

Yajña Upakaraṇas

Upakaraṇa means “equipment, tool, implement, device, apparatus, appliance, paraphernalia, helping, assisting, preparation.” So yajña upakaraṇas means any implements used in the performance of Yajña ceremonies, including the homa kuṇḍa (fire altar), bowls and cups for holding offering, spoons and other implements for placing offerings into the fire, fans for fanning the fire and other such implements. They are also referred to as yajñāyudhas: āyudha meaning “implement, weapon, or device.”

Yajñaśālā

The place where the ceremony is conducted is called a yajñaśālā or “hall of the sacrifice.” For larger Vedic and modern Āgamic ceremonies like temple consecrations, yajñaśālā are temporary structures. They tend to be open air pavilions, or Temples in the West will often use large tents which can be put up for the ceremony. For regular offerings, simple structures are maintained. Some shelter is useful, if not necessary for yajña ceremonies to provide shelter from the hot Sun and rain which is caused by the rituals. Shelters also provide protection from winds which can blow out the fire or blow it around which is dangerous. Sometimes ceremonies are done inside buildings with proper ventilation (like chimneys or exhaust fans) or on a very small scale. In the traditional Vedic and Āgamic rituals, temporary structures are built from wood like covered pavilions with high roofs. In the Vedic ceremonies, the pavilions are burn at the conclusion of the ceremonies as a final offering to the sacred fire. The design of traditional yajñaśālās has been covered already a little in the previous section and suggestions for creating spaces to perform yajñas will be covered in detail in the following sections. Fire codes in the Western countries make doing indoor fires more difficult.

Homa Kuṇḍa

The Homa Kuṇḍa is the fire altar into which fire is placed and offerings made. Kuṇḍa means “a pit, a well, a bowl, a container, a pot, or a basin.” In certain cases small homams are performed on a sthaṇḍila, an open piece of clear ground which may or may not be raised slightly. This method does not provide as much protection from the flames and burning particles which may shoot out of the fire, and it does not have the same ability to amplify or project the spiritual energy. In a pinch, however, homam can be performed on a clear piece of flat Earth. Homa kuṇḍas may be simple or elaborate. They tend to have raised sides constructed with three equal sized steps made of fire proof brick or clay. Kuṇḍas with raised sides and no steps are also common, though the step design is preferable if possible because it helps amplify and project the healing energy to the surrounding area. The three steps relate to Brahma Vishnu and Shiva. They help ensure that the offerings reach and assist beings in the three realms (physical, astral, and causal). They tend also to be dug under the ground. In this case, the depth under the ground may commonly be twice the height of the Kuṇḍa. The depth under the ground can also be deeper to accommodate very large amounts of offerings. I have seen them as deep as 11 feet under the ground. This allows for bigger fires to be created. They are often created with one portion raised to hold a bowl for offering ghee which is kept toward the West (or the opposite

side from the direction a person will face to make offerings into the fire). This raised portion is called a Yoni and is said to relate to the Goddess. If this raised portion is toward the West a person may sit facing East which is most common and generally best for all good purposes. The opening of the Homa Kuṇḍa is referred to as the mukha or mouth. For home use, sometimes fires are constructed in metal containers which may mimic the pyramid shape of the larger stepped alters. Some are also shaped like inverted pyramids. The pyramid shape is excellent to amplify and project energies which is why Temple towers also have this form. Sometimes priests will conduct rituals in people's homes in disposable aluminum pans for baking. This is not ideal technically or energetically. In earlier times bricks would be fired in hand-made molds according to certain complex specifications. Any specific size was possible. In modern times, the size of Homa Kuṇḍa is often influenced by the standard size of commercially available bricks and blocks.



