

## **Lotus' A Symbol of Growth, Purity, Birth and Enlightenment : A Perspective from Mythology to Spirituality**

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### **Abstract**

'Lotus' which is also known as 'Padma' in Sanskrit is an ancient and polyvalent symbol in Asian culture. Hindus revere it with the god Vishnu who is often described as "Lotus-Eyed one" Brahma who sprouts from Lord Vishnu's naval on lotus, Goddesses Lakshmi, sitting or standing on fully bloomed pink lotus, Saraswati, sitting on white lotus and many other God and Goddesses. Lotus is often used as an example of divine beauty, purity, growth, birth and enlightenment, and its unfolding petals suggests the expansion of the soul. The lotus bud is compared with a folded heart or soul, which has the ability to blossom or awaken to realize the Divine truth, which symbolizes the journey from the darkness of ignorance to the light or spiritual illumination. The growth of its pure beauty from the mud and thus rooted in the mud and floating on the water even remaining untouched with the water symbolizes how one should live in the world in order to get release from rebirth.

**KEYWORDS :** Divine Truth, Hinduism, Padma, Puranas, unattached.

### **1. Introduction.**

'Padma' is the Sanskrit word for the Lotus plant, which is also called the sacred lotus or Indian lotus. 'Lotus' or 'Padma' is an important symbol in different religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and so on. Many of the divinities of Hinduism are depicted in Lotus position, not only depicted in the lotus position, but also seated on, standing on, or even being born from lotus blossoms. Both in worship and in portrayals of the Divine, Hindus are infatuated with lotus flowers. The lotus is the foremost symbol of beauty, prosperity and fertility. Each human being is the spirit of the sacred lotus. It represents eternity, purity, divinity and is widely used as a symbol of life, fertility, ever-renewing youth. One of the most common metaphysical analogies compares the lotus' perennial rise to faultless beauty from a miry environment to the evolution of consciousness, from instinctive impulses to spiritual liberation. In some legends, Gautama Buddha left lotus seedlings behind with every step. In Buddhism, the Lotus is used as an allegory for how a soul is born into a life of desire and attachment, but can rise above all of this to become pure and unattached, the process of Enlightenment.

### **2. Objectives.**

- To show that lotus is the symbol of growth, purity, birth, enlightenment.
- To show that lotus is a symbol of etiquette and culture in Hinduism.
- To show the significance of lotus among God and Goddesses according to the puranas.
- To show that if a person leads his life like lotus, he will realize the Divine Truth.

### **3. Materials and Methods.**

This is a descriptive study. It is based on metaphysical view. Some ebooks and webside has been followed to prepare this research paper.

### **4. Result.**

In our chaotic human lives bombarded with troubles and hardships we seek to be free from pain and sufferings. In the same way a lotus find its way out of its muddy roots to bloom and break free from surrounding burdens holding it down. That is to say in my paper I want to convey that we must lead our life as lotus flower. We must perform the dharma without being attached to the world.

### **5. Discussion.**

#### **5.1. The Lotus Flower and its meaning in Hindu tradition.**

##### **5.1.1. Hindu God or Goddess on Lotus.**

Lotus is a symbol of etiquette and culture in Hinduism. Perhaps one of the strongest associations of the lotus flower with religion is that, that is observed in Hinduism. In this religion the lotus flower meaning is associated with beauty, fertility, prosperity, spirituality, and eternity. We can see in many pictures or idols that God and Goddess of Hindus such as Lakshmi, Saraswati, Krishna-Radha, Ma Sherwali, Brahma and so on sitting or standing on the lotus flower. For example the goddess of prosperity, Laxmi, is usually depicted as being seated on fully opened lotus flower. Like wise Brahma, the God of creation is depicted as emerging from a lotus that crawls from the Naval of the sustainer Lord Vishnu. The question naturally arise inspite of all other flowers, why only on lotus ? The question may be spiritually interpreted that the lotus is an example of the best reunciante. It sits calmly and coolly on muddy water, but is itself totally above the water. Though it is an the water, it is not wet. Though it is in muddy water, it is beautiful. Similarly the great reunciates are those that take part and participate in the world, but they are themselves detached and their beautiful heart is seen, despite the muddy world of which they are involving.

In the book myths and symbols of Indian Art and civilization it has been shown that the lotus of Brahman represents the highest form of earth. Actually 'Lotus is not just a flower its symbolic representation leads to mythology. The filaments of the lotus are the mountains of the world, the outer petals the outer continents. In the center of the pericap is the continent of India, and various Gods and Goddess shown sitting with one foot down on the lotus. Which represents that the devotees can approach the God to offer worship to the particular God.

