CHAPTER 4
ABSTRACTION AND NON-OBJECTIVE IN ART:
MEANING AND CRITIQUE

4.1. What is Abstraction in Art?

The word ‘abstract’ comes from the Medieval Latin ‘abstractus’ meaning ‘drawn away,’ which is from the Latin past participle of the verb ‘abstrahere’ ‘to drag away; detach or to divert,’ from ‘abs’ which means ‘away’ and ‘trahere’ meaning to ‘draw’. This etymology underlies the preceding definitions as well as thinking of abstraction as “In thought, leaving out, by not attending to, the apparently irrelevant distinguishing features (or even common features) of the several individuals falling within a class.”

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the verb ‘abstract’ means “to withdraw, take away; to separate in mental conception; to consider apart from the concrete.” The noun ‘abstraction’ is “the act of abstracting;” and hence is “the act of separating in thought;” but it is also “the result of abstracting; a mere idea.” The same dictionary defines the adjective ‘abstract’ as “separated from matter, practice, or particulars; ideal; abstruse.” Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines the verb ‘abstract’ as “remove, separate; to consider apart from application to or association with a particular instance;” and the noun ‘abstraction’ is “the act or process of abstracting;” and is “the state of being abstracted” as well. The adjective ‘abstract’ means “disassociated from any specific instance” and “expressing a quality apart from an object”

Abstraction is used in visual art either typically to mean, as Harold Osborne wrote “a mode of representing objects which reduces the amount or particularity of the detail depicted…. neither the work neither itself nor any of its parts represents or symbolizes objects in the visible world.”

Abstraction, according to the Dictionary of Philosophy is that “aspect of form of cognition, which mentally isolates properties of an object or connections between its properties from others. Both the process and its result are called abstraction. In this process of abstraction it is sometimes necessary to disregard
certain of man’s subjective possibilities...the various concepts and categories - matter, motion, value are the result of abstraction”

The process of abstraction encompasses through the perception, conception and memory. Abstract art is the product of process of abstraction, in which it is necessary to separate the essential aspects in their pure form.

In Latin ‘concretus’ means simply ‘mixed’, ‘fused’, ‘composite’, compound; while the Latin word ‘abstractus’ means ‘withdrawn’, ‘taken out of’, ‘extracted’. That is all that is contained in the original etymological meaning of these words. The rest pertains to the philosophical conception that is expressed through them. The term ‘abstract’ in philosophy is typically opposed to the term ‘concrete,’ and it is a problematic issue in this discipline how these two terms are to be defined. According to Mill “The concrete is that which is immediately given in individual experience as an ‘individual thing’, an individual experience, and a concrete concept is a verbal symbol that may be used as a name of an individual object. That symbol which cannot be used as a direct name of an individual thing is ‘the abstract’. One may say, ‘That is a red spot’. One cannot say, ‘That is redness’. The former is therefore concrete, the latter abstract.”

According to Art Fundamentals, ‘Abstract art’ “is a type of art which is entirely imaginative and not described from anything visually perceived by the artist. The elements, their organization, and their treatment by the artist are entirely personalized and consequently, not associated by the observer with any previously experienced natural objects.” and ‘Abstraction’ defined as “Theory and practice as a term given to the visual effects that derive their appearance from natural objects but which have been simplified and or rearranged to satisfy artist’s need for organization or expression. Abstraction is a process of varying degrees of change – from near naturalism through semi abstraction to pure abstraction. Sometimes any resemblance of the final product to the original objects is difficult to detect ‘as in pure abstraction, with its non representational art’

A Companion to Aesthetics defined Abstraction as “Absence of representation. In painting and sculpture, pure abstraction consists in the absence of representative elements, elements which recognizably resemble items in the external
world and which the work is intended to portray. Abstraction, however, admits of
degrees. Extremely realistic works display a minimum of abstract elements. As the
artist introduces distortions or generalizations or purely decorative elements, the
works grow more abstract."\(^8\)

In Dictionary of Abstract Painting, Michel Seuphor defines abstract art as
“…all art that does not recall or evoke reality regardless of whether that reality be
the point from which the artist started on not. True abstract painting, it explains,
should avoid representation, even of an accidental kind, or the depicting of any
subject whatsoever. Its colour, form, and textures exist for themselves alone
depending on no reference to any external reality"\(^9\)

