

RTA-RITU

An Exhibition on Cosmic Order and Cycle of Seasons

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The Exhibition on *Rta-Ritu: Cosmic Order & Cycle of Seasons* attempted to capture the essence of the notion of order and harmony in their diverse manifestations. This Exhibition was the fifth in IGNCA's presentation of the fundamental concepts on universal themes that cut across diverse cultures. (The four previous exhibitions were on space- *kham*, form - *akara*, time - *kala*, and the five elements *prakrti*).



The concept on *Rta* originates in the Rigveda(10.85;4.23, 9-12;10.190). In the Vedic vision the universe is not conceived as a haphazard mass of elements and events, but is ordered whole, in which each part inheres the whole and the whole is balanced by its parts. The ordering principle of nature, the inflexible law of harmony, the universal cosmic flow which gives to everything from the vast galaxies, down to the nucleus of an atom, their nature and course, is *rta*. *Rta* then, is observable everywhere. *Rta* governs the movement of the heavenly bodies, *rta* commands the shift and play of the seasons, *ritu*; and it is *rta* which guides the repeated round of birth, growth and decay of all life-forms. *Rta* lives in each human being as the pulsation of the heart-beat and the innumerable rhythms that balance life.

The theme of cosmic harmony is displayed in five sections of the exhibition. The first section is an audiovisual which attempts to give a panoramic voyage of cosmic rhythms. The story of creation begins with the birth of the cosmos, the first split-second of the Big Bang and the subsequent ordering and structuring of the universe characterized by large galaxies, planetary systems, wind and water cycles, natural geometries to the nuclear world of microcosm. The audio-visual paints the picture of the given universe and the rhythms underlying it.

A narrow corridor lit up with diffused UV lights leads up to the second section of the exhibition on order in human life, titled The Cycle of Life. The cosmocentric view of life holds that nature and its rhythms are not simply a setting for man and a backdrop to his life, but integral to the shaping of human life. The seed of human life and the crop-cycle have a common destiny. Both subject to the self regulating principle of order intrinsic to nature. The sun as the seed of celestial phenomenon governs the cosmic rhythms, likewise, the seed which is the beginning and the end of a crop-cycle contains the regenerative potential of human livelihood. In traditional ecocentric societies, the seed, soil, crops and seasons give order and structure to the annual rhythm of human life. There are rituals to celebrate each act of the agricultural cycle. These rituals set the farmers to find harmony with the field and seasons.

The third section explores the theme of Spatial Order through the plan of the three great cities of Isfahan, Beijing and Jerusalem. Philosophical tenets govern the planning of ancient cities. The cities reflect the image of the cosmos - a cosmogram. They embody a vision of order. The outward order is attained by selecting sites in the cradle of nature, riverside, horizon-landmarks, mountain, plateaus, which create a natural reference point with the divine. The internal order of traditional cities is provided with an appropriate physical and psychical framework. The designs are the ideal aspect of embodying their

architecture. We are led into the experience of the centre thought a dimly-lit *grabha-griha*, the sanctum sanctorium of a Hindu temple, the innermost cell which enshrines the image. The section then takes us into the city of Isfahan. The largescale city scape defines the design parameteres of the city. The design of the city is planned following strict rules of orientation. The Shah Mosque is oriented to the *Kaabah* (Macca), conceived to be the earthly point where the heavenly axis pierces the earth. The decorations are adapted on the laws of sacred geometry; the layout in accordance with the Islamic Vision of paradise. The iwan-type mosque architecture gets dissolved into the Chinese pagoda roof-tops in the city of Beijing. The next city, the palace complex in Beijing symbolises the meeting of heaven and earth the yin and yang of Chinese philosophy. The palace complex and its environs is structured on the square. Symbolising the feminine principle *yin*, and *yang* or the male principle representing the circle as the heaven. We then enter Jerusalem, the city which is the confluence of three faiths, Judiacy, Christianity and Islam. The majestic building of the Dome of Rock preserves the rock, sacred to all the three faiths of the world.



In the next section titled Urban Chaos, the anthynom of *rta* unrta is displayed through the disorderly, sporadic and chaotic environment of contemporary cities, separated from the rhythms that guide harmonious functioning of life, where urban planning has lost site of the integral vision of spatial order. The narrow corridor opens out into circular space of the next section. The space here comes alive with a magnificent recreation of the far spreading inverted tree with its roots in cave and branches touching the earth. The metaphor of the tree is described in the *Katha Upanisad* and the *Bhagvadgita*. The tree is created with woven cloth panels with motifs of branches and lush leaves in shapes of green and ochere hanging from the centre of the dome. The roots high in the heavens symbolically convey that the norms of truth or *satya* originates from a transcendent source.



There is one law of life, presenting both the worlds: the order in the heavens is the order which ought to govern life on earth. The sides of the room are lined with thought-provoking quotations from the major faiths of the world: Hindu, Chinese, Islam, Christian and Greek. The Moral Order section reminds one of the infinity and splendour of *satya*, which is the foundation of *rta*.

Ritu chakra, the last section gives us the experience of annual cycle of the year through the shift and change of the seasons, ritu gives us an intimate taste of the notion of *rta* in our day to day life through celebration and festivals of each season. This section is crowned by the new-year celebrations.

The final panel of the section is a summing up of the vision of integration conveyed through the symbol of the spiral. The symbol of the spiral integrates the microcosm, the macrocosm and the creative expressions of civilizations, and thus becomes an appropriate image of conveying the unity that binds all level of life.

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