Homakuṇḍas are made in various shapes and the tantras and Āgamas describe the energetic effects of different shaped kuṇḍas. Square is most common and generally best for all purposes. The Vedic altars are constructed in specific shapes. The gārhapatya is circular, the āvahanīya square, and the dakṣiṇāgni a half circle. More complex altars are made for elaborate Vedic rituals to precise geometric specifications in the shape of falcons and tortoises and other designs. Āgamic yajñaśālā for Temple consecrations usually have a variety of different shaped kuṇḍas. This helps to generate a well rounded energy capable of fulfilling all the various spiritual needs of the Temple devotees. We can select the best shape Kuṇḍa for a particular yajña with knowledge of the energy of the different shapes, or we can use our intuition to guide us, or a square is easy to construct and suitable for all purposes. When in doubt, using a square shape is suitable for all purposes. Circle shape is also fairly universal.

The Effects of Different Shapes of Homa Kuṇḍa

- 1) **Vṛtta (Circular)** - Peace and public welfare, keeping enemies and negative energies

away.

- 2) **Caturaśra (Square)** - To accomplish work and gain siddhis, to pacify negative planetary energies, to cure disease, for peace, for all purposes, For all Gods
- 3) **Ardhacandra (Half Circle)** - General welfare, peace, happiness, family harmony.
Sometimes used to control others or to grant siddhis. Sacred to the ancestors
- 4) **Trikona (Triangle)** - Victory over enemies (shaped like arrow), transformation, release, also sometimes used for attraction and control.
- 5) **Yoni (Heart Shaped)** - Sacred to the Goddess, Manifesting one's desires, attaining love and progeny, treating diseases of women. There are also some "yoni"-shaped kundas, shaped like an American football which are used in tantric worship of the Goddess
- 6) **Viṣama Pañcāśra (5 pointed Star)** - Winning over seen and unseen enemies.
Grounding.
- 7) **Ṣaṭkona (Six pointed Star)** - Sacred to Murugan and Sudarśana, energizing, quick results, victory over enemies, and spiritual awakening.
- 8) **Padma (Lotus)** - Sacred to Lakṣmī and Sarasvati, wealth, knowledge, health, peace, rain, protection from negative energies. Adds auspiciousness. Fulfills all desires.
- 9) **Pañcāśra (Pentagon)** - Protection from enemies. Grounding.
- 10) **Ṣaḍaśra (Hexagon)** - Ucchedana (destruction) and māraṇa (killing) - used to invoke and establish deities, prevent an event or to paralyze or stop an attack.
- 11) **Saptāśra (Septagon)** - Bhūta doṣa śānti (exorcisms and treating mental disorders) brings higher awareness.
- 12) **Aṣṭāśra (Octagon)** - Good health - vāstu śānti - Lakshmi and Bhairava



Size of Homa Kuṇḍa

Traditionally, the Kuṇḍa is designed in accordance with the size of the body of the yajamāna. The Vedic fire hall was also laid out according to precise geometric specifications. Traditional measurements were based upon parts of the body and include aṅgulas and hastas. An aṅgulas is the breadth of the thumb, called aṅguṣṭha in Sanskrit. This is roughly equivalent to 1.763 centimeters (0.69 inches) or the measure of 8 barleycorns. A hasta is the span from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. This is the same as 24 aṅgulas (or about 45 centimeters or 18 inches). A hasta is called a cubit in English. A vitasti (a span) is 12 aṅgulas, or about 21 centimeters (or 8 inches). There are many other measurements based upon these.

Certain Purāṇas and Tantras recommend that a homa Kuṇḍa be made corresponding to the amount of offerings being made. With offerings of ghee alone, this is not an important consideration. When offering sāmagrī, herbs, flowers, or especially fruits or liquids like milk or yogurt, this becomes a very important consideration. Too many offerings placed into a fire which is too small will not allow proper circulation of air to keep the fire burning and will tend to smother the fire. Liquids will obviously put out the fire when liquid substances like milk or water-containing substances like fresh fruits, cooked foods, flowers, or herbs. A typical amount

of sāmagrī to offer is what can be grabbed easily with the thumb, index and middle finger. Sometimes larger quantities of offerings are made to achieve a greater impact. In this case herbs may be offered by the handful or plate full. My Guru, Shridhar Guruji from Hyderabad, performs huge yajna rituals where hundreds of large plates full of herbs and garlands and fruits and grains are offered into the fire. These ceremonies are extremely powerful due to the large amount of offerings made. He uses extremely large homa kuṇḍas, some as large as 12 feet in diameter, 6 feet above the ground, and 20 feet below the ground. Massive amounts of fire wood are placed into the kuṇḍa through the course of the day of the yajna to facilitate such large amounts of offerings. He uses specially carved spoons which are extra long for adding ghee to the fire and often has to shield himself with a wet cloth over his chest from the massive and scorchingly hot fire.

