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ART HERITAGE: A MIRROR OF NATURE - HUMAN RELATIONSHIP

BANSI LAL MALLA*

SUMMARY

A view of prehistoric art by Indian culture and tradition, a deep philosophical approach by a scholar of art and archaeology.

RIASSUNTO

Una visione dell'arte preistorica nella cultura e tradizione indiana, un profondo pensiero filosofico da parte di uno studioso di arte e di archeologia.

BACKDROP

The artistic tradition of India is one of the oldest and richest in the world. Beginning with the prehistoric rock art, and finding expression in a vigorous school of modern art, the tradition spans over thousands of years. It has two parallel streams of expressions from the earliest historical period i.e. classical and the vernacular. Many great schools of hereditary craftsmen flourished under the patronage of the royal courts within the classical or monumental tradition. But the arts and skills of village societies operated through the vernacular form of artisan guilds. Mainly, the ceremonies and festivals are associated with this tradition, which re-voke the perennial interrelationship of the five primal elements water, earth, air, fire and ether. In each festival, there is a rhythm of creation, consecration, worship and finally either throwing away, or burning, or immersion. Indian art contains masterpieces in major art forms such as pictographs, petroglyphs, architecture, sculpture, terracotta, metal work, textiles and ceramics.

PREHISTORIC ROCK ART?

The prehistoric rock art has been interpreted with different theoretical orientations - generally based on vague and misguided notions of "primitive mentality". Primitive man is denied of having "deeper aesthetic feelings" and "highest moral and intellectual speculations". Following the evolutionary approach - addressing the propositions about human cognitive development and the process of evolutioning emergence of language - "scientific" claims are made for the "origin of art". But we should not ignore the fact that in the old world the cosmocentric view dominated the lifestyle. Even the authors of rock art and sages of the *Upanishadic* philosophy reveal the same experience of the cosmos and man's place in it. Both look at the universes sacred artifacts. Interestingly, the text of the classical Indian theory of art is consistent with the context of what

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is known today as aboriginal art. The fundamental intuition, motifs and styles of rock art persist in their art.

The significance of prehistoric rock art forms, designs, colours and concepts perhaps reinforces and continues to emphasize the vitality of the traditional way. These elements, most probably, basic to all arts, allow the artists to visualize their concepts and traditions. Traditional philosophy expresses the vitality of the emerging contemporary art. Drawing analogy from the theme of tribal art, we can safely state that people in the prehistoric period might have conceptualized the nature into art form and worshipped the presiding deities and spirits for better living. The basic urge, which had compelled and prompted the people to manifest art, was utilitarian purpose, invoking sympathetic magic to ensure a constant food supply. The principal food of the shelter dwellers was game animals hunted so regularly. By portraying animals the shelter - dwellers perhaps believed, it would give them success in hunting, and there would be a plentiful supply of wild animals that made them fall prey to their weapons, when they went on hunting. Thus, the prehistoric rock art acquires status of magico - religious nature. Some scholars suggest that rock shelter paintings of antelopes pierced with spears may also have served as magic invocations of success, because several tribal groups still make images personifying evil and ceremonially decapitate them.

MEANING OF WORD 'ART'?

Many traditional societies have no formal term for art, no separate word for artist. Majority of them can paint and carve. It is an integral part of their lifestyle. The priest may have the privilege for producing paintings and songs in ceremonies. Or members of a clan may hold such a status. The Saora icon is the drawing on the walls and is locally called *ITTALAN* (*ID* = to write; *KITALAN* = a wall). The term varies from one area to the other. The Saoras living around Chandragiri refer to it as *ANITAL* (*KINTAL* = wall, the drawings on the walls are called *ANITAL*). Similarly, the Pithora painters of western India call painting *LIKHANA* "writing" and painter *LAKHERA* "writer".

