



## GOLD IN ANCIENT INDIAN LITERATURE – A STUDY

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**ABSTRACT:** Gold is a worldwide fascination usually gold has meant power as its value is subject to content appreciation. In this paper describe the literature related to gold and its content. The literature shows that how to use the gold and origin. The paper also deals with references of ancient Indian gold technology in ancient Indian religions, political and foreign account text with brief descriptions all these given in the literature.

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### Gold in Ancient Indian Literature – A Study

The history of gold is a long and complex one. It has been a symbol of wealth and a guarantee of power since its use first emerged. Because of its rarity, its usefulness and its beauty, gold has caused individual and national obsession and the destruction of cultures, and the emergence into power of others.

The value of gold has been appreciated in daily life too. The Rig Veda, India's most ancient text, (dated approximately to 1500 B.C.) says the giver of gold receives a life of light and glory. And to receive or buy gold is to welcome Lakshmi. That is why during Diwali time, gold is almost invariably bought. On this festival, it is Goddess Lakshmi who is worshipped.

In India, gold is almost revered along with popular deities that are adored and venerated with golden ornaments dedicated by ardent followers. Gold jewellery is an inseparable part of important ceremonies like marriages and other religious ceremonies. India has long been the site of gold mining, first from placers and then in more modern times from the oxidized and primary zones of a variety of auriferous deposits

### The Vajasaneyi Samhita

It belongs to the white Yajurveda. Mention to lead has been made in two verses.

- (a) "... They, made of silver, gold and lead, are used as helpers in the work ..."  
(23.37).

### The Atharvaveda

We come across two references to Rajata.

- (a) "... For lengthened life, to last through hundred autumns, they equalize with nine the nine spirations. Three in gold, three in silver, three in iron by heat are established in their several places." (V. 28.1).

### The Satapatha Brahmana

It is interesting to trace this fascination for gold. The Satapatha Brahmana, an ancient Hindu text describes gold as the seed of Agni, the God of Fire.

There are several references to gold in the Satapatha Brahmana. A reference suggests the use of gold for the manufacture of dishes. "... He then throws down gold (the gold one beneath the right foot with) 'Protect (me) from lightning!' The Virag, doubtless, is the rain, and of this there are these two terrible forms, lightning and hail; of these the gold plate is of the form of lightning ; against these two deities he affords protection to him, whence he who has performed the Sautramani has no fear to these two deities, as he also who thus knows this." (XII, 8, 3.1 l).

Hiranya has been used for gold.



- (a) “Now Sand has been strewed on the north side of it: below that he (previously) throws (a plate of) white gold (i.e., a silver plate weighing a hundred grains), with, ‘Protect it from contact with the earth’! .. “ (XIV. 1.3.14).

Gold was also used for ornamentation as is evident from a reference in the Pancavimsa Brahmana

“... A turban, a good, a bow without arrow, a board-covered rough vehicle, a garment with black fringes, two goats-skins: one white, one black, a silver ornament (worn around the neck), (all) that is (the equipment) of the Grhapati” (XVIII. 1.14).

Brahmanas like Taittiriya Brahmana (II 2.9.7; III 9.6.5), Sadvimsa Brahmana (VI. 6.2) and Jaiminiya Upanisad Brahmana (III 4.3) also contain references to gold.

Gold also occurs in the Chandogya Upanisad: “... As gold is corrected by borax, and silver by gold, and tin by silver, and lead by tin and iron by lead, and wood by iron or leather; ...” (IV 17.7).

#### **The Chandogya Upanisad**

We find reference to gold in the Chandogya Upanisad. “... Just as one would join gold by salt, silver by gold, tin by silver, lead by tin, iron by lead, wood by leather; - so does one make up the artifact in the sacrifice by the virility of these regions, of these divinities and of the science of the three Vedas, - That sacrifice verily becomes well- healed up where there is a Brahman — Priest knowing this”. (IV. 17.7).

#### **The Sruta Sutras**

A reference from **MANAVA SRAUTASUTRA** indicates the use of gold in the form of vessels.

“...A copper vessel should be scrubbed; a wooden vessel should be heated; and an earthen or a golden or a silvery vessel should be washed by means of water ...” (Manava 3.1.1-5)

Gold figures in plenty of ceremonies.

- (a) “... The adhvarya ... should take up (the pieces of) gold together with (the pieces of) silver ... With **Uddhanyamanam**..., he should dig out nine times in each fire-place by means of a pin made either of gold or of silver ...“ (Vaikhanasa I 7-10).
- (b) “Towards the north (within the fire-place) he should put a piece of gold... And he should throw out the piece of silver to a Vrsala or to some unknown person ...“ (Baudhayana 2.16-18).