When there is a larger number of people making offerings into the fire also, it becomes important to ensure that the fire is sufficiently large to accommodate the offerings of many people. 1 person can make a hundred offerings, or 10 people could make 10 offerings. The total number of offerings is the same, but the time is 1/10th. In other words, ten people will make the same amount of offerings into the fire in ten minutes that one person could make in over an hour and a half. Several people offering pinches of sāmagrī can quickly smother even a large fire, especially if the mantras being used are short and lots of ghee is not added to the fire. For groups of people making offerings into the fire, typically the Homa Kuṇḍa should be no smaller than a three foot diameter. It is useful to encourage people to offer very small amounts with each offering and to have one person in charge of adding ghee as needed, and another in charge of replenishing wood. For larger amounts of offerings, the fire should obviously be larger.

Size of Homa Kuṇḍa According to Bhaviṣya Purāṇa

50-99 offerings = 21 aṅgulas (about 37 cm / 14.5 in)

100-999 offerings = 1 hasta (42 cm / 16.5 in)

10,000-99,999 = 2 hastas (84 cm / 33 in)

100,000-999,999 = 4 hastas (168 cm / 5.5 ft)

1,000,000-9,999,999 = 6 hasta (252 cm / 8.25 ft)

10,000,000 or greater = 8 hasta (336 cm / 11 ft)

For ideal results, we should measure not in inches or centimeters, but by one's own body. It may be necessary if using standard sized building materials like bricks to approximate or to cut them to size with a masonry saw. Of course we always have to consider the type and amount of offerings, the number of people making the offerings and the duration of the ritual to select the appropriate size for a Homa Kuṇḍa. It is typically better to err to the excess because a larger Kuṇḍa can accommodate a smaller fire and amount of offerings but not vice versa. It should be noted that larger Kuṇḍas create very hot fires and require a large quantity of fuel in the form of seasoned firewood. More details will be given on materials and construction for homakundas in the section on setting up a place for yajna in your space.

Sthaṇḍilas



Sthaṇḍila

In certain cases, homam is performed on a sthaṇḍila, instead of a homakuṇḍa. A sthaṇḍila is a leveled piece of bare Earth. It could also be a slightly raised platform. Ideally, the ground will be leveled and cleared of plants and rocks. This allows for a stable base for safe construction of the fire. Whenever a homakuṇḍa is not available, especially for smaller ceremonies, it is possible to use a sthaṇḍila instead. This setup has the disadvantage that there is no wall to protect people from the heat of the fire or to shield from flaming pieces of wood or offerings from popping out at the people. It is acceptable whenever a homa needs to be performed in a place one time and there is no kuṇḍa, or for whatever other reasons it may not be feasible to construct a proper homa kuṇḍa.

Yajña Upakaraṇas



A collection of Vedic Yajña Upakaraṇas

The Vedas prescribe an enormous amount of different utensils used for Vedic yajña rituals. They must be made from very specific materials (like wood from particular trees) and designed according to precise and rigid specifications. The utensils, like the yajñaśālā, were designed in relation to the size of the body of the yajamāna. The construction of Vedic yajña implements discovered in ancient archeological sites demonstrates an extremely advanced knowledge of mathematics, geometry, and metallurgy. The vast range of Vedic Yajña Upakaraṇas is outlined briefly below.

