



Oil Lamp (Sukunda)

Date

early 19th Century

Medium

Brass

Description

This object is a brass oil lamp, or sukunda, from the Newar people of Nepal's Kathmandu Valley. The main vessel was used to store oil, which was spooned out into the dish projecting from the front, from which a wick is burned using the oil as fuel. The symbolism present on sukunda vessels is connected to the origin of the Kathmandu Valley, which began as a vast lake millions of years ago and was said to be the home of many snake gods. The handle is cast in the form of an eleven-headed

cobra, beneath which is a sculpture of Vishnu, the God of creation and transformation. He wears a tall crown and sits cross legged atop the vahana Garuda, whose outstretched wings form a seat for his passenger. The oil within the vessel symbolizes the lake, and the figures above represent the Gods of change and protection who drained the valley to make it habitable for mankind, denoting the beginning of civilization. The lamp dish (dalupa) is headed by a sculpture of the multi-armed Ganesh, bringer of success and new beginnings. Sukundas play an important role in most Newar ceremonies, including birth, marriage, and death rituals. Larger examples such as this one would have been commissioned by a particularly wealthy Newar family and were reserved for marriage ceremonies. In all ceremonies, the lamp lights up the physical space while imparting positive energy to all present.

Dimensions

16 1/2 × 7 × 16 in. (41.9 × 17.8 × 40.6 cm)