Indian aesthetics or the science of art appreciation uses the word 'art' in a wide and all-inclusive sense in classical (textual) tradition. Bharata's *Natyasastra* deals with the performing arts i.e. dance and drama which has a pronounced visual aspect also. The *Shilpasastras* include generally architecture, painting and sculpture. But in the *Puranas* such as *Agni Purana* and *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, the continuity of these art forms with the performing and literary arts is recognized. In ancient tradition the word *kala* (Art) has been used in an even more inclusive sense so as to include minor arts and crafts also. The essential hallmark of art is to make, create or fashion a form or *rupa*, sensible or intelligible. Thus, art would include not only the visual arts but also the performing literary. In *Natyasastra* dramatic forms are *rupa*. The authenticating form impressed in the coin is also *rupa*. The diverse forms, which the same word acquires in different grammatical formations, are also *rupa*. *Rupa* has a sense of form, which manifests something more than itself. It is a significant form though the significance may be implicit and contextual.

Indian aesthetics has three main streams: (i) literature and poetics (ii) drama and dramaturgy (iii) fine arts and sculpture. But its scope circumscribe almost

all the branches and sub-branches of Indian - Arts, Crafts, Sciences, Literature, etc., which entertain our sense organs, satisfy our mind and convey Happiness to our soul. All sorts of literature - Prose, Poetry, Criticism, Drama, Dramaturgy, Dance, Music, both vocal & instrumental, Painting and also allied faculties of arts, convey joy to an aesthete. It can also be anything, which is sweet, bright, beautiful and true in the phenomenal world, even in dream and imagination, because in ecstasy paramount of good and absolute Happiness 'Supreme' reigns.

Indian logic postulates the perception of (i) the mundane (*laukika*), or perceptible by sense organs, and (ii) super sensuous (*yaugika*) or realisable introspectively. It assures super sensuous taste in relishing aesthetic Beauty and bliss. It is not only concerned with the problem of Beauty but also with the question of art and the enjoyment in art. The classification of arts in Indian tradition is based on different aesthetic senses. Amongst the senses that lead to aesthetic experience are vision (*drishya*) and hearing (*shravya*). Architecture, sculpture and painting originate from vision, and music and poetry originate from hearing and theatre from the two together. Hence, Indian aesthetics is a well-experimented psychoanalytical process of judgment. It is understood today as a science and theory of Beauty and fine arts.

NATURE AS CULTURE

The chief difference between the man of the archaic and Traditional societies and the man in modern societies lies in the fact that former feels himself indissolubly connected to the cosmos and cosmic rhythms; whereas the latter insists he is connected only with history. (Mircea Eliade)

Most of the world religions have found expression in some way or the other in visual imagery, and view the universe as God's artefact. God is the 'Supreme Artist' for them. The God's work is the natural world, visible to the human eye. The reverence of nature was not confined to Eastern thought only, but the ancient Greeks too deified the forces of nature. The Greeks also worshipped Mitra, the Vedic god. The pre-Islamic Persian religious text *Avesta* mentions about the same god and is named - 'Mithr', later changing into 'Mehr'. As per Islamic tradition, the nature is the creation of *Allah* and the Holy *Quran* devotes chapters pledging on oath to nature. Even some of its chapters are named after natural forces like the Sun (*Al-Shams*), the Moon (*Al-Qamar*), the Thunder (*Al-Ra'd*), etc. Interestingly, one of the names of *Allah* almighty is '*Al-Musawwer*' or 'The Artist'. God's epithet as the 'Supreme Artist' found the greatest emotional stimulus among the saint poets of India. One of the Great poets of India, Kabir used conventional similes to describe God as the Weaver, the Potter, the Painter, the Originator of music, etc. In Hinduism, God is the originator of every kind of art. Lord Vishnu and Shiva have thousands of names, which refer to the works of art. Vishnu is regarded as a 'Divine Architect' and 'Bestower of Forms'. He is the giver of Happiness.