Ladles and Spoons

Various ladles and spoons are essential for the performance of Yajña. They serve to convey ghee into the fire and are used also to offer liquids to the fire, like milk offered in the agnihotra. Some form of spoon is crucial to the successful performance of Yajña. The offering of ghee is essential to keep the fire going in order to consume the offerings made. In Vedic times there were dozens if not hundreds of different spoons of different shapes and sizes, each with very specific names and purposes. These were typically carved from specifically prescribed woods.

In modern practice, there are also many variations. They are not typically known by precise names or made to specific specifications. Most rituals employ one or two for offerings. These may be made from wood or metal. Wooden versions are often turned on a lathe or carved with certain stylistic embellishments. Wood has the disadvantage that it can burn if care is not taken. Metal has the disadvantage that it can become very hot as it is used.

Sruk and Sruva

These are the two basic spoons used in Yajña rituals. They are still used today in various forms and are seen in nearly every homa ritual. The sruk is a larger ladle used for special offerings and conveying large amounts of ghee when required. The sruva is a long handled spoon used for making regular offerings of ghee to the fire throughout the ritual.



Two sets of sruk and sruva

Sruk Is a large ladle with a yoni shaped bowl with a lip for pouring liquids used for pouring large amounts of ghee. This is said to relate to śakti or prakṛti, the Divine feminine. The Sruk can be used periodically to add large amounts of ghee when needed to keep the fire burning. It is used specifically for certain rituals like pūrṇāhuti, and vasordhārā. There are several implements used in Vedic rituals with a similar design, a few of which are described below as “Sruk-type ladles.” Traditionally the sruva is made to be either 12, 24, or 36 angulas (the breadth of one’s thumb). It is also common to make this ladle the length of a hasta (from the tip of one’s elbow to the tip of the middle finger). It is made from palāśa wood (*Butea monosperma*). Its bowl or puṣkara is large and yoni shaped with a lip or beak at the tip shaped like an elephant’s lips or swan’s beak (called prasecana). The tail end is shaped like a crow’s tail (vāyasa puccha). In modern practice, there are versions which contain a deep bowl at the end and a mouth often decorated with a lion, tortoise, bull, eagle or Ganesha for pouring liquid.



Sruks in different styles

Sruva Typically slightly smaller than the Sruk. The Sruva is a long spoon used for making offerings with every mantra saying svāhā. It is traditionally 24 angulas or 1 hasta in length and its small bowl (puṣkara) should not be larger than the tip of one's thumb. The bowl is divided into two portions representing the iḍā and piṅgala. It is traditionally made from khādira wood (Acacia catechu). There are various distinct sruva-type spoons prescribed for use in Vedic rituals. Obviously there are variations for different purposes and larger spoons for larger fires. The Sruva is said to relate to śiva or puruṣa, the Divine masculine.



Sruvas

Vasordhārā - means literally “flow of wealth.” It is a ladle designed for pouring a continuous flow of ghee into the fire. It is used in a ritual also called vasordhārā, which is a part of the agnicayana, in which ghee is poured in a steady stream into the fire along with Vedic mantras. This ritual is still a part of elaborate Yajña rituals today, conducted after the pūrṇāhuti (the final offering). Its design usually includes two bowls at each end. One for receiving ghee pouring into it and one for collecting ghee to be poured from its tip. Modern Vasordhārās typically include a design of nadi, kurma, simha, garuda, or Ganpati at the tip from which liquids pour out. Traditionally, the Vasordhārā was made from audumbara wood (Ficus racemosa). Today they are made from wood or metal. Wood versions require pouring of milk over the tip to prevent them from burning during the ritual. Metal versions get very hot and may need to be held with a cloth. The continuous stream of ghee helps to ensure the fire consumes all the offerings. It represents a continuous flow of mindful awareness that helps to assimilate the spiritual experience arising from practice. Larger Vasordhārās require the assistance of at least two other people and require implements to help position them for use. For smaller rituals, a steady stream of ghee may be poured using a sruk.