The early history and meaning of “abstract” itself has been obfuscated by the
midcentury revisions and redefinitions of this concept. As Seuphor wrote
“…abstraction rarely meant abstract in any pure, rigorously formal, non-referential,
and non-representational visual sense, accommodating instead a wide array of
hybrid formulations….At once pictorial, poetic, and philosophical, it is embedded
within a genre whose history can be traced back to romanticism, but whose moment
of triumph comes at the end of the nineteenth century in the context of symbolism,
decadentism and the avant-gardes: the interior landscape…. As initially employed in
twentieth-century cultural debates, ‘abstraction’ signifies less a distinctive pictorial
practice that disrupts naturalism in the name of autonomy of art than a mode of
unfettered exploration of the world—hence the referential trace embedded in the
word ‘landscape’ -closely allied with visionary states: meditation, dreaming,
delirium, hallucination…..So understood, ‘abstraction’ opens up the prospect of an
art that, following in the footsteps of pure philosophical inquiry, symphonic music
and certain expressions of spirituality, finds in geometry not only the new vernacular
of the era of industry but also the secret language of the psyche or of the world, or of
the psyche as world; an art that is ‘abstract’ in as much as it has withdrawn from the
realm of appearances in the pursuit of something anticipating the noumenal.”\(^10\)

Abstract art is based on the concept that there is a much value and power in
color, shape and texture alone, and those elements becomes is an art form in
themselves. The creative use of these elements has the power to provoke feeling,
emotion, and a response. “Thus the key to abstract art lies in the discovery of self (also) and the exploitation by a suitable technique, of the hidden store of virgin material which we all carry within us and to which we all must find a path – and this is perhaps the hardest aspect of the artist’s work – before it can be brought to light.”\textsuperscript{11} There is definitely controversy between those who believe art should be a faithful depiction of scenes or objects, and those who believe in the freeing nature of abstract art. It wasn't until the early years of the 20th century that abstract art suddenly became a valid art form encompassing many different styles under the heading of abstract.

Abstract art is the opposite of a natural or realistic image of something you would recognize as reality. Rather it is focused on color, texture, mood, form, pattern, elements that gives the viewer something powerful; a feeling, an experience, without telling them exactly what it is they are looking at. As Maurice Denis wrote “…remember that a picture – before being a battle horse, a nude woman or some anecdote – is essentially a flat surface covered with colours arranged in a certain order.”\textsuperscript{12}

The process of abstraction that is key to achieve the Abstract image consists of a process of dragging away, removing, or separating the relevant from the irrelevant, the essential from the inessential. What is dragged away, removed, separated, or abstracted in abstraction is what is essential to effecting and comprehending the intended identification of an artwork with some object.

4.2. Abstraction, Non-Representational and Non-Objective in Art

Synonyms of ‘Abstract’ or ‘Abstraction’ in this second sense are non-figurative, non-representational, and non-objective etc. These are some significant terms associated with the notion of Abstract art.

Non-Representational painting is “not resembling or portraying any object in physical nature.”\textsuperscript{13} Abstract art is an art that is not based on visual recreation of the natural world. “every kind of art which does not relate to visible reality, that is, it does not contain any abstract reality where it provides the initial impetus for the
Unlike definite representations of reality which everyone can see and recognize, abstract art is more concerned with producing work which is evocative, organic and perhaps transient. Abstract artists deal with making representations, not from the natural world, but which is felt, expressed and lived. “Art without object - the painting itself is an object so it cannot exists without it. And formation of any abstraction when painted is again a representation of artist’s abstract thought. Therefore, non-representational is also a defective term”\(^{15}\)

Non-objective art is another way to refer to Abstract art. Essentially, the artwork does not represent or depict a person, place or thing in the natural world. Usually, the content of the work is its color, shapes, brushstrokes, size, scale, and, in some cases, its process. Non-objective art where there is no formal reference to reality and the presentational world at all. Alfred H. Jr. Barr in his book ‘Cubism and Abstract Art’, he wrote “Substitutes for ‘abstract’ such as ‘non-objective’ and ‘non-figurative’ have been advocated as superior, But the image of a square is much an ‘object’ or a ‘figure’ as the image of a face or a landscape, in fact ‘figure’ is very prefix used by geometers in naming A or B the abstraction with which they deal…this is not to deny that the adjective ‘abstract’ is confusing and paradoxical. For an ‘abstract’ painting is really a most positively concrete painting since it confines the attention to its immediate, sensuous, physical surface for more than does the canvas of a sunset or a portrait”\(^{16}\)