Interestingly, Indian theory of aesthetics is deeply rooted in the triple - principle of *satyam* (Truth), *shivam* (Goodness/auspiciousness) and *sundaram* (Beauty). *Satyam* (Truth) is paired with *rtam* (Cosmic Order) in the famous passage of *Rgveda* (X.90.1), which says that both of these were born of kindled *tapas*. *Tapas* is the

basic effort and form of the manifestation of existence, creation and bliss from the basic cause. This relates to primary analysis of creation where Reality is seen in two forms viz. *rtam*, the kinetic aspect of order and *satyam*, the potential aspect of Truth. *Rtam* for Hindus in the blue print for Cosmic harmony (*Dharma*); for the Buddhists the law of righteousness (*Dhamma*); for the Muslims the inflexible yet all the merciful decrees of divine (*Haqq*). And for the Chinese *rtam* is the mystical path (*Tao*). Thus *rtam* is the framework in which the process of creation, sustenance and dissolution operates. Its most important meanings include Cosmic Order, Truth, Nature (*Dharma*), Beauty and Continuous Flow. It regulates the cosmos into a systematic whole.

For the ancient sages none was more important, or full of power, than *Vanaspati*, the Lord of the Forest (*Rgveda* 10, 146). In Indian culture forests (*Vana*) constitute a very important part, and are considered the abode of gods. The manifestations of nature have been interpreted either through symbolic or anthropomorphic or theomorphic forms, or sometimes using metaphors, myths, etc. to define it. The part played by the different primary elements, planets, etc. of the nature in the world order and the necessity to keep this order in total harmony with the nature has been a key concern of all the ancient sages and philosophers. They tried to identify the utility of different elements of the universe and tried to preserve them for the humanity. An attempt was made either to divinify or explain the scientific import of such elements. As different plants are believed to control the destiny of a man, were associated with different planets.

All the traditional Indian and world societies, also believe in the concept of *axis mundi*. For example, the tree represents, metamorphically, a power in the eyes of primordial man. It evokes verticality. It achieves communication, between the three levels of the cosmos: subterranean space, earth and sky. It provides one with an access to the invisible. In many cultures the universe is portrayed as multilayered, the layers kept distinct and in place by a world tree running through the exact centre (*axis mundi*) of the cosmos. The *axis mundi* symbolizes the communication between cosmic regions; and the extension of an organized and habitable world existed around it. The meaning and the function of the *axis mundi* rests not in abstract and geometrical concepts alone but in every day gesture that can affect the transcendence. The symbolism of the centre of the world may also be expressed through a sacred mountain, a sacred place, a ladder, a vine, a rope, a pillar and a bridge - all of which serve as an *axis mundi* connecting heaven and earth on various cosmic realms of being. There is a tendency to replicate the image of the *axis mundi* in multiple forms. Such is the case with the cross the cosmic tree of Christianity.

COSMOLOGY AND CULTURES

Man as a part of nature imitates god's primordial works of art. What he does, as an artist, is "cosmography", a *kairological* art on which all the arts are hung. Ontologically speaking, there are five *Kairological* moments in human consciousness, namely revelation, expression, reflection, identification, and tradition. They are mutually interdependent and interrelated and yet each is self-organising and self sustaining.

