



Ethnographic Study of lamps from Goa State and Sindhudurg District of Maharashtra

SITARAM K TORASKAR

Indian Numismatic, Historical and Cultural Research Foundation, Nashik, India.

E-mail: s.k.toraskar@gmail.com

Abstract: Lamps were the medium of light in the past, though their existence now is just limited to religious rituals, except some remote corners of the subcontinent. Modernisation, electrification and government policies have changed the scenario for good. Archaeologically, a variety of lamps are unearthed from various archaeological sites all over the subcontinent. Many epigraphs refer to lamps in religious context. Stone sculptures and coins present iconographic manifestation of lamps with deities. All these show the importance of lamp in the ancient societies. Being a source of light for a long time, it also became an integral part of socio-religious customs. The present paper tries to discuss many such instances of ritualistic importance of lamps with ethnographic data from the study area in Goa state and Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra. It discusses various rituals related to lamps and its socio-religious importance on wider level. It also tries to focus on the development in architecture to fix these lamps for dual or multiple functions.

Keywords: Deepmal, Divja, Goa, Lamps, Mhale, Ritual, Sindhudurg

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Introduction

Lamps and candles have been always sanctified by societies all over the world. Being the gleam source of light with the utilisation of less fuel, lamps are always preferred to illuminate shrines. Even after the discovery of metal and the invention of ways to model it into various forms of illuminating devices, the importance of earthen lamp was preserved through festivals and rituals. Diwali, the pan Indian festival of lamps, is a marker of this tradition.

Here is an attempt to document and analyse the lamps in Goa state and Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra in the ritualistic aspects of the society.

Antiquity of lamps

In global context, upper Palaeolithic cultures of Europe like Aurignacian, Perigordian, Magdalenian, etc. give the earliest evidence of lamps (Beaune 2002). However, undisputed evidence comes from late Perigordian period at the site of Laugerie-Haute, Dordogne (Beaune 2002: 61). In India, evidence related to lamps appear very late. It appears in Chalcolithic period (Ghosh 1989: 182). The finer quality of lamps which are of imported variety or imitated and excavated from Arikamedu (Begley :526) and Ter (Chapekar, 1969: 123) and other Indo- Roman port sites with artistic superiority come from Indo-Roman period. Terracotta lamp at Ter is in form of head of a Roman soldier (Desai 2013: 64). Diplakshami is seen portrayed in many temples. A celestial figure from Norton Simon Museum original belonging to eleventh century CE, represents the figure with offering (here a lamp in the upper right hand near her shoulder). The object is shaped like a conch, but the hollowed body which suggest it as oil lamp (Pal 2003: 140). Medieval sites in India have well build structures for fixing lamps with duality of function. Lamps occupy a distinct religio-cultural identity in different regions with diverse ritualistic setting.

Lamps in Study area

Lamp occupies an important place in the cultural entity of Goa and surrounding area. Exploration in remote zones informs lamps of various types locally known as *Divli/ Divo/ Panti, Samai, Divza, Mhale, etc.* made up of diverse materials, such as stone, mud and a variety of metals. Yet, some are prepared from biological materials like flour, however this is now non-functional and has achieved a ritualistic identity.

Divo/divli (lamp)

Divo or Divli or Panti is an indigenous term for traditional earthen oil lamp, which is hollow in between to fill oil (basically vegetable oil) and lighted by *Vath* (wick) made of cotton. Having religio-cultural significance, lamps are lighted on various auspicious events. In remote corners, where the concept of *Sima/ Shimo* (village outskirts) are prevalent the tradition of daily lighting lamp prevails. The hidden aspect may be that of directing the way.

Etymologically word *Diwali* is derived from *Diva* i.e. lamp; pointing the significance of lamps in this occasion and cultural scenario in general. Though the tradition of lighting oil lamps is replaced by electrical gadgets even then transformation in the earthen shapes and design has reinvented the tradition in modern days.

According to popular belief, if a lamp is lighted in front of Lord Vishnu in the Month of Karthik (October-November), then it is equal to visiting all the *Tirth* (Sacred place). If *Deepdaan* (donation of lamp) is done after burning an effigy of *Narkasur*, then the person is safe from hell (Kerker 2005). *Narkasur* is a demon in a local myth, whose effigy is burnt on the night before *Diwali* suggesting end of dark or evil and *Diwali* festival is welcomed in the region by lighting lamps which continues for weeks.