Abstraction removed the subject or recognizable shapes, forms or perspectives completely by simply allowing splottes of color to dominate the canvas. In reference to Kandinsky’s abstract art much discussion among art critics and theorists arose to determine the “problem of abstract versus naturalism”, which connects well to Kandinsky’s transition between figurative and non-objective art. Troubled by the realistic goals and superficial works of nineteenth century art, Kandinsky experimented with the concept of non objectivity. He and fellow artists worked quietly, among those numbed by the deification of matter, in an attempt to restore the faith and hope lost by a century devoted to materialism. Kandinsky’s effective dematerialization of the object gave his work a mystical substance which helped to redirect society’s search for spiritual meaning. There is no literal
translation for the inner content of form. It is born solely from the artist’s ability to “touch the human soul . . . this is the principle of internal necessity”\textsuperscript{17}

Color, form and object each have their own distinct vibration but when set in unison with the others they create a spiritual harmony that communicates to the soul. Kandinsky’s concept of vibration comes from the theosophical teaching that vibration gives material shapes their life and meaning. Kandinsky believed that “pure elements, especially colours, are capable of affecting our inner experiences, even a part from the traditional tripartite reaction to art; colours is a means of direct impact on the soul. The colour is the key. The eye is the hammer. The artist is the hand which sets the soul in vibration by means of this or that key.”\textsuperscript{18} The mission of Kandinsky’s nonobjective abstract art is to bring the viewer’s soul to the same level of vibration as his own in order to introduce the beholder to higher levels of spiritual consciousness. This is the principle of internal necessity; the artist’s ability to communicate soul to soul.

Non-objective painting typically uses geometric motifs on the surface of picture plane. As a general rule no use is made of linear perspective to create the illusion of pictorial depth, neither is impasto employed to create textural effects. Also, the picture is purposely devoid of any references to worldly things, either material or emotional. Non-objective art is abstraction in its purest form. Non-objective image does not depict recognizable scenes or objects, but instead is made up of pure forms, shapes, patterns, and colors, that exist for their own expressive sake. Color, form, structure, and composition, are the important elements of the image, which affect its expressive power. This image projects an emotion or an idea or philosophy of some sort that the artist is trying to express.

As we gathered from the etymology ‘Abs’ (from the Abstract) means ‘to detach’ or ‘to divert’. So by definition to ‘abstract’ must mean that ‘something’ whole, sacred or complete has had to be digested, altered and changed in some way, furthermore when one realizes that “…All our forms of communication are abstractions from the whole context of reality. I have often quoted Alfred North Whitehead in what I think is one of the crucial statements on abstraction, that “the higher the degree of abstraction, the lower the degree of complexity.”\textsuperscript{19} Once one
understands that every expression is a form of abstraction, then abstraction of form finds its strong visual representation.

4.3. Types of Abstraction

Abstraction emerges in the visual art to free the painting from representational subject matter. Abstract art is an art that does not depict the natural world but instead uses shapes, texture and color in non-representational way. In visual art painting is a two-dimensional medium of expression. In abstraction, imagination is concentrated on pictorial surface and arrangement of shapes, colors, texture and patterns are invariably used to achieve the abstract image. The objective is to conceive the sheer visual. It is this practice, which is leading the artist to experiment with the structure of form and his own inner expressions.

It is important to note that abstract painting is not about formlessness, because by making a point or a stroke on the surface of the canvas we generate the certain form. That form is important in the context of our analysis. So abstraction is only possible with the form, it can’t be formless, but it can be abstract or representational. On the basis of form ‘Abstraction’ can be broadly categorized in three types including Organic Geometric and Autonomous Abstraction.

Non-representational imagery that has been ‘abstracted’ from nature or has been derived from some aspect of the representational world to the point where they no longer conform to conventional reality called organic abstraction. Nature plays a significant role in this kind of abstraction. Artists start from the natural object and reduced and simplified it till it becomes completely an object of its own, which had no relation to the visible reality. Organic abstraction is an art which depicts the concrete physical object in simplified, or distorted, or exaggerated form; the depicted object may only constitute an indirect reference or an allusion to the original natural subject. The term Organic abstraction was not a school or movement, but a striking feature of the work of many important artists. It includes work made by cultures and societies around the world, made for many reasons both spiritual and religious or as a response to environment and habitat.
Geometric forms are always considered as pure forms, so if an artist makes his forms through the use of pure geometric forms, regardless of whether they are symbolic or non-objective is Geometric abstraction. Geometric abstraction is a form of abstract art based on the use of geometric forms sometimes, though not always, placed in non-illusionistic space and combined into non-objective compositions. Throughout 20th century art historical discourse, critics and artists working within the reductive or pure strains of abstraction have often suggested that geometric abstraction represents the height of a non-objective art practice, which necessarily stresses or calls attention to the root plasticity and two-dimensionality of painting as an artistic medium. Thus, it has been suggested that geometric abstraction might function as a solution to problems concerning the need for modernist painting to reject the illusionistic practices of the past while addressing the inherently two dimensional nature of the picture plane as well as the canvas functioning as its support. Wassily Kandinsky’s paintings of later period were comes in this category. Other significant artists such as Kasimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian have also embraced this approach towards abstract painting. In India many artists uses the geometric forms to create their own style of abstract paintings, among them S.H. Raza, Om Prakash Sharma, Akkhitam Narayanan, G.R. Santosh are significant.