All the cultures are formed on a cosmic understanding. The *Agamic* and the Kashmir Shaiva traditions speak of the five-headed Shiva, each representing one of the five elements. In South India, all the five elements are represented in the *linga* form, in the following sacred places: Kanchipuram-*Prithwilingam* (Earth); Jambukeshwaram-*Apulingam* (Water); Arunachalam – *Tejolingam* (Fire); Kalahasti – *Vayulingam* (Air); Chidambaram – *Akashalingam* (Sky). The traditional cosmology has three crucial dimensions: the sacred universe, the divine order and the terrestrial existence. Modern cosmology is a special discipline and an empirical one aimed at understanding all that exists. Since the creationists and evolutionists today are in the midst of an ideological struggle, and evolution is merely a model and not testable experimentations, one might have faith that is true. If an alternative model for nature correlates faith better than the evolution model, then it would be the one to believe. Both, the evolution and creation are really competing scientific models. There is also a third point of view whose primary impetus is 'ontological'. Every culture has a world-view that contains some 'ontology', some conception of man – what it regards the fundamental level. All primordial cultures refer to a cosmological state of existence which is neither god-centric nor anthropocentric. While drawing inspiration from these cultures, the sages had grasped the stupendous idea of 'Expanding Universe' where God, Animal and Man originate, disappear and reoriginate endlessly. There is a natural symbiosis among all the three. God comes down to the world of animal and man, and both animal and man return to the world of Gods. The ancient sages had realized the man and nature relationship. They did not merely chant the majesty of the cosmos and the glory of God, but they also lived in positive symbiosis with the animal world. Animals have influenced the Hindu thought process to a great degree and they form the core of human consciousness – sensual, intellectual and mystical, all in one.

The Vedic hymns of the Golden Germ (*Hiranyagarbha*) and the Cosmic Person (*Purusha*) define the living body of the universe in geometrical terms. The *Upanishadic* sages introduced the conception of Brahman, which transcends geometry of surfaces. They conceived a world of matter, arising out of space and disappearing back into space. They infused the image of *Purusha* into the conception of Brahman, and traced the course of evolution from the primal *Atman*, through the elements. It speaks of the interrelationship between the soul and the elements. The individual soul (*atman*) is identified with the infinite Great Soul (*parmatma*), and the apparent paradox has been resolved by introducing the term Brahman, the expanding one. According to the *Chandogya Upanishada* (III, 12, 79):

What is called Brahman – that is the same as what the space outside of a person is. What the space outside of a person is – that is the same as what the space within a person is. What the space within a person is – that is the same as what the space here within the heart is. That is Full and unchanging.

The mysterious presence of bodiless space has been explained by the *Brihadaranyaka Upanisad* (III, 7.12) as follows:

He who dwells in the space, yet is other than the space, whom the space does not know, whose body is the space, who controls the space within – he is the Atman within you, the inner controller, the immortal.

The different Indian philosophies always believe that there are many ways of perceiving truth and in determining the relationship between God, nature and human being. While we may pursue different faiths and regulate our affairs in various ways, the motive remains the same of human happiness and bond of goodwill. The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* (IV, I) records it as follows:

He who is one, and who dispenses the inherent needs of all peoples and is in the beginning and end of all things, may He unite us with the bond of goodwill.

This philosophy goes beyond moral realm and is a cornerstone of plural and secular society. Hindu view of the cosmos emphasizes that the world is a family (*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakum*). Being an integral part of the great Indian philosophy(ies), the Kashmir Shaiva thought-currents too propagate the message of universal harmony, and also believes in the harmony between man and nature. It has its roots in the sacred science of the nature (cosmology). It looks the nature as culture, in both its manifested and unmanifested forms. In Shaiva tradition, the cosmos comprises of eight components, namely, the five-elements (Space, Air, Water, Fire and Earth) and also the sun and the moon, which are the measures of time. The eighth is the Brahman, that is, man in his consciousness. Interestingly, the Great God Shiva has eight forms (*Ashtamurti*) both in his cosmic manifestations and on the individual level. Shiva *Ashtamurti* dwells everywhere and over and above it dwells in the human body (in his consciousness also). In addition to *Nataraja* form the other forms depicted in iconography are: *Tripurantaka*, *Ardhanarishvara*, *Kalasimurti*, *Gajasursamharamurti*, *Bhikshatana*, *Virabhadra*, *Bhairava* and *Vinadhara*. Images of *Nataraja* represent the most exalted aspect of Shiva - a metaphor for the cosmic cycle of creation and destruction and the individual cycle of birth and re-birth. His *tandava* form of dance marks the metaphysical level of dissolution of the world.

