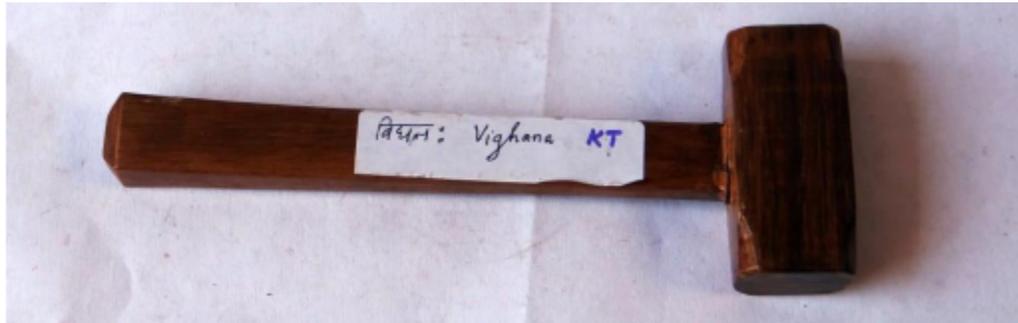


Śamyā - a wooden peg shaped like a mace (or an un-hollowed sruva), which is a measuring device used along with the sphyra -



Vighana - a club or mallet used for breaking up lumps of Earth



Abhriḥ - a wooden spade used for digging holes and constructing altars



Implements for Crushing

ulūkhala - wooden mortar and **musala** pestle - used to pound grains and to crush other items



dṛṣad and **upala** or **grāvāṇa** - large stone slab and long cylindrical mill stone used for grinding the soma creeper



Adhiṣavaṇa-palake - two wooden pressing boards used to help press the juice from the Soma stalks



Strainers

Daśāpāvitra - a woolen strainer for straining the pressed Soma juice.



Karotara - another form of strainer

Ovens and Cooking Implements

Kapāla (plural **kapālāni**)- clay potsherds or saucers used for baking puroDaasha cakes of rice flour and water for offering



Rauhiṇa-kapāle - a pair of animal-shaped potsherds for the rauhina cakes



Mahāvīra (aka gharma) - a round clay vessel with a wide mouth which is heated intensely in the pravargya offering to boil the ghee - in this ritual there is one main and two secondary pots kept and polished with the new garments of a bride.



Two styles of Mahāvīra

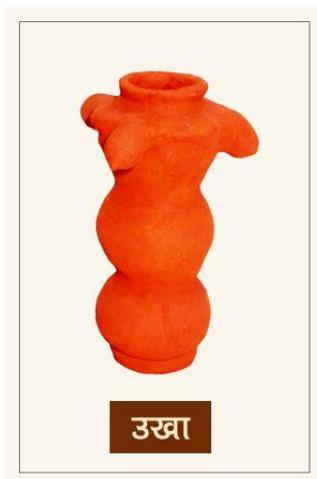
Cullī - a clay oven for baking

Kuplu and bhrāṣṭra - another clay oven

Mekṣaṇa - a wooden rod used for stirring Flour in boiling water for making the purodasha cakes also used for dividing the caru.



Ukhā - an earthen caldron for cooking. Meat for offering is cooked in the caldron.



Two styles of Ukhā

Śūla - metal skewers for cooking solid foods over the fire - organs of the animal are roasted for example.

Fire Utensils

Araṇis - for churning the fire, and other implements to start the fire have been addressed in detail already.



Upaveṣa or Dhṛṣṭi - Stick which is used to stir the fire when necessary, the tip of which is shaped like an extended palm (hastākṛti) or a flat square shape. It should be 12 or 24 angulas and made from palāśa wood (Butea monosperma). It is used to move burning wood when it falls out of place, and used for moving burning embers for various ritual purposes. These were two in number and held by the adhvaryu and the pratiprasthaastri.





Dhavitra - Is a fan used for fanning the fire. Though some Vedic rituals allow blowing the fire through a special long hollow tube, generally it is considered inappropriate to blow on the sacred fire because spit, which is impure, may get into the sacred fire. It is considered a sign of disrespect to blow on a sacred fire. It is considered appropriate however to fan the fire to increase oxygen flow and help the fire to burn. Specific techniques to help the fire burn are addressed in the next section. The fire is typically fanned with mantras of Vāyu (air or wind). In Vedic times, a fan called a dhavitra was used which was made from black antelope skin attached to a bamboo stick.



Sata - two large vessels for carrying embers

Parīśāsa - tongs to lift the gharma from the fire

Śapha (plural Śaphau) - a pair of tongs made from udumbara wood shaped like claws, designed to hold the Mahāvīra vessel.