In this type of abstraction artist emphasize on the construction of an art object from non-representational autonomous forms. In this type of abstraction, imagination and invention are concentrated on pictorial surface and arrangement of shapes, colors, texture and patterns are invariably used to achieve the abstract image. Beyond the symbolism, spiritualism and mysticism, here the forms are completely Non-objective. The formal properties like point, line, form, colour and texture becomes the subject matter for the painting and only thing that is concerned beyond the formal structure is the artist’s inner expression. It could be instantaneous or deeply researched too. It is sheer idea to create a visual that is directed for sheer visuality.

Another important aspect about the abstraction is the process of making, by which abstract image is achieved. On the basis of process of making we can also
categorized the abstraction in two different types including suggestive and accidentally found.

Abstraction is complex issue as it involves varied methods, techniques and expression of the individual. Most problematic issues is that artists are not strict to any particular type of abstraction and they intermingled the various types and methods to create their own individual style. So all these types presented here is broadly categorized the abstraction in painting.

4.4. Origin and Sources

The earliest cave drawings of Bhimbetka (Fig.4.1) dating to 30,000 BC represent an intuitive desire to express and ‘depict’ ones living space, to say and record something about what has been seen and what is familiar. The pre-historic caves of Bhimbetka, Hazaribagh (Fig.4.1a), Mirzapur, Hoshangabad, Banda and other caves contain many engravings of animals as well as abstract designs and expression of a clearly non representational nature. These are some of the earliest forms in representation and abstraction setting the template for how the human beings would strive to represent, distort, celebrate and evaluate the world around. Varied motifs that were painted in these pre-historic caves were included geometric forms like dots, circle, loop, wavy line and circle and triangles are non-representational in the character.
Abstract art had its roots in the earlier traditions and not by means the invention of the twentieth century. As Wilhelm Worrringer claims that “abstract art made its appearance earlier than imitative art, that for many centuries it was the natural form, that these early cultures even when they represented natural objects deformed and approximated them to abstract forms. This can be seen in Egyptian and Near Eastern art as in Irish illuminated manuscripts and old Scandinavian carvings. This early abstract was, in most cases, religious or was understood in terms of magic and was much closer to the cosmic than to pure formalistic art. Equally ancient is the philosophical theory of abstract art. It developed in Greece, through of all artistic manifestations known to history Greek art is the least abstract. The origin of this theory are to be found with the Pythagoreans, who were convinced that, first of all it is for this reason a reflection of the cosmos. Both these ideas were taken over by Plato, who reshaped them radically.”

Fig.4.1a. ISCO, Rock Art site, Hazaribagh, Bihar, 7000 – 4000 BC

Fig.4.2. Bowl, Indus Valley Terracotta Pottery Artifacts, 3000 - 2500 BC
The earliest origins of mathematics in the Indian subcontinent is generally dated around 300-600 BCE when the ‘Sulva Sutras’ are thought to have been written. But geometry may have had an even earlier beginning - in the third millennium BCE in the pottery artifacts of Indus valley civilization. Design patterns, such as complex space-filling tiling, seen on artifacts of the Indus Valley Civilization shows a deep understanding of sophisticated geometric principles. The
Indus Valley Civilization had also developed skills in pottery and painting. They used a special type of clay, which was baked. Once the pot was made, the painters would paint beautiful designs, which include varied decorative patterns of geometric shapes. According to Partha Mitter, “Art generally means sculpture and painting, and often includes architecture, but human artifacts may embrace a wider category of material remains that include the decorative and minor arts, such as jewelry, pottery, metal and wooden utensils and even toys.”\(^{23}\) (Fig. 4.4)

**4.1.1. Religious Heritage and Occult Doctrines**

India is colourful and vibrant country, a land as diverse as its people. A mosaic of faiths, cultures, customs and languages that blend harmoniously to form a composite whole. One of the world’s oldest living civilizations, which gave to the world, the concept of zero, the primordial sound ‘Aum’, Yoga and Tantra.