##### **5.1.2. Brahma sprouting from the Vishnu's naval on lotus.**

According to Puranas, Brahma was born from the lotus flower originated from the naval of Lord Vishnu. Vishnus navi is the galatic centre. Lotus from Vishnus naval represents the procession of earth. The lotus is symbolically equal to mount meru. Brahma sits on top of the mount meru. Mount Meru is the abode of the God and on top of meru are present the palaces of Brahmaa and the protectors of the eight directions (North, South, East, West, North-East, South-East, North-West, South-West). The ancient sees of the vedic culture referred to the Galactic Center as Vishnunavi. Brahma (Ultimate Creator) sits on the lotus, the symbol of Divine energy

and Divine grace. The lotus grows from the Vishnu, who is the sleeping God, and whose dream is the universe. He rest on the coils of Ananta, Serpent of Infinity, waiting for the universe to recreate itself.

The body of Garbho dakaŚāyī Vishnu is described as sprouting the lotus stem within which all the planets of the universe remain, and at the top of the stem is the lotus flower on which Brahma is born. Brahma is often depicted with lotus flower. In Hinduism, Lotus represents the concept of primordial birth from the cosmic water of creation. Lord Brahma emerging from the naval of Lord Vishnu symbolically represents that life begins in water. The lotus flower represents nature and the all-encompassing energy of creation.

### **5.1.3. ‘Water’ represents the procreative aspect of the Absolute and the ‘Cosmic Lotus’ the generatives.**

The Hindu text Religious and useful plants of Nepal and India describes that the water represents the procreative aspect of the Absolute, and the cosmic lotus the generative. There is a story that the lotus arose from the naval of God Vishnu, and at the center of the flower sat Brahma. Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the protector) and Siva (the merger) are associated with this palmist. The Taittiriya Brahman describes how Projapati, desiring to evolve the universe, which was then fluid, saw a lotus-leaf, pushkara parna, coming out of water. It is described that when to put forth the universe, the cosmic waters grew a thousand-petalled lotus flower of pure gold, radiant like the Sun. This was considered to be a doorway, or an opening of the mouth of the womb of the universe. Hindu texts describe that water represents the procreative aspects of the absolute, and the cosmic lotus, the generative. Thus, lotus is the first product of the creative principle. The role of lord Brahma was to re-create the universe after the great flood on this plant. And it is said that in order to create the universe, He used the different parts at the lotus plant.

Patron of wealth and good fortune Goddess Lakshmi, sits on a fully bloomed pink lotus as her divine seat and holds a lotus in Her right hand. It is also mentioned in the Mahabharata that Lakshmi emerged from a lotus which grew from the forehead of Lord Vishnu.

Again we find the power of Goddess, Ma Durga, was created by Lord Śiva to fight against demons and was adored with lotus flower by Varuna.

White lotus is found associated with Goddess of wisdom, Devi Saraswati symbolizing purity and divine beauty, one of the prime deities of Hinduism, Vishnu was mentioned as “Lotus-eyed One” in the ancient texts of the belief-Vishnu was depicted holding a lotus flower in his hand in many works of Hindu iconography.

Virtually every God and Goddess of Hinduism; Brahma, Vishnu, Siva, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Parvati, Durga, Agni, Ganesha, Rama and Surya; are typically shown sitting on the lotus, often holding a lotus flower in their hand. The lotus which serves thus as the seat of the Deity, signifying their divinity and purity is called padmasana or kamalasana.

## **6. Structure and symbolism of lotus.**

In vedic scripture, the body of Lord Krishna, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, is described as being like a bluish new-grown lotus flower. In many spiritual traditions, lotus flowers are especially sacred as an offering to the divine.

### **6.1. Symbolism of opened and un-opened lotus.**

Interestingly the open flower and the un-opened lotus bud forms are associated with human traits. The unopened bud is representative of a folded soul that has the ability to unfold and open itself up to the divine truth. Thus it may be said that the thousand-petaled lotus signifies spiritual illumination. Each opening of the petal is the gradual unfolding of the consciousness on the path of enlightenment. Actually within the human body, the specific yogic teaching that addresses energy centers, known as the chakra system, uses a lotus with varied number of petals to represent each particular chakra. The crown chakra is the thousand petaled lotus, and so its blossoming indicates enlightenment.

### **6.2. symbolism of the lotus bud.**

The bud of the lotus symbolizes potential, specifically of a spiritual nature. In spiritual literature, lotus has been symbolized for the macrocosm and the microcosm, the universe and man.

### **6.3. Symbol of Lotus as the highest of consciousness.**

The lotus also represents the highest level of consciousness when in search for enlightenment and purity. In the postures of hatha yoga, padmasana (the lotus position) is assumed by those determined to reach the ultimate highest level of consciousness which can be found in the lotus chakra at the top of the head.

### **6.4. 'Lotus' the symbol of spirituality.**

The center of lotus is either yellow or yellowish-green. And at the center lies a circular mass of stigmas, the capillary receptacle. It represents the ultimate goal of all self-realization : the union of the human soul with the ultimate consciousness.

The petals of a lotus are arranged in concentric layers, and when the lotus blooms, each one opens in succession to reveal the ones inside. And this gradual opening in stages has been used as a metaphor to describe how we attain higher level of self-realization and consciousness as we progress spiritually.