Śaphau and Mahāvīra

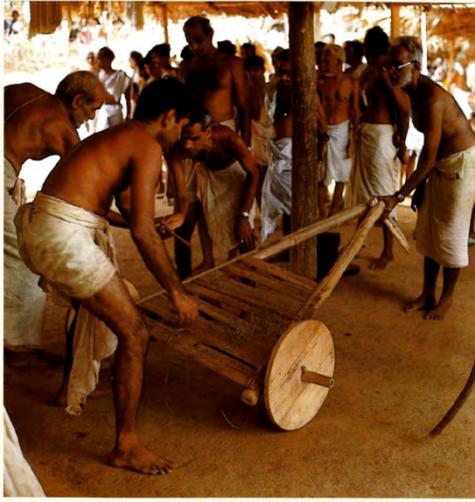


Pravargya ritual

Seats / Pedestals

kr̥ṣṇājina - black antelope skin used for the priests to sit on and for mortar and pestle to be placed on. It is used in the consecration of the yajamaana in the Soma yajna.

Āsandī / rājāsandī - a raised pedestal which is used as a throne for the Soma stalks. After Soma is purchased as a part of the ritual by the Udgaatri Priest, it is transported on a special cart.



Kūrca - is the name for a bundle of the sacred darbha grass. There is a wooden, elongated fish-shaped platform which is used for placing the sacrificial ladles and other implements when not in use. It may be shaped like a kurma (tortoise) or makara (dolphin). It is kept to the West side of the Aahavaniya fire. When the Kūrca is not available, darbha grass may be strewn on the ground and implements placed upon it.



Miscellaneous Implements

Śūrpa - winnowing basket for cleaning grains before grinding



Yūpa - is the name for the sacrificial post to which the animal intended for sacrifice is bound with rope.



Kumbakuriram - a head ornament / hair net for the yajamāna's wife made from cane and wool from a living animal, worn during dīkṣā



Ratha cakra - a spoked chariot wheel is used in several Vedic rites. It is used in the Agni Aadhaana rite and the vaajapeya rite.



Asida - an iron sickle used for cutting the darbha grass and other items for offering



Necessary Implements

Besides a **homa kuṇḍa** or **sthaṇḍila** it is necessary to have at least one spoon which can be wood or metal. It is useful to have two two spoons like a **Sruk** and **Sruva**, one for making regular offerings of ghee to the fire and one for pouring larger amounts of ghee when required. For those who know the Veda mantras and wish to perform the Vasordhārā ritual, it could be useful to have a **Vasordhārā** of some sort, though this is not strictly necessary, because a sruk can be used for this purpose also. A magnifying glass, or camphor and matches or a **lighter** to start the fire are needed to replace the traditional Araṇis. Because we should not blow directly on the fire, some form of **fan** to fan the fire is useful to get or to keep the fire burning to replace the traditional antelope skin dhavitra. This could be an actual fan or any fan-like item (like a metal plate). Ideally, every item used would be reserved for use for its specific purpose in homam alone. In addition to this, **bowls, cups, and plates** are required for holding the offerings.

Materials for Yajna Implements

Certain materials are more suitable for use in prayer ceremonies. Items made from natural substances are good, because natural substances do not hold a lot of human energy and therefore do not oppose the spiritual energy of the rituals. These can be woven baskets, bowls or plates, or vessels carved from wood or stone or made from metal. Vessels made from grass or bamboo or lotus leaves or other natural materials are acceptable. These natural materials can be returned to the Earth after use which is a beautiful practice. Special plates and bowls are made in India from leaves and grasses. Vessels made from glass or stone or gemstones are also permissible. We should consider the energy that may be invested into such items by those

who make them and ideally select items made by spiritual people if possible. This is less important for long lasting materials like wood or metal or stone or glass and more important for disposable items like woven baskets or plates made from leaves. Long lasting materials can be purified before use and used again and again in rituals to build up a spiritual energy of their own which actually adds to the power of the ritual. Materials like metal and stone are best for holding spiritual energy. Some gemstones actually amplify spiritual energy or help to establish specific energies. Of the metals gold is best for holding spiritual energy and it is also very supportive to the opening of channels into the spiritual realms for the Devas to assist with our offerings. Gold is very expensive though. Silver is second best followed by panchaloha (a five-metal alloy of gold, silver, copper, zinc, and iron), bell metal (or bronze), brass, and copper. Metals like tin, aluminum, and steel are not as good for holding spiritual energies. Lead is toxic and therefore is not a good choice. Iron also does not hold energies extremely well, but is sometimes used in rituals for Saturn and similar forces. Gold is neutral or warm and is good for Vata dosha and relates to the Sun and Jupiter Planet. Silver is cooling and is good for pitta dosha and relates to the Moon and Venus. Copper is heating and good for kapha dosha and relates to Mars. It should be noted that gold is very expensive and very soft, so may not be ideal for construction of plates and other utensils. Gold plating is a possible alternative, but this must be used with care as not to chip off the gold plating. Silver plated materials are also a cheaper alternative to silver. But silver is not that expensive, when compared to gold, especially in India. Most temples, that can afford will have most commonly used utensils made from silver or brass. Gold items will be used more for decoration like in the arches behind the deity or for kavachams (armours) or jewelry worn by the deity. Likewise, the properties of specific woods can be considered for their effects. The Vedic implements were made from specific woods that supported the specific function of each implement. Since relatively few will be hiring people to carve implements from specific woods, we have not provided detailed information about the properties of different woods for making implements. Some information on woods in general will be available in the section on dravyas (substances for offering). Plastic and synthetic materials should be avoided.