Vasordhara



Offering a stream of ghee with the vasordhara

Sruk-type Ladles with yoni shaped bowl ending with a lip include **upayamanī**, **upabhṛt** (aśvattha wood), **juhū** (palāśa wood), **pracaraṇī**, **agnihotrahavaṇī**. These had specific designs, woods, and proportions which vary according to the different Vedic texts a person followed.



Upabhṛt as per Āpastamba and Bodhayana



upayamanī



जुहू (कात्यायनीया)

Juhū (as per kaत्याayana)



Juha 93
KT

juhū



Agnihotra Samiti TN
Munni Tred.

agnihotrahavaṇī



upayamānī

Sruva-type spoons with small, lipless bowl include **darvī**, **dhruva** (vikaṅkata wood), **sruvi**, **vitasti**, **tragbila**. Like the Sruk-type implements, these were designed according to strict specifications laid out by the Vedic texts.



darvī



Dhruva

Pariplava (Pariplupātra and antardhāna)- A handleless spoon used for drawing the soma.



Pariplu



Pariplava, inside droṇakalaśa, both on top of grāvāṇa

Grahaṇī - Spoon used to hold butter or buttermilk

Prāśaka - A ladle with a large bowl for decanting.

vasahomahavanī - a sruk type ladle used in offering fat in vasahoma



Rauhiṇa-havaṇī - A pair of spoons used for offering the Rauhiṇa cakes



Aniṣṭubdha sruk - There are also aniṣṭubdha, or un-hollowed ladles



Ākarṣa phalaka - is a special ladle shaped like a bow with a cup shaped like a cobra's hood, used for offering sesame in the upaakarma ceremony.

Vessels

Praṇīta and Prokṣaṇī pātras

These are the two main vessels for holding water for use in Vedic rituals. The praṇīta pātra holds sacred water established for use in Yajña, From this the prokṣaṇī pātra is filled and used

to sprinkle water for purification. They are still used today in very formal Yajña rituals. The Vedic implements were carved from wood. In modern rituals these are often replaced with *kalaśa* and *pañcapātra*. These Vedic implements are echoed in tantric rituals by the *sāmānya arghya* and *viśeṣa arghya* of tantric rituals as in *Navāvaraṇa pūjā* for the Goddess.



Prokṣaṇī (above) and Praṇīta (below)

Praṇīta pātra - rectangular shaped vessel for holding consecrated water. It should be 3 by 4 by 6 angulas in size and made from ashvattha wood (*Ficus religiosa*) or nyagrodha wood (Banyan / *Ficus benghalensis*). Water from it is mixed with flour to make *puroḍāśa* cakes. It may also be used to store soma.



There is also a **sakṣīra praṇītā**, a vessel like the praṇītā with two compartments of different sizes, filled with milk and water for the *cāturmāśya caru* offerings to the sons of Lord Rudra.

Prokṣaṇī pātra - yoni shaped vessel for sprinkling purified water for purifying various implements. The act of sprinkling (aspersion) is called prokṣaṇam. It is used for pouring water around the fire during the kuśaṇḍikā rites (preliminary rituals at the beginning of homam). It has a depression the shape of a lotus leaf (padma patrākṛti) or lotus bud (kamalā mukulākṛti). It is 12 angulas in length.



droṇakalaśa - a large wooden vessel used for holding the strained soma juice. A strainer is placed over the top. It is usually square or circular shaped with a handle.



droṇakalaśa

Grahas (pātras) - 10 wooden cups of five types for holding the , usually in hourglass shape 1) śukra- graha, 2) manthi-graha, 3) upāṁśu-graha, 4) urdhva-graha, and 5) ṛtu-graha.