METAPHYSICS IN INDIAN THOUGHT & ART

We know now that non-equilibrium, the flow of matter and energy, may be source of order. We have a feeling of great intellectual excitement: we begin to have a glimpse of the road that leads from being to becoming. (Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers)

In Indian thought and art, both vernacular and classical traditions, one finds variously images of an apparently metaphysical world. Indian art is struck by an extraordinary feat of traditional thought - currents which are both simple and complex. At one level, simple words are used so that everybody can understand the nature of art and art of nature. But at higher level it becomes 'cosmology' instead of simple explanation.

(a) Vernacular Tradition

In all ancient cultures belief and ritual occupy an important place. Often they

are unable to discern the proximate or remote cause of natural calamities by reasoning and therefore, attributed to the wrath of the malevolent spirits who are supposed to be annoyed or angered for one reason or another. An attempt is then made to appease the malevolent spirits or god. It is not only for the negative purpose of warding off diseases and disaster but also to invoke their blessings for peace, prosperity, abundant crops, health, cattle and numerous happy children. Different cultures have different patterns for this. For instance, in the Saora (tribe) invocation, the chanting words are less important as compared to the Santal (tribe) invocation. It is the production of icons, which are in focus. For the Saoras the icon becomes the 'symbol of will and realization of dream or goal, both negatively and positively'.

The worship of gods and spirits takes many forms and a vast complex of ritual - religious ceremonies may be associated with it. It is worth mention here that the tradition of invocation (*avahani*) and bidding farewell (*visarjan*) to the paintings are intrinsic to the ritual art. The worship is usually combination of:

- ▶ Ritual chanting, invocations or incantations;
- ▶ Certain purificatory rites involving the person or persons offering the worship and the physical space where it is being sanctified;
- ▶ Physical objects such as food or drinks, flowers, incense, etc.;
- ▶ Accompanying plastic or performing arts such as specially designed paintings, icons, or murals and songs and dance numbers.

All these forms have a ritualistic significance. The performer could either be a priest or the head of the household.

Most tribal communities (including the Saoras and Santals) believe that health and continuity of life are natural; whereas disease, sickness and death are unnatural. Further, that these natural phenomena are the handwork of malevolent spirits who need to be won over by offerings and worships. The icons thus follow the first act of ritual divination. Before drawing the icon the priest (*kudan*) worships the village gods and other important deities including the ancestors installed within the village boundary. The major icon is drawn on the wall close to the entrance of the house or on the wall facing front door of the house. For drawing these icons there is a prescribed season, but no specific dates. The icons are generally drawn in September/October (*Ashvina*).

The making of *Osakothi* (*osa* = penance *kothi* = sacred space) ritual paintings in Orissa is a continuous living tradition. The *Osakothi* ritual complex is one of India's finest living traditions centering on annually - produced folk - murals of goddesses and gods. Its close parallel is seen in the ritual relating to the Rathwa mural paintings in Gujarat. There is transformation and re-enlivenment of the visual image in both the cases. The pictorial act is associated with possession by divine spirits, singing, dancing and invocation. The Pithora painters of western India execute the creation story, said to be originally "written" by the God Pithora. The priest identifies the painted figures. He goes into trance and, taking up the sword moves from one end of the painting to the other. He accounts for each form,

and identify them one by one. Animal sacrifice follows the painting ceremony. Once the ritual is completed, it is believed, god Pithora stays on the walls of the house where he has been installed, and its inhabitants live with him forever.

The drawings on the mud walls of the Saora, Warli and the Rathwa houses are a part of the worldwide phenomenon in traditional cultures finding its expression in mural paintings of mud walls.