It is ideal to keep specific utensils reserved for use in ceremonies only. If food is to be cooked, ideally, it would be cooked in pans used only for this purpose. Spoons for stirring and cutting boards and knives etc. likewise, would be specifically reserved for use in ceremonies. Not everyone can likely afford this immediately, and so we must do the best we can. Keeping specific utensils for worship helps empower the practice. Then we do not have to worry about energies intermingling. Then energies of worldly activities like cooked food for eating, can hinder the flow of spiritual energy. It may require a great deal of effort to purify such items so that they do not detract from the energy of a ritual. The energy of yajna, likewise could cause trouble if it is associated with our daily activities. The spiritual energy generated in a ceremony like yajna can be very powerful, like medicine. We do not want to be constantly exposed to it any more than we would want to take a full bottle of aspirin. People should not live in the space where yajna is performed regularly, because the energy is too powerful. It may not be supportive to human life. Ideally, a separate space is kept, if possible, for such ceremonies for these reasons. The same is true with the implements used.

Even in Vedic times, different fires were kept for cooking offerings and for offering them within a dedicated space. Domestic cooking was done elsewhere altogether. At the very least, we should never do puja or yajna in the same space where people sleep. Yet, if a person lives in a one room apartment with a fire place, they might have no other easy option than to perform rituals in the same space where they live. We can only accomplish the best we can accomplish, and we should never let a failure to accomplish the ideals for practice to stop us from practicing to the best of our abilities. In situations like this, where there are no other options, there is grace to allow people to defy the laws of energy and to get away with doing what is less than ideal. I would recommend working toward getting dedicated implements for ceremonies. Even after 20 years of doing the ceremonies and offering a huge variety of cooked foods, I still sometimes wind up using kitchen implements not reserved only for prayer occasionally. We are working toward getting a dedicated kitchen for the purpose of cooking offerings. If for your first fire ceremony, you decide to cook payasam (kheer / rice pudding) to offer, maybe you could use whatever cooking equipment you have. But then if you like making that offering, you could try to buy pans for cooking this when you can afford.

Ideally, everything used in prayer should be new. It should not be used. Used items have all kinds of bad energy on them, and most people cannot easily purify such items (especially, metal, stone, or gems). Some feel it is okay if items are given by family, since a person's karmas and energies are already deeply intertwined with the family. Otherwise, we risk taking on a lot of energy and karma when using pre-owned items in ceremonies that can amplify energy. In particular, we should not use items used in worship by others, unless it is a very saintly person. This can cause a lot of problems. So that antique statue of some God or Goddess, should be avoided, but the item used by a guru or an awakened soul in worship will bring great blessings when we use it. Even the clothes we wear for worship, should be our own and ideally new or washed before use.

Other Implements

In addition to this, vessels for storing water are required. The traditional praṇīta pātra and prokṣaṇī pātra could be used, or alternately a pañcapātra and uddhāraṇī (cup and spoon) and a kumbha (water pot). As said before, if cooked offerings are to be offered, ideally utensils would be reserved for this use. Additionally bells, oil lamps, camphor holders, incense holders and other puja vessels are required. It can also be useful to have some sort of stick or poker for manipulating the fire (for small scale ceremonies, I used to keep a pair of metal cooking tongs with an insulated handle for this purpose). I have also used a long, strong stick for this purpose in larger homams. This is used to replace the traditional hand-shaped Upaveṣa.

The bare minimum would include a homa kuṇḍa or sthaṇḍila, a bowl and spoon for ghee, a bowl for havan sāmagrī, a plate or bowl for flowers, a bowl for rice akṣatas, lamps, a pañcapātra, a kumbha, a camphor lamp, and a bell. In addition to this, the sacred darbha grass is indispensable for use in yajna rituals. This will be addressed in more detail in the section on dravyas.

Some Images of Commonly Found Implements for Yajna



Homa kund, brass pyramid 21 inch opening



Homa kunda, copper inverted pyramid, small



Set with homa kunda, base, spoon and bowl for ghee and fire tongs



Brass spoon and bowl for ghee



Wooden yajna implements dhrishti, sruva, sruka, sphya and prokshani



Brass Oil lamp, typically used in pairs



Brass camphor lamp for arati



Another style brass camphor lamp



Brass incense holder (for incense sticks)



Another style brass incense holder (for burning resins or powders on charcoal)



Brass puja bell, with Nadi / bull handle



Brass puja plate with svastika



Brass flower basket



Silver kumbha / water pot



Copper panchapaatra and uddhaaraNI



Darbha grass



Camphor tablets for starting the fire