### **6.5. Analogy of lotus for the realization of the ultimate truth.**

There is an analogy for an unenlightenment individual on his journey to a realization of the Ultimate Truth. The lotus flower's journey does not begin in the open air but in the water below. As a bud, it is submerged in water that is not the most pleasant of environment – muddy, (possibly) full of natural and man made rubbish, fish and different kinds of insects.

At a certain time stage it comes out to be flower, the bud pushes resolutely past the unpleasantness and breaks free of its earthy coop. And at this stage the sun first spreads onto the face of the bud. This chronological mechanism ensures that no part of the petals themselves ever come in contact with the dirty water. The core of the

flower always remains free from contaminants that is pure despite the environment in which it is began its life.

### **7. Lead life like lotus to realize the Divine Truth.**

The question naturally arise why has this one flower become such a widespread and important symbol ? The answer is found in what the lotus is and how it grows. The lotus is unusual among flowers in part for steadily perfect the blooms tend to be. The blooms are showy and striking, even more so because they stand high above the muddy water that the naturally grow in.

That is to say A philosophical meaning of lotus is that lotus is a unique flower. It grows in but shines out and faces the light. The world is a mud. Only highly awakened souls raise out the mud and face the light : The light of knowledge. And mythologically it can be said that, those lotus flowers are “plucked” by Gods and hence are seen in all the deities’ hands. So basically lotus also denotes a highly enlightened soul, or a devotee.

The lotus is a symbol of purity and perfect beauty in many Asian cultures and faiths, but it is somewhat more than that. It symbolizes purity or beauty that holds itself above the mud and water that is variously interpreted as imperfection, sin, attachment, or Earthly desires. As a lotus is able to emerge from muddy water un-spoilt and pure it is considered to represent a wise and spiritually enlightened quality in a person. It is representative of somebody who carries out their task with little concern for any reward and with a full liberation from attachment.

Have you seen a lotus leaf with water droplets on it ? shake the leaf, and all droplets fall down without leaving a trace of wetness.

Live life like a lotus leaf. Do not get attached to illusions around you. Be there, but do not get attached and do not suffer when they leave you.

The roots of the lotus are deep inside the water. It is be very firm and its very difficult to shake and tear apart.

Analogically I see from my perspectives that men is always given the duty to control his sense (both organs of action and organs of perceptions) and this is whole aspect of yoga and other aspects of meditation. In analogy to the lotus, it may be said our sense should be steadfast like a lotus.

The standard meaning of lotus in Hindu Dharma can be understood from the Gita sloka. The symbolism of lotus flower is mentioned in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Bhagavad Gita by Lord Krishna : 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). That is to say... One who resigns all his actions to Brahma and work without any personal attachments, is not soiled by sin as a lotus leaf is not wetted by water. In other words it can be said that, in the Bhagavat Gita, a human is adjured to be like the lotus, they should work without attachment, dedicating their actions to God, untouched by sin like water on a lotus leaf, like a beautiful flower standing high above the mud and water.

The quality of the lotus flower to remain untouched by the water and mud of the pond, where it grows, is compared with the quality of a wise and spiritually enlightened person, who performs his duty without any material or emotional desires. This quality of detachment enables one to remain unaffected by all worldly pleasures and gain, and achieve spiritual perfection. The lotus bud is compared with a folded heart or soul, which has the ability to blossom or awaken to realize the Divine truth. This symbolizes the journey from the darkness of ignorance to the light or spiritual illumination.

Lotus in spite of being in water never gets wet. It is not bothered about its surrounding but it blooms and performs its job and vanishes. The ultimate aim of living beings is to perform its karma without bothering about the external factors.

The lotus is rooted in the mud but floats on the water without becoming wet or muddy. This symbolizes how one should live in the world in order to gain release from rebirth, without attachment to the world. In other words to achieve spiritual enlightenment and breaking free from basic, instinctive impulses.

Lotus is a symbolic representation of how we need to live in the world. Whenever we have to be, we should make use of then and contribute the best results unattached by any of the negativities. Roots of the lotus which are in the mud, stem in water, leaf unattached with water, and flower untouched by any of these.

Shape of lotus petals is the sacred geometry. It is the background screen for higher visions, part of hide and seek games of divinity. Thus in spiritual terms, lotus shows us to sacrifices all the fruits and reach the creator.

In general , the lotus is mainly considered as a symbol of rebirth since it rises from darkness and turns into a beautiful flower with pink, white petals much like a human being born from nothing and turning into something complete and beautiful.

His process of coming into existence is also considered as a symbol of spiritual enlightenment and the expansion of one's soul.

The ultimate aim of each human being is to be the lotus-flower. That is to say perform the dharma without being attached to the world.

In our chaotic human lives (represented by the muddy roots of the lotus) bombarded with troubles and hardships we seek to be free of pain and sufferings. In the same way a lotus find its way out of its muddy roots to bloom and break free from surrounding burdens holding it down. Thus not only does a lotus represents growth, purity and birth, it also represents faith and enlightenment.

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