Kerker (2005) documents variety of lamps denoting their functional aspect in various rituals and ceremonies which are discussed below. Most families light *Saanjvath* (evening lamp) in front of the deity in the praying room and *Tulsivrundavan*. During marriage, *Lamandivo* is lighted and *Karavli* (companion of the bride and groom) handles a lamp known as *Shakundivo*. During the worship of god or for any auspicious ceremony, lamp is active throughout the ceremony. In the temple, a lamp known as *Nandadeep* burns at all the time. The *lamandivo* is traditionally lighted in front of lord Ganesh during Ganesh Chathurthi. The newly married bride, while entering the house, carries *Lamandivo* in her hand. *Nandadeep* is a single grooved small traditional lamp, while, *Samai* has five grooves for the placement of cotton. *Samai* is lighted in the morning and at night every day. The number of grooves which are lighted depends on family status. *Nandadeep* is used to light during *Halad* ceremony (Pre marriage ritual of applying turmeric paste on bride and groom's body) and also in some cases during Ganesh Chathurthi. The *Nandadeep* lights for longer period because it has a single groove. *Niranjan* is made up of steel, while *Nandadeep*, *samai*, *Pancharat* are made up of brass locally known as *Pithal* and *Lamandivo* is made from *Thamba* (copper). *Pancharat* is five hooded lamp used in *Aarat*. Other utensils used for thermal function are *Dhuparna/ dhuparne* (odour utensil). Also utensils used for lighting camphor come under such category. On the *Divyachi avas* (lamp's new moon day) which occurs in the month of *Ashad* (June-July), the lamps are venerated. During *Ovalni* or *Aarat*, lamp has special place in the sacred plate. *Ovalni* is a process of ritually rotating sacred plate with lamp.

Toraskar (2015, 2020) documents a tradition in Dhanagar community where lamp made of *Nachni* (Raagi) is lighted on the fifth day of a newly born baby. The custom is locally known as *Pachvi Pooja* (Pooja on the fifth day of birth). In some communities, however, such lamps are lighted on the day before *Padvo* (Cattle festival during Diwali) and are drained in the river.

Akashdivo

Apart from lamps, Diwali Lantern or Akashdivo is an important element of Diwali celebration hanged on to the roof outside the house. Though now transformed into

electric gadget was traditionally having different story. In the pre-industrialised era, the earthen oil lamp was in use instead of bulb and was made up of bamboo sticks and wrapped with traditional colour paper known as *Folly*. This *Akashdivo* used to stay lit throughout the *Diwali*.

Zodvi

On the twelfth day of *Karthik* (October–November) month, *Tulsivivaha* or marriage of *Tulas* (*Ocimum tenuiflorum* L.) takes place. According to mythology, *Tulas* is one day wife of Vishnu; as a result, women do fast for three days for the long life of their husband. On the day, *Tulshivrudavan* (structure with *Tulas* plant) is decorated with plants like sugarcane, *Zhendu* (*Tagetes erecta* L.), and sometime by *Talkhala* (*Cassia tora*). *Avalo* (*Emblica officinalis* Gaertn.) and *Chinch* (*Tamarindus indica* L.) are placed in the *Tulas*. The plant known as *Dino* (*Leea sambucina*) is planted in the *Vrundavan* as husband of *Tulas*. In this function, for the long lasting life of husband, *Zodvi* are lighted in front of the *Vrundavan*. Total 365 *Vathi* (wicks) are made from cotton and are placed in banana trunk, which is locally termed as *Gabe*. Then oil is poured into it to make it wet. To avoid the flowing of oil from the raft, cow dung is taken and blockage is made all around. The devotee sits near the *Vrundavan* till it burns after which fast ends (Kerkar 2012).

Kakado

Kakado is a stick of the midrib of coconut leaflet locally known as *Vhir*, wrapped with cotton and lit by dipping oil at one end. The flame survives for some time. On the eve of *Vhadli/Moti Diwali* (big Diwali), domesticated animals, especially cattle, are adored by ritually rotating the *Kakado*. *Moti Diwali* is celebrated in this region on the Marriage of *Tulshi Vrundavan*.

Divja

A typical traditional type of lamp with four *Panti* (lamp) at sides and one on top locally known as *Divja* (**Figure 1**) is culturally important in the life of Goan women. Traditionally they are made of clay and are painted. Nowadays brass, steel or silver are replacing the original material. In many local celebrations, *Divja* processions are held.

Divja are carried by married women and girls who have not attained puberty. In the case of newly married women the parents offer the *Sat-Singar* (set of things

needed for the Pooja), while in the case of young girls, maternal uncle provides the required material. The participants have to observe fast. The *Bhat* (priest) of the temple make a prayer and invokes the deity, which is followed by lighting the *Divja* of the participants. The participants follow the *Palki* procession. Care is taken that *Divja* will light continuously. If it goes off, it is considered as an ill omen. The oil which remains after the worship is applied by the devotees to the head of the *Savashin* (married women).

In many places in Goa there is a tradition of *Divja zatra*, where in *Divja* procession is held on different days. The procession of the *Divja* starts from the shrine of the ancestral god and goes on till the circumambulation of the main temple for five to seven times or vice-versa and then are immerse. The right of lighting *Divaj* is traditionally decided and all the castes and sub-castes participate in the ceremony in their respective ancestral village (Halankar 1999).