Power of Traditional Art

The power of India's traditional art could be observed by the remarks of some western scholars also. One of such scholars, Mr. E. V. Havell had even advised the modern Indian artists that 'they must use traditional themes, express traditional sentiments, and employ traditional styles. They must in other words, understand Indian art and more especially its spiritual and ethical purpose'. Abindranath Tagore, along with his pupils, was able to take a dispassionate view of art. They drew inspiration from village scenes, besides from classical themes, characters from history and mythology. Another noted artist Jamini Roy, inspired by folk and tribal art, started a new movement, inspired by the village artists. He created in his own style a 'Santal Girl', 'Drummers', 'Mother and Child', etc. Roy rediscovered the village style of Indian paintings and gave it the status of fine art. It is worth mention here that one of the greatest artists of the world, Pablo Picasso, has his roots in tribal tradition.

(b) Classical Tradition Manifested World

The word "Parameshvara", in the textual tradition (Like *Sharada-tilaka*), is the indicator of the Supreme Divine, the originator of the 'manifested world'. In Him, the infinite power - Shakti (Energy) or Kala (Time) lies in eternal union. The emergence of Shakti in the beginning of 'Creation' is like the appearance of oil out of oil-seeds. It is a spontaneous act, initiated by the divine will [*Shiva Purana (Vayaviya samhita)*]. It is through the divine will that the supreme power which is synonymous with it and remains concealed in the divine essence reveals itself. The textual tradition of *Agamas* (especially the *Vatulasuddhagama*) records Shiva as formless (*nishkala*), the all-pervading and the incomprehensible entity who on self will releases a microfraction of His Self which activates into five successive Shaktis (i.e. parashakti, adishakti, icchashakti, jnanashakti and kriyashakti). From these Shaktis emerges five Sadashiva - *tattvas* (Elements). These are known as Sadyojata (represents *prithvi*, i.e. Earth), Vamadeva (represents *jala*, i.e. Water), Aghora (represents *agni*, i.e. Fire), Tatpurusha (represents *vayu*, i.e. Air), and Ishana (represents *akasha*, i.e. Sky). Since Isana is supposed to possess in itself all the Sadashiva - *tattvas* preceding him, he is represented in iconography as a five-headed deity each of which represents different Sadashiva - *tattvas*. These faces are individually called as *Nandivaktra* (western face), *Umavaktra* (northern face), *Bhairava* (southern face), *Mahadeva* (eastern face) and *Sadashiva* (face upwards). Infact, the five faces of Sadashiva represent five elements, which gets further divided into five parts each. Hence, in his Maha-Sadashiva aspect he is

depicted as twenty-five headed. It is from the microfractional part of Sadashiva that Mahesha (Shiva) is formalized who initiates the process of creation (*srsthi*), preservation (*sthiti*) and reabsorption (*laya*). He should be depicted having ten arms and four heads, each with three eyes. The fifth head is invisible and is not shown in iconography.

Shaiva thought-currents are not just limited to the understanding of cosmic evolution but for understanding the inner human essence which links it to the cosmic force through *yoga* and spiritual *sadhana* also.

Manifestation in Art

The mason coordinates materials that were scattered and makes of them the habitation of God: from an indeterminate Chaos, which it was, his soul becomes the temple of the divine presence, the temple of which the universe is the model. (Frithjof Schuon)

Corresponding to this, a man developed temples, which are symbols of the world-mountain, or, analogically, of the universal man (*Purusha*) whose body comprehends the universe. It is believed that from the limbs of the cosmic man everything originated. The names of the various limbs of the human body from the feet to the crown of the head are applied in Indian architectural texts to the different parts of the temple structure. But the *Vastu Purusha* (architecture as symbol for Cosmic Man) is lifeless unless the soul resides in it. His real soul being the central image installed on its sanctum being the *garbha griha* (sanctum sanctorum) or the house of the womb, built in the universe-form of womb. This experience is traditionally justified by the analogy between the dark cave of the heart and the dark space of the shrine where the image appears. Above it raises the high tower, a microcosm of Mount Meru with its vertical thrust leading eye and heart to union with the divine. In the classical Hindu architecture, two kinds of movements are invariably present. One is from the exterior to the inner centre of *garbha griha* (Sanctum Sanctorum). The second is the upward movement of aspiration, assent, and exultation. This is usually suggested by the '*shikhara*' (finale). In spatial order, the architecture is fundamental to us as nature and language. The ornamental forms and sculptures on the temple surfaces and columns on the walls represent the cosmos as a mythical design. The Cosmos, the Cosmic person and the *vastu purusha*, are all projections and emanations of the *purusha* in the heart, the light and the heart. The *vastu* (architecture) is something with which the spectator identifies himself. It represents his abode and location. The mind is the abode of the spirit, the body of the mind, the house of the body. Where the spirit is universal, the house is the cosmos. The temple is a representation of the essential form linking the individual to the cosmic person. Indian cosmology holds that the universe is infinite and expanding beyond the arena of geometrical space where the drama of Nature is acted out⁵.