Putabhṛt - clay trough to hold the prepared Soma juice

camasa - These are wooden cups with handles for offering and drinking the Soma juice, ten in number 1) **acchāvāka camasa** 2) **udgāṭṛ camasa** 3) **neṣṭṛ camasa** 4) **potṛ camasa** 5) **praśāstr camasa** 6) **brahma camasa** 7) **brāhmaṇacchaṁsi camasa** 8) **yajamāna camasa** 9) **sadasya camasa** 10) **hotṛ camasa**



All ten camasa cups



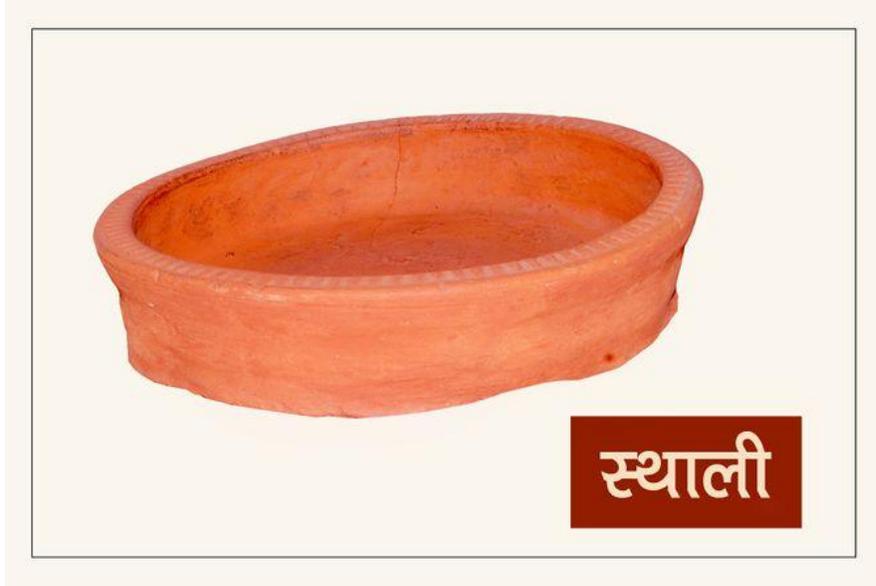
Potri camasa



Sadasya camasa

sthālīs - these are bowls of various designs and uses. Examples include: **agnihotra-sthālī** is a wide circular bowl with straight edges used for catching the milk when milking the cow

ājya-sthālī (**sarpirdhāna**) as its name implies is a bowl used for holding ghee **caru-sthālī** is used for boiling the caru porridge **dhruva-sthālī** and **āgrayana-sthālī** a vessel to receive the strained soma juice



sthālī



Āgrayana-sthālī

Śarāva - an earthen dish for holding water to sprinkle a new mother

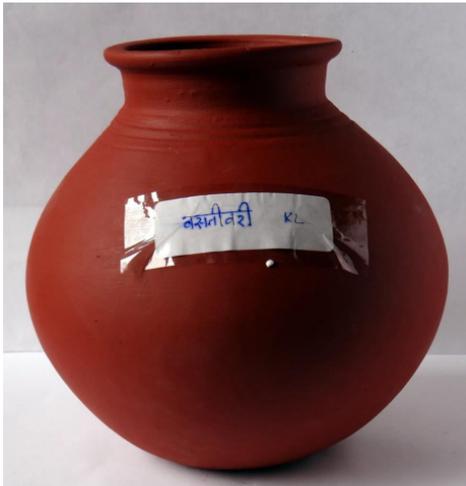
Pinvana - two vessels for milk

Aindra-vāyavyam - a wooden cup for drawing soma for Indra and Vayu



Aindra-vāyavyam

Vasatīvarī kalaśa - a clay vessel used for collecting water from a stream coming out of a hill the day before pressing the Soma



Vasatīvarī kalaśa

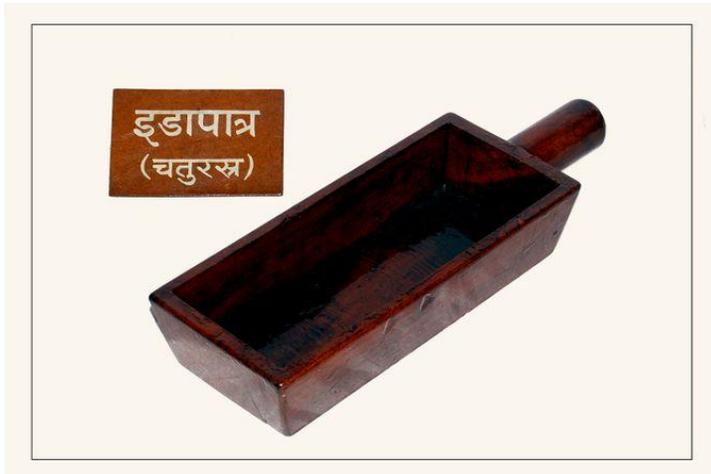
Idāpātra and praṇītāpraṇayana - deep oblong container with a flat rim to hold ghee