#### **The Dharma Sutras**

These have been dated by one source to the period spanning c. 500 — 200 B.C. gold figures in the description of the means of purification.

According to Vasishtha, gold is purified by water alone. (III 62).<sup>32</sup> But Baudhayana gives a different way of cleansing gold.

“Copper, silver and gold (must be cleaned) with acids...” (1 .5.8-33).

#### **The Vinaya Pitaka**

There are some references which suggest the use of gold in the manufacture of bowls and also in the ornamentation.

- (a) “... You are not, O Bhikkhus, to use bowls made of gold, or made of silver, whoever does so, shall be guilty of a dukkata” (The Kullavagga V.9.1).

#### **The Digha Nikaya**

There is some references to related to gold.

- (a) “... Further they saw cotton-down, cotton thread and calico; and the same thing happened. Further they saw iron, copper, tin, lead, silver, gold. So that in the end of none crony had a load of gold, the other of hemp”. (II. 351).

#### **The Samyutta Nikaya**

The “Collection of Grouped Discourses” contains only two references to gold.



- (a) “...And I had eighty thousand couches of solid ivory, of solid wood, of solid gold and silver, furnished with wooden draperies, with white draperies, with flower-worked coverlets and spread with choicest skins of antelopes, with canopies above and scarlet cushions at each end” (III. 144).
- (b) “... Grain-store and hoarded wealth, silver and gold, or whatsoever property there be, ...” (I. 92).

#### **The Milinda Panha**

This probably looks back to the reign of the Greek, king Menandros who ruled in northwest India in the first century B.C. The work is likely to have been written in the first century A.D. The reference suggests that lead was popular with the people and that we had regular workers in gold. “... Then nobles and brahmins, merchants and work- people ... cooks and curry makers, barbers and bathing attendants, smiths florists, workers and jewelers; ... — all these coming to take up their residence there, and finding the new city to be regular, faultless, perfect, and pleasant, would know. “Able indeed must that architect have been by whom this city was built!” (V. 4).

#### **The Dharmasastra**

The Dharmasastra, another ancient Indian text says, “this universe was enveloped in darkness. He (the Lord) desiring to produce various creatures from his own body first created the waters and in them deposited a seed. This seed became a golden egg, resplendent as the sun, in which He Himself was born as Brahma.” Brahma is therefore called Hiranyagarbha or born of gold.

#### **The Kautilya’s Arthasastra**

About the qualities of gold Kautilya’ s say “Gold which has the colour of lotus filaments, soft, lustrous and not producing any sound is best, the reddish yellow is of middle quality and the red colored one of the lowest quality.” 40

A rather detailed description of the, properties of gold and silver, and of their working has been given by Kautilya.

Kautilya has also described the use of gold in the working of silver. “For silver articles, either solid or hollow, silver may be mixed with half of the amount of gold.”

Chapter 2.14 describes the duties of the **Sauvarnika** the royal goldsmith, who manufactured gold and silver articles for the people in a special workshop in the market place.( Shamasastri, R. Kautilya’ s Arthasastra Mysore, 1951, pp. 84-85)

#### **Patanjali’s Mahabhasya**

PATANJALI has mentioned coins of different denominations and metals in the Mahabhasya. These include: **niska**, **Satamana**, **Suvarna**, **Sana**, **Karaspana**, with its lower denominations — **ardha** or half, **pada** — a quarter, **masa** with still lower denominations — **ardhamasa**, **Kakini** and **ardhakakini**; and rupa which may have been a coin or a figure or symbol on a coin.

The position of **Suvarna** is equally doubtful. It appears that **niksa** and **Suvarna** were gold coins while **Satamana** and **Sana** were probably of silver, as suggested by Manu.

### **AYURVEDIC TEXTS**

Within the human body too the color of gold is celebrated. The human body, according to Ayurveda, is believed to have many charkas or nodal points of operation. Gold’s immunity to rust made physicians feel it had properties to cure diseases. The heart Chakra is said to be golden yellow and so the colour itself is regarded as inspiring divine thoughts.

#### **The Caraka Samhita**



Gold, silver, copper, lead, tin and iron along with their calces are mentioned for use as drugs. A process has been described for treating thin sheets of iron, silver and gold with hot solutions of salts and alkali (Potash Carbonate) for use as drugs.

In a reference a disciple who approaches the preceptor with reverence for study, is advised to bring with him among other things ornaments of gold, silver, jewels, pearl, coral, etc.

### **The Sushruta Samhita**

The Sushruta Samhita is a representative work of Ayurveda. It has dealt mostly with vegetable drugs. The Sushruta is par excellence a treatise on surgery. It is stated that the original Samhita was written at least two centuries before the birth of the Buddha while its final recension was made about the second century B.C.