The elements of nature have a building ability; and each have a form, a location and an inter-dependent relationship. A form is predetermined; it is filled by perishable matter. Life is formless, self-existent and, essentially, indestructible. As form and life come together, the process of origination begins. Life activates

matter that constitutes form, but in itself is not a material substance. The elements constitute human and other forms, both individually and collectively. The head and ears are associated with Sky; neck and chest with Air; stomach with Fire; and body with Earth.

In the traditional Hindu cosmology, the gods are related to the earth by dwelling in the upper reaches of Mount Meru (*Sumeru*), the central peak and axis of the world. They live in one cosmos with mankind and descend to the foothills when needed. In some parts of India the temple courts and precincts were vastly expanded to constitute temple cities, replicas of the heavenly that included all the activities of religion and daily life. All the temples were laid in accordance with the well-defined plan. All the geometrical forms introduced in the temple or house architecture, the most primary and most recommended form is a square. In the *Shilpashastra*, the whole cosmos is conceived within the square and the space of circle. In the *Agamic* characterisation of elements the Earth is represented by square, Water by crescent, Fire by triangle, Air by hexagon and Sky by circle. In the *Vedic* tradition, the concern for giving equal importance to Sky and Earth suggests that square and the circle are the basic geometrical forms. The geometrical forms like rectangular, octagon and circle have their emanation from the square. Building, a temple was a ritual in itself. The temple and the temple worship were thus intended to help take beyond the world of illusion, 'to the still point of the turning the wheel'.

Some religions like Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism have an abundance of symbolism, where as Islam has little. For the Mahayana Buddhism the elusive 'void' or 'emptiness' serves a master symbol. For Islam it is the God-given gift of the Holy *Quran*. In the sense of overt representations of something, images are more definite than symbols. The images share the basic character of symbols and often have subordinate symbols associated with them. In the case of a Hindu image with many hands each holding an attribute with symbolic meaning. These are given a human interpretation through another symbol system, that of language.

Hindu gods are involved in the living world of man, though they stand for cosmic laws at a higher level of that world. The deities who are the basic energies of the universe can be approached through the perception of created forms. This necessity has led to the representation of the deity in a thousand variety of thought - forms, magic designs, and *mantras* (Hymns), symbols and images. Human ability to construct the images represents the things, which may be regarded as an aspect of his ability to symbolise both at higher (master symbols) and lower (natural symbols) levels. In Kashmir Shaiva analysis of *mantric* compositions, the phonetic elements or letters of the Sanskrit alphabet are condensed forms of creative energy. In Shaiva rituals, the symbolic postures (*mudras*), sacred diagrams (*mandala*), or mental assignment of various parts of the body to different deities (*nyasa*), and initiation (*diksha*) are very important features. The mystic diagram (*mandala*) is of great importance in the Shaiva-*tantric* system of ritualistic worship. It is a mystic circular design representing cosmos, and also a visual aid for concentration and

introversive meditation. It is said that "the square is the fundamental form of Indian architecture but it must not be forgotten that the square presupposes the circle and results from it. Life, growth and movement are visualized in a circle, while the square is perceived as a mark of order, finality, and of perfection beyond life and death". The *mandala* universally symbolizes the evolution and involution of the cosmos contained within the orbit of cyclic time. As an image of evolution the concentric circles around the still centre (timelessness) embody the diverse world of manifestation, transformation and mutation in time. Besides, *Nyasa* is a means of 'seating of power' in one's own body by touching limbs with the hand accompanied by appropriate *mantras*. "As a temple is consecrated before it becomes a sacred place of worship, so before God is invoked, this body (the true temple of God) should be dedicated to him".