From ancient times Indian religious arts are associated with the certain symbols, diagrams, which are almost geometric in their structure. “Symbolism in Indian art has a tradition going back to the several thousand years. It is extremely difficult to assign a date as to when the symbols and decorative designs came into existence. One is left with no choice but to base one’s views either on conjecture or on the study of Indian scriptures, Puranic literatures etc. Most of the discoveries were made at the dawn of historical period when the early man had discovered the essentials of civilization. By this time, wheel, the use of sun dried and fire-bricked bricks, etc. had been discovered as also the symbols which were used as a means of communication. These were symbols came to be used as pictographs late, from which emanated the alphabet.”\(^{24}\) These symbols, ritual diagrams are had their own specific meaning and purpose as they are associated with religious manifestations. “Religious works offer an interpretation of ma-cosmos relationship rooted in a quest for the spiritual. They embody an all inclusive world view, an ethos and philosophy to live by. The traditional artist is akin to a mystic who communes with nature to solve the mystery of creation. To achieve this end he works his way through the vast storehouse of inherited memory-imprints conventionalized through centuries.”\(^{25}\) (Fig.4.5, 4.6)
Symbols are always a part of Indian tradition and religious system, which had deep hidden meaning associated with their iconography and structure of form. These symbols are made of very simplified forms and usually practiced in ritualistic as well as everyday activities. “Symbols have always been an important and revealing expression of art and beliefs. Whether in concept of form or both, the symbols encompass varied aspects of culture both in terms of time and space. It hardly needs to say that the symbols are not merely the forms in respect of the aniconic representations but they are manifestations with deeper meaning. They occupy significant position almost in every kind of artistic expression. The symbols on icons, seals, sculptures, architectures and other objects have their apparent artistic values as well. At the same time they have religious, social and philosophical connotations. Indian art virtually embraced the totality.”

These simplified and geometric symbols shows that abstraction has always are associated with our tradition from the ancient period. “The abstract ideas were also expressed through symbolic language in Indian art from very early times. It dominated the entire realm of Indian art. The language through which art came in a form was that of symbols. The symbols or signs depicting the divine and semi-divine and unexpressed concepts represent aspects of paramount truth as seen by
As in the most traditional cultures, visual symbols become powerful means of relaying religious and social ideals. Temples employed a profound symbolic language based on the visual representation of all major philosophical concepts. Some significant symbols of are ‘Chakra’- the wheel of time used to symbolize movement; ‘Swastika’- representing the fourfold aspects of creation and motion; ‘Padama’- the lotus, the prime symbol of creation; Linga and Yoni- male and female symbols of fertility. Among the many

Our ancient architecture is also associated with the varied geometrical forms, which is based on the classical treatises of Vastu Shastra. Most of the temples and buildings were built on the basis of the Vastu-purusha Mandala (Fig.4.8 to 4.11), which is a cosmic diagram of the enclosure where Vastu Purusha manifests. “Vastu-purusha Mandala (Fig.4.8, 4.11) essentially is square essentially linear. The square is the fundamental form of architecture and all other shapes are derived from it. In geometrical metaphysics the square is regarded the original perfect form. The square is oriented to the four cardinal directions, East, West, North and South, which makes space comprehensible and so it becomes an appropriate symbol of the extended world. The horizontal and vertical lines embody the pair of opposites. Balance and order lie in the perfection of the square.” Most texts on Vastu Sastra talk about the 64 module plan for temples and shrines and the 81 module plan for residences and
other buildings that are not religious structures. The mandala is an area of space defined by an enclosure. Vastu Purusha is super imposed into the enclosure to indicate the birth of a structure from Nature.

Fig.4.9. A Digram of Vedic Fire Altar, 1500 BC.  
Fig.4.10. Eklingatobhadra Mandala, Benaras  
Fig.4.11. Vastupurush Mandala Based on 81 Squares, Rajyasthan

The word ‘Tantra’ is really difficult to explain. But it’s important to note that the diagrams and yantras come from the Tantric philosophy of Hinduism, beginning in the fifth or sixth century. “No one knows how old Tantra is. There are hints of it in India’s oldest literature. The earliest surviving complete texts are Buddhist and date to about AD 600. But there are many elements of what became Tantra in older
Hindu and Buddhist scriptures; and later texts even refer to Tantra as ‘Atharva Veda’ thus identifying it as an aspect of the most ancient sacred and orthodox literature of Hinduism.” For instance, the main deities are Shiva, Shakti, Kali, and so on. Hindu Tantrism combines devotional elements with ones that may seem more mystical, such as symbols, signs, mantras and mudras. (Fig. 4.4, 4.5) It is really a libertarian branch of Hinduism, and often it is forbidden.