Mhale

Mhale is a bigger variety of traditional lamp, which is having ritualistic significance. It is more than half meter in height and has an almost equal width. It has *Pantio* or lamps in equidistance all around in various layers, and centred by comparably large sized lamp. It is made of mud and decorated with reddish colour. In the temple of Bhagwati (Haldhonkarin) at Khandola in Ponda Taluka of North Goa a fair is held on the second day of *Falgun* (*February–March*) month of Hindu calendar, which is also known as *Mabliachi Jatra*. Here possessed person take the *Mhale* on his head and take a circumambulation around the temple. The tradition is also present in Mayem in Bicholim taluka of North Goa (*Figure 2*).

Architecture to Facilitate Light

There are instances where a special structure is built to facilitate lamps for the light and as a indicator of landmark. In the region two special types of structure i.e. Deepmal/ Deepstamba and Deepgruha are seen. These are discussed below in details.

Deepmal/ Deepstamba

Deepmal or Deepstamba is standing structure in front of the temple with a provision of lighting lamps common in Goa and Maharashtra. In the *Puranas*, it is suggested to install one and quarter hand sized stone and to light the camphor or any other igniting items. This stone pillar is referred as *Deepkhand* or *Deepdand*, which was

common in front of the Shiva temple (Kerkar 2005). Architecturally the Deepmal or Deepstamba is hexagonal, octagonal or round with minimum ten feet elevation tapering towards top with multiple niches which holds earthen lamps. These rows of lamps are lighted during auspicious ceremonies from many centuries.

Some of the prominent *Deepgruha* from Goa are located in the Shantadurga temple of Kavle, Mangeshi temple of Mangeshi, Mahalsa temple of Mardol, Saptakoteshwar temple of Narve, Laxmi- Narayana and Mahadev temples of Bicholim, Chamundeshwar temple of Pilgao all in north Goa and Mallikarjuna temple of Canacona in South Goa. These *Deepmals* are different in design and architectural elements and are attached to unique rituals. Shantadurga temple at Kavle has hexagonal shaped seven tiered *Deepmala* with six miniature shrines and a designed pillar at every corner. The Deepamal at Mangeshi temple is lighted on the fourteenth night of *Karthik* for the ceremony of lamps locally known as *Deepotsav*. In the right hand side of the Saptakoteshwar temple of Narve, there are ten round *Deepmals*. The *Deepmal* at Mallikarjuna temple at Canacona is lighted on the full moon night of *Kartika* (kerkar 2005). In Sindhudurg district there are *Deepmals* at various places like Kunkeshwar temple at Malvan, Vithoba temple at Sawantwadi, etc.

Deepgruha

Deepgruha is the local term for light house or watch tower, where light from a certain height guides the navigator. Usually constructed on a high gradient for justifying the mentioned purpose and shaped round and octagonal for creating a wide angle. The structure tappers from bottom to top and is facilitated by staircases for movement. The outer wall is coloured with lines as a mark of identity and possible location which helps in day time. The Lamp lighted on the top of the structure is having a flickering nature which is intentionally time bound. Every *Deepgruha* has typical timing of lighting and vanishing from other, on the basis of which navigator finds his direction. The flames generated in the eighteenth century for the purpose were by burning wood or charcoal (Halankar 1999).

In Goa, total often such *Deepgruhas* are identified, whereas, in Sindhudurg district, nine *Deepgruhas* are known i.e. one at Vijaydurg, two at Devgad, one at Malvan and five at Vengurla.

Discussion

The persistent high importance of a certain material in culture embosses it with symbolic meaning, making it a part of religious ritual. Lamp is a symbol of light and

light is a symbol of life. Hence, social significance of lamp throughout the human history also made it culturally and religiously important. The ethnographic survey in the Goa state and Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra presents variety of rituals where the lamps are prime component.

Survey highlights various typology of lamps with their indigenous names made from a variety of materials. Clay lamps hold significant position in various traditional ritual ceremonies, which are performed in the region. Even though metal lamps have now become a regular ingredient of religious ritual, metal lamps were traditionally diverse in typology and had a specific ritual importance for every type (Jaiswal, 2004, 2013). Some bygone traditions are witnessed in certain locations like





Zodvi where wicks are burned on the banana trunk or through the use of midrib of coconut leaflet as in the form of *kakado*. *Mhale* is a considerably big lamp used for ritual purpose. It is very difficult to know its non-ritual use, if it had any, in the pre-industrialised period. However, its use for night possession or any gathering for religious or possibly social purposes can be inferred.

Rituals like lighting *zodvi* and *divja* are performed by married women for the long life of their husband. Also it is seen that lamps are a part of every ritual of human life i.e., birth ceremony, marriage ceremony, death ceremony, etc. A special festival of lamps i.e. *Diwali* is celebrated to mark the importance of light that is traditionally in the form of earthen lamps. Similarly, *Divyachi avas* as celebrated in the month of *Ashad* (June-July), is an important occasion to venerate the lamps.

Also structures like *Deepmal/ Deepstamba* and *Deepgruha*, which facilitated lamps to glitter the wide surrounding areas due to their elevation also became landmarks of the areas.

Lamps, despite losing their functional aspect in the present world, retain their ritual aspect, thus displaying signs of being an integral part of all socio-cultural events in the human society of the bygone era.

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