Idāpātri



Idāpātri



Idāpātra (caturasra / square)

Nināhya - Earthen pot buried in the ground to keep its contents cool

Kumbha kumbhi - clay pots for various purposes. Kumbha is male. The female Kumbhi has bulges like female breasts.

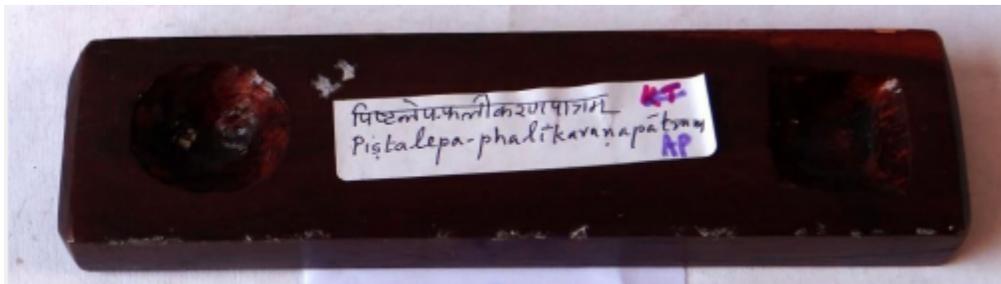


Kumbha



kumbhi

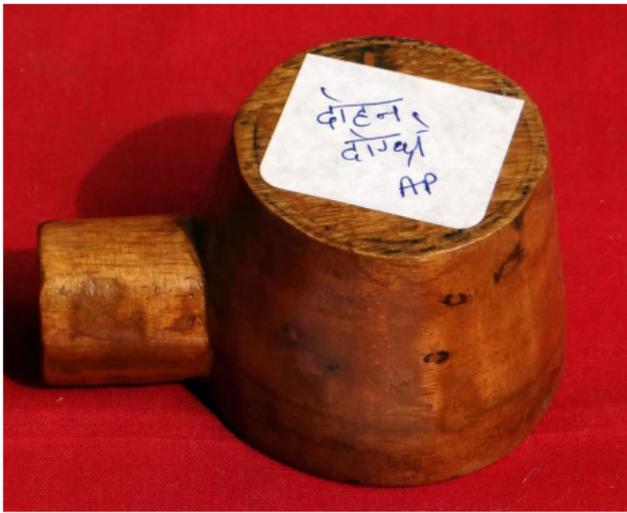
Piṣṭalepa-phalīkavaṇa-pātra - a wooden vessel used for offering the remaining flour sticking to the vessel after making cakes (**Piṣṭalepa pātra**) or for offering the chaff of husked grains (**phalīkavaṇa pātra**).



Purodāśapātrī - a wooden vessel for holding the puridasha cakes



Dohana-dogdhre - wooden pails with wooden or metal lids for collecting milk when milking a cow



Ādhavanīya - is an earthen vessel in which the wet pounded Soma stalks are placed and stirred before juice is extracted **sambharaṇī** - is the name for a wooden vessel for collecting the wet pounded Soma stalks



Ādhavanīya

Antaryāma - a wooden vessel used for drawing the Soma juice while retaining the breath



Tools for Measuring and Preparing the Ground

Sphya - sword shaped implement made from khādira wood (Acacia catechu) which is 12 or 24 angulas in length. used for cutting the darbha grass - marking the area of the altar and leveling the ground, it is used for drawing the lines during rekha kriya (drawing lines where the fire will be lit).