Tantra is an ancient tradition. It was widespread in India until about the 13th century when the Muslims invaded India and made Tantric practices punishable. It was then forced to go underground. It is a passionate and powerful way of life that is finally re-emerging. The word Tantra comes from Sanskrit roots. Its literal translation is to expand and liberate.

Fig.4.12. Goddess Sakti. Rajastahn, 17th Cen.

The subject of Tantra is generally considered highly esoteric and has always been shrouded in myth, mystery, superstitions and tradition. It is general opinion of scholars that the cult of 'Sakti', the most important feature of the Tantra, was a very ancient tradition. “According to the Tantra, the ultimate truth is the union of Siva and Sakti, or Purusha and Prakriti. Shiva represents pure consciousness which is
inactive – the static aspect of reality, while Sakti represents the world force – the kinetic energy of ultimate truth. Every conjunction of opposites produces a rapture of plane and ends in the rediscovery of the primordial spontaneity.\(^{30}\) (Fig. 4.12 to 4.15)

The philosophy and iconography of Tantra deeply interrelated with the geometric signs and symbols, which are very abstract in their character. “Though very little is known about Tantra art in India, it has perfected a sign language which symbolizes the man-universe relationship.”\(^{31}\) In ancient times, tantrics used these Yantras and Mandalas for the magical and ritualistic purposes. They used the geometric forms and symbols like, bindu, oval shape, square and circle in association to their symbolic meaning. “Art in the service of Tantra contained numerous iconographic elements, starting from abstract forms to figurative images, their residues, and different combinations. Among the important ones are: Bindu (primal point), Oval (a cosmic egg), Square, the perfect form manifested by pairs of opposite acting as complementary rather than contradictory (symbol of continuous movement), Triangle and its variations facing upwards and downwards (respectively symbolizing Purusha, the eminent principal, and Prakriti, the power of manifestation), Trident (the emblem of its deity Shiva), piercing eyes (symbol of Shakti), Om (the primordial sound, sound symbol of supreme one) and numerous variations of organic, geometric, floral, vegetable, animistic forms, gods and
goddess etc. drawn from different Indian religious doctrines.” These diagrams and yantras are used for meditation. The diagrams and yantras date back to the handwritten Tantra treatises that have been copied over many generations, at least until the seventeenth century. At some point they evolved into this complex symbolic cosmology of signs.

Fig.4.15. Nav-Yoni Chakra, 1761, Nepal.                     Fig.4.16. Chart of 12 Zodiacal Divisions, Rajashatan

Yantras are also important geometric diagram, which is used to perform the ritual or meditation. The word Yantra has originated from the root ‘Yama’ that means to regularize to control or to concentrate. A Yantra is a highly efficient tool for contemplation, concentration and meditation. Yantras carry spiritual significance and there is a specific meaning of Yantra that pertains to higher levels of consciousness. In the occult doctrine of Tantra, Yantra is a means, with the help of which a desired perfection is achieved. Yantra are highly abstract in their structure of their formation as their whole structure is based on the geometrical forms. The forms, styles, patterns of Tantra art is based upon Yantra structure of geometrical forms.

A yantra is a geometrical pattern made of several concentric figures (squares, circles, lotuses, triangles, point). The point (bindu) at the center of the yantra signifies unity, the origin, the principle of manifestation and emanation. A yantra is the yogic equivalent of the Buddhist mandala. When these concentric figures are gradually growing away from its center (bindu) in stages, this is for human beings a symbol of the process of macrocosmic evolution. When they are gradually growing towards its center, this is for human beings a symbol of the process of microcosmic
involution. “A concentric figure of primal shapes regarded as inclusive ‘contained’ image of distant genre, in that they are composed of primal shapes, square, dot, circle, line triangles which constitute the basic vocabulary of the genesis of form. Or we may say that abstract configurations are constructed by archetypic symbols that are conceived to be the essential structures of the envisioned cosmos; the four directions, the cycle of seasons, the five elements, the zodiac signs and the like. These diagrams invariably mirror the notion of the ordered cosmos”

Yantras are usually designed so that the eye is carried into the center, and very often they are symmetrical. The most significant Yantra is the Sri Yantra. (Fig.4.17, 4.18) All primal shapes of a yantra are psychological symbols corresponding to inner states of human consciousness. Yantras are sacred symbols of the process of involution and evolution.