Sushruta has dealt mostly with vegetable drugs. There is, however, one sloka in which six metals, viz., tin, lead, copper, silver, Krishna Loha (iron) and gold, and their, calces are also recommended for use as drugs.

### **THE EPICS**

Gold is seen to be the reference point in mythology whenever the highest form of prayer, perfection or beauty is to be described. The goddess Lakshmi, symbolizing fertility, productiveness and prosperity, is said to have been bathed by elephants who carried pure water in golden vessels. Urvashi, believed to be one of the most beautiful women in Hindu mythology, is supposed to have complexion of golden hue. The golden coloured deer plays an important role in the famous Indian epic the Ramayana.

It is said that Lord Shiva (one of the trinity in the Hindu pantheon) taunted his wife Parvati saying her skin was dark. So offended was Parvati that she performed penance to gain access to Lord Brahma, the creator in the Hindu pantheon. Lord Brahma granted her the boon she was seeking. Parvati was reborn as Gauri, or the woman with golden colored skin.

### **The Mahabharata**

Rajata occurs as a general term which is used for both gold as well as silver in the Mahabharata. However, we have a few references where Rajata is used exclusively for gold.

- (a) “The sum of gold is silver; of silver, tin; of tin, lead, and of lead, useless dross.” (Udyoga Parva, Section XXXIX).
- (b) “... By performing the Sraddha on the twelfth day one always beholds, if one desires, diverse kinds of beautiful articles made of silver and gold ...” (Anusasana Parva, Sect. IXXXVII).

### **The Ramayana**

In the later parts of the Ramayana, especially Books I and VII are separated from the genuine Ramayana of Books II and VI by a long interval of time.

- (a) “... Thus addressed by the learned Brahmins, the king bestowed on them a hundred million pieces of gold, and four hundred million silver coins...” (Bala Kanda, Chapter 14).48
- (b) “O Best of well-born Men! Silver, gold and precious gems are shared amongst friends as belonging to either ...” (Kishkindha Kanda. Chapter 8).

### **The Smritis**

According to Manu the duty of liberality should be practiced both by sacrifices and by charitable works if a worthy recipient could be found.

“A giver of land obtains land, a giver of gold long life, a giver of a house most excellent mansions, a giver of silver (rupya) exquisite beauty (rupa)” (Manu. IV 230).”

Visnu has dealt separately with subject concerning pious gifts.

- (a) “After having placed on its four sides (beginning with the eastern side) four metallic dishes (of copper, silver, white copper and gold respectively) ... to a Brahmana, who is an Agnihotrin, decked with ornaments, and clad in two garments.” (Vis. IXXXVII. 6).



(b) “A golden vessel which shows no stains becomes pure with water alone, likewise what is produced in water (as shells and corals), what is made of stone, and a vessel not enchased.” (Manu. V. 1 12).52

(c) “Objects made of gold, silver, water-shells, or gems, when (they are only defiled by leavings of food and the like, and) not smeared (with greasy substances), are cleansed with water.” (Vis. XXIII, 7)

Manu declared the technical names of (certain quantities of copper, silver and gold, which were generally used for the purpose of business transactions among men.

(d) “A stealer of gold, silver, or clothes, at a value of more than fifty mashas, shall lose both hands.” (Vis. V. 81).

### The Puranas

It is difficult to determine the exact position of the Puranas in the history of Indian literature, both according to contents and chronologically. They undoubtedly reach back to great antiquity but those works which have come down to us are of later date. All that can be safely concluded is that the earlier Puranas must have come into being by the seventh century A.D.

A great deal is said about the vessels to be used in offering **arghya** (water for honouring the invited brahmanas and pindas), for cooking Sraddha food, for dining and for serving.

The Vayu (IXXIV 1-2), Matsya (XVII. 19-22), Brahmda (Upodghata. XI. 1-2) and Padma (Srstikhanda. IX. 147-150) state the vessels of gold, silver or copper are the (proper) ones for pitrs.

(b) “The vessels for the Pitris should be made of any of the following materials, viz. Lotus leaves, wood, conch-shell, gold and silver ...” (Matsya Pur. XVII. 19-28).

The Sraddhasutra of Katyayana provides that the arghya water should be taken in Camasas (cups) made of sacrificial trees (such as **Palasa, asvattha, udumbara**) or in vessels of gold, silver copper, rhinoceros horn, precious stones whichever may be available, or in a vessel made of leaves. Prajapati (III) provides that the thee pindas should be cast in a vessel of gold or silver or copper or bell-metal or of rhinoceros horn but not in earthen ware or a wooden vessel, that (115) the vessels to be used for taking food by the brahmanas should be made of gold, silver or an alloy of five metals or they may take their food in **Patravali** (i.e. leaves stitched together).

From the above mentioned references it may be concluded that the silver-in-ritual motif continued to be prominent.

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