In the empirical world visual imagery symbolizes - what is ultimate, and lead human beings into a relationship with what is beyond. These forms and symbols are the inevitable intermediaries in a process in which the mental mechanism is discarded and supernatural states of being are realized. Hence, we approach unmanifested through manifested. According to the Holy text (of Hindus) *Bhagavata Gita*, "Those who feel attracted to the contemplation of the unmanifest are faced with a problem, because a being imprisoned in a body cannot grasp the ways of the unmanifest". Thus the spiritual guide, "the *guru* (Enlightened One) understanding the nature and qualifications of the seeker tells him the particular form of divinity he should worship". All human beings in fact, have not all the same capacities, nor are they all at the same stage of development. They worship the god suitable for them at their particular level. Hinduism accepts polytheism as a reality of human experience.

Each god of the pantheon has an affinity with some particular form, colour, body or energy in the visible universe. The deities represent three levels of abstraction - the level of the spiritual body; the subtle body (where emotions and the senses holds sway); and the gross or physical body in the phenomenal world. These include the thought - forms, symbolic sounds of the *mantras*, and the diagrammatic *yantras*. They are held to be more accurate than an image being abstract. If the *mantra* can be described as the sonic form of the deity, then *yantra* or *chakra* is the very deity in visual form. Both *mantra* and *yantra* are central to the worship of *Shakti* or the Mother Goddess – a cult that is predominantly popular among Kashmiri Hindus. A mystical construction of the *tantric yantras* of the cosmos, the *Shri Yantra* is formed by the interpretation of two set of triangles: four, apex upward, representing the male principle, and five apexes downwards, representing the female principle. The *yantra* is devised to give a vision of the totality of existence, so that the adept may internalize its symbols for the ultimate realization of his unity with the cosmos.

CONCLUSION

The nature represents the life and sacred continuity of the spiritual, cosmic and physical worlds. The physical properties of nature are combined with supernatural

or sacred ideas, the beliefs that surround the basic elements, flora and fauna (etc.) connection with what constitutes religion in different cultures. These are not deemed only sacred in the major religions of East and West, but also in other traditions where beliefs in the sacred are combined with the beliefs in the power of ancestors, in the creation of life in birth, after death and the afterworld and about health and illness. The different components of the nature may symbolize a deity either by serving as a vehicle embodiment of the sacred presence or by making a sacred spot that a deity frequents.

The uniqueness of Indian culture lies in the fact that the people at different periods of history have contributed to its renewal and revival. There is both deep-rootedness in tradition and innovative zeal at work. Art has essentially been an inherent human technology for expressing consciousness in matter. Artists have created objects, rituals and environment not only for a subjective expression, but also as homage to the creator, to ensure harmony with nature, and to promote the well-being of nature itself.

In Indian thought and art, both vernacular and classical traditions, one finds various images of an apparent metaphysical world. The images share the basic character of symbols and often have subordinate symbols associated with them. In the empirical world it symbolizes - what is ultimate, and lead human beings into a relationship with what is beyond. These forms and symbols are the inevitable intermediaries in a process in which the mental mechanism is discarded and supernatural states of being are realized.

It is perhaps due to close relationship between man and nature that the authors of the rock art probably conceptualized nature into art form and worshipped the presiding deities and spirits for better living. Rock art acquired the status of magico – religious nature. Community dance and the hunting indicate perhaps some sort of magico – religious significance.

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