Fig.4.17. Sri Yantra.           Fig.4.18. Sri Yantra, Method of Drawing
Colours used in these diagrams and yantras also had their symbolic meanings in association to their ritualistic purpose. “Symbolism of colours was the major constituent and so also varying visual manifestations of sound, light and space etc.” Fig.4.19, 4.20) Possessing an uncanny affinity with a range of twentieth century abstract art, the diagrams, Yantras and Mandalas also have a magnetic, vibratory beauty that inspires acute attention even in the uninitiated.

![Fig.4.19 Sattav, Rajas, Tamas, 19th Cen., Rajasthan](image)

![Fig.4.20 Navagraha, 19th Cen., Rajasthan.](image)

Concept of ‘Maya’ is another significant concept associated with the Hindu philosophy of Tantra. ‘Maya’ literally means illusion, where the illusory nature of the universe is conceptualized as Maya Sakhti, the cosmic power who causes humans to identify with illusory forms, preventing them from seeing the fundamental reality of their inseparability if the divine. “In no traditional doctrines does the idea of the divine art play so fundamental a part as in Hindu doctrine. For ‘Maya’ is not only the mysterious divine power that causes the world to appear to exist outside of divine reality, as such as is the source of all duality and all illusion; but ‘Maya’, in her positive aspect, is also the divine art does that produces every form…..Just as, by virtue of its ‘Maya’, the Absolute objectivizes certain aspects of Itself, or certain possibilities contained in Itself and determines them by a distinctive vision, so the artist realizes in his work certain aspects of himself. He projects them, as it were, outside his undifferentiated being. And to the extent that his objectivization reflects the secret depths of his being, it will take on a purely symbolical character, while at the same time the artist will become more and more conscious of the abyss dividing the form, reflector of his essence, from what that essence really is in its timeless plenitude.”
4.1.2 Folk Heritage

India had a rich tradition of folk art, which is widely practiced in the rural provinces of the country and also associated with varied art communities and social groups. Folk art is the form of art, which is continuing for generation after generation. These are the part of the everyday life, celebrations and ritual etc. Paintings are mainly done on the floor or walls and court yards. Colours are prepared from the locally available vegetables and minerals. “The style of the folk painting varies from province to province, district to district, may even from village to village….Yet unified under-current runs through all of them, they are from Rajasthan, Gujrat, Madhya Pradesh, South India, Bengal, Bihar or Orissa.”36 The forms of such works are generally made by artisans without any formal training. These paintings are made out of intense simplifications and away from the natural in the favour of the distortion and geometric. “It s characterized by primitive vigour. The human forms, birds, animals, plants, trees, and other motifs were freely distorted and intensely simplified. They voluntarily gave up the natural in favour of the unrealistic. Not single motif is drawn with the meticulous perfection and studied elegance of the miniature paintings. Very often the rural artists completed the picture in one sitting…This treatment lends remarkable boldness, vigour and dramatic effects to these paintings.”37 Indian folk arts not only beautiful, but also important to Indian rituals and beliefs in the countryside. Folk arts used both to decorate homes and to wish for good fortune in all aspects of life.

Although most of the folk paintings associated with the social groups and communities are not completely abstract in character, because these paintings are representation of their rituals, beliefs and narrative folk stories, so figural forms are always associated with these works. But it is important to note that varied geometric or abstract forms are the integral part of the formation of these paintings. These abstract motifs follows a wide range of geometric patterns which including zigzag lines, wavy lines, triangles, circle, squares, dot, flag, pattern of patel, concentric circles, spiral form, arc, rectangle and scallops, leaves, swastika, sun, moon etc. If any folk art form are acknowledgeably abstract or near abstract in character that is the art of ‘Rangoli’, which is largely based on the decorative geometric patterns and motifs.
Rangoli comes from the word ‘Rangavali’, are Hindi words. The term is derived from words, ‘rang’ (color) and ‘aavalli’ (row) so rangoli is row of colors. It is one of the most popular and folk art forms in India. (Fig.4.21 to 4.27) The origin of Rangoli can be dated thousands of years back because as the earliest Indian treatise on painting, the ‘Chitralakshana’ mentions the practice of Rangoli. Traditionally, Rangoli is drawn usually in front of the house – doorway. It is mainly drawn on the various festive occasions through the India. It is daily practice to draw some rangoli in front of the doors in south India, west India. Rangoli also has a religious significance, enhancing the beauty of the surroundings and spreading joy and happiness all around.

