion is the vehicle of many Goddesses (Shaktis). The lion also symbolizes in all ancient civilizations the solar principle, the light of life and knowledge.

Mythology is very important for humanity as it answers many religious questions and also distinguishes between what is good and what is bad. Sacred symbols help to understand the religious myths. Hindu scriptures are filled with metaphors that contain deep philosophical truths, expressed in symbols, and immediately accessible to ordinary individuals. This study will provide new meanings, ideas and interpretations of the gods, especially in their representation through symbols. New creation knowledge will be added to

Hindu mythology. Since mythology is a part of culture, it is important to society. This will motivate the younger generation to read the original mythology.

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