Fig.4.21. Rangoli, (Auspicious Pattern for luck)

Though the folk art of making ‘Rangoli’ is the same all over India, there may be small variations here and there. Primarily known as the Rangoli, it also has different names in different states along the length and breadth of this country. Tamil Nadu and the southern parts of India: Rangoli in south India is referred to as ‘Kolam’ (Fig.4.25). “The Kolam pattern in Tamil Nadu must be drawn as unbroken lines, with no gap to be left anywhere for evil spirit to enter.” Kolam is the name followed in Tamil Nadu. In kerala, it is called ‘Pookalam’, In Andhra Pradesh it is known as ‘Muggulu’. The making of Kolam has an extensive use of dots which form the basic frame work of the Rangoli. In the eastern state of West Bengal, the Rangoli is famously known as ‘Alpana’ (Fig. 4.24). The Alpana is used before
important festivals as well as auspicious days. ‘Arripana’ (Fig. 4.23) is the name given to the Rangolis in Bihar, at the time of puja ceremonies and other devotional gatherings. In Uttar Pradesh, it is commonly known as the ‘Chowkpurana’ thought the manner of making it more or less remains the same. ‘Madana’ (Fig. 4.22) is the name given to the Rangoli in Rajasthan. In the rest of the parts of India, like the states of Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat and Maharashtra, the name Rangoli (Fig. 4.26, 4.27), is used extensively. There are different names in different regions and languages, but the Rangoli continues to remain a collection of colours which are considered very auspicious at festive occasions as well as gatherings for prayers as well as devotional purposes.

Rangoli usually made by young girls and ladies in parts of the court yards as well as outside homes to decorate the house. In the some parts of India, Rangoli making is daily routine practice for the women as like to perform the daily ‘puja’ in the house. “A family’s elder woman may rise before the rest of the family each morning and create the sacred space in the puja area. She wears her good sari, a ritually pure sari appropriate for ritual action. She may sing a devotional song as she cleanses the puja room and washes the floor and ritual vessels. She cleanses the household alter, offers fruit and flowers, and anoints the deities with sandalwood...
paste and kumkum, an auspicious red body paint. She creates the rangoli on the floor to establish the sacred space. In the evening, she brings the deities their evening meal, lights the lamp and incense, and blows the conch shell, and the rangoli is swept away.”

Fig.4.24. Alpana Design, Bengal.                                        Fig.4.25. Kolam Pattern, Tamilnadu.

Rangoli is not just created on the floor but can also be created on the walls. Earlier, the colours used to be natural colours which were derived from natural sources like the bark of a tree, leaves and the flowers. In some parts of South and East India ‘Kolam’ and ‘Alpana’ are created with rice flour, rice paste. This medium is one available to rural women with little means or access to other materials for artistic expression.

One important aspect about Kolam, Alpana, Mandana and Arippan that forms of Rangoli are made out of line drawings and followed a purely geometric structure. Colour hardly had any role to play in such type of Rangoli, but still it decorates the homes and save them from evil space. In some manner curvilinear forms also visible but made out of geometrical structure of ‘dots’ on the ground. While in the Northern and Western India, colours are much important element in the Rangoli.

Geometry is the integral part of these ritualistic designs, which are much abstract in their character. These visual deigns are made for certain rituals and had varied iconographic patterns for different festive occasions. “Village women traditionally worked from patterns memorized from watching their mothers and
grandmothers. Girls on their way home from school would look at neighbors’ patterns and attempt to reproduce them when they got home. Most traditional floor patterns are geometric and symbolic. The *bindu*, the point, symbolizes the point from which everything emanates, and into which everything merges. The *trikona*, a triangle, represents the male and female principles operating in the universe. The *catuskona*, a square, represents stability. The *pancakona*, the pentagon, is the symbol of the five elements, earth, air, fire, water and ether. The *satkona*, the six-pointed star or hexagram, is the male and female triangle symbols interposed, and is often used to worship the goddess Lakshmi. The *astakona*, octagon, is the symbol of protection, assigned to the god Vishnu. The *swastik*, or *swastika*, is the symbol of four cardinal points, or the cycle of the sun, symbol of Brahma, symbol of Buddha, and good luck, and is frequently depicted in floor decorations. The *caukra*, or circle, symbolizes life and growth.
The folk art of Rangoli is one of the popular practices in our households throughout the India, which has its roots in age-old tradition of folk art. Most of the Rangoli patterns made out of geometrical forms which are much abstract in character. These abstract designs are decorative and ritualistic but in some manner it shows that abstraction or geometric designs was always the integral part of our daily life and had play a larger role in our life as they are associated with our folk ritualistic and religious manifestations.
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