Chapter 3

PURPOSE OF SYMBOL
Ritual Decorations:

"In Shanti Swarup view "Religious sentiment has everywhere been not only one of the principal sources of aesthetic inputs, but has also provided the creative force for artistic productivity" (Shanti).

This is true of India, where art and religion flourished side by side. Ritual ceremonies and decorations, customs, traditions and believes all play an important role in our social and religious lives. In Hinduism there are countless dieties of worship. Among the foremost form of dieties, is the worship of Brahma as nirguna (i.e. without attributes) and second is the worship of Brahma as saguna (with attributes) as the creators and destroyer and third is the worship of a symbol of the diety. The third is the most common form of worship.

Rituals is essential in all forms of Hindu worship and these rituals are of two types one is the vedic, based on the vedas. 'Veda' means knowledge or
wisdom, and vedas are books of wisdom. The vedas are four.

1. Rg Veda  
2. Yajur Veda
3. Sama Veda  
4. Atharva Veda

Each veda consists of four parts. Mantra Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanisad. The mantras are hymns in praise of the vedic Gods. The Brahmanas are guide books for the performance of sacrifical rites. The Aranyakas or 'forest books' give philosophical interpretations of the rituals. The Upanisads are the concluding portions of the veda. Second is agamic based on the traditional religious teachings.

Rituals are part of our ceremonies as weddings, grah-pravesh, the naming ceremony of a child etc., these rituals decorate includes in them the hanging of festoons and mango leaves across the doors, flowers, lighted clay lamps, decorating the floor of the house with coloured rice powder, chalk and limestone.

This floral design is the most artistic part of the decoration and this ritual decoration is a speciality of
the women folk. These women folk decorate the courtyards and floors of houses with beautiful traditional and geometrical designs for blessing her home. For in India, the home is the habitation of the deity, a temple as it were. The cleaning of the entrance, the Puja before it, the laying of Rekhavali with or without colours, the worship of tulsi plant, have always been the highest pre-occupation and one of the most sacred duties of all house wives. They think that by doing so they ward off the evil forces from entering their houses and harming their families and thus exposing them to the displeasure of the divine. It is said that Ravana could not enter the hut of Sita because of the protective influence of Rekhavali. There is also another popular belief which suggests that Rekhavali bears its origin to the design of the Gopis laid out on the floor in the pangs of their separation from Krishna. The legends only heighten our belief in Rangoli as a constant decorative element in our lives. This feminine art is transferred from one generation to the other, that is from the older
women folk to the younger girls and the motive force of this art is the Religion. This domestic art is practised throughout India with minor variations. It is found in Bengal, Orissa, Madras, Maharashtra and Gujarat. This ritual decoration is continued at different places with different names like Alpana in Bengal, Jhunti in Orissa, Kolam in the South, Rangoli in Maharashtra and Gujarat and Chowk Pujana and Sonarakhna in Uttar Pradesh, Alpan in Bihar and Mandana in Rajasthan.

Ranga Rekhvali, or Rangoli as it is popularly known all over India, is a folk art and is, perhaps, most characteristic of the genius and the way of life of our people. Yet it is an art which is remained unnoticed by the students of Indian culture, a fact which is deplorable in view of the place it had in the conception of the Indian home. Etymologically - Ranga Rekhvali means colour laid designs, produced by employing a variety of lines from time immemorial.

Generally the designs are executed on the plane surface of the courtyard or the floor of the house.
And the material which these folk artists used are powdered rice or white line stone or chalk or even flour, sometimes mixed with water give an effect of white paint. These artists do not used brushes but use their finger tips for this purpose. Mostly white colour is the main colour for these decorations but sometimes these artists use broken bits of leaves for green color, marigold petals and powered turmeric with yellow, red color comes from the powered red brick and for black color charcoal is used. In South and Maharashtra minute particles of coconut husk and sand are also use for this purpose.

The designs for these decorations are of two types that is
1. The ceremonial
2. The decorative

The ceremonial designs are traditional and are drawn according to the occasion. Such designs includes figures of birds, fish and animals, sun moon, stars and chariots The Rangoli on Nag panchmji day
must includes the figures of snakes similarly the most important festival of Bengal is in the honour of Lakshmi in the month of Aswin (Sept.-Oct.) on full moon night. The motif on Alpona are Lakshmi charan and a creeper to represent the paddy. Paddy is the symbol of wealth. In south each day of the week is related with different motifs, on mondays the women made a Shiv Peeth or Kolam, on tuesday a Kali Peeth, on wednesdays a swastik and on fridays Lakshmi Kolam. The important motifs of decoration are shells, gada, gopads, the cow foot marks. In Bihar and U.P. the figure of scorpion is made to ward off the evil effects. Fish is another important and auspicious motif for Hindus. In Bengal the Alpona decoration related with the worship of married women includes different ornaments like bangles, nath, the ornaments of baju and ear. On occasions like worship, place of the idol, or on the reception of the bride and bridegroom, the designs are mostly geometrical or floral. The Gujarati girls make thousands of Rangolis on the onam festival celebrated every year in the month of harvest during
the deepavali week. 'Phook Kolam' is an interesting decoration on festive occasions in Malayalam. In Rajasthan, Kuchcha ground finished with cowdung is beautify by the Mandana patterns in crimson red, with black chocolate, blue or green are used for the background motifs chalk dissolved in water or rice paste is used for drawing the patterns. The squares are important patterns for ceremonies and circles and polygons are drawn at festivals time.

The art of ritual decorations is a highly developed domestic decorative art which is inherited from one generation to the other.

In spite of the all pervasive influence of religion on the art of tribal India certain forms of decoration are secular in purpose. The example of such decorations are the secular wall decorations of the Gonds and Pardhans in Mandla and the wood carvings on Gond, Saora doors. The purpose is the creation of beauty.
The Gond and Pardhan wall decorations are made with a thick sticky mud or clay with water. The art is the speciality of women. The desired pattern is made on the wall in high relief and when the design is completed on the wall after that white wash or cow dung is applied. In wood the design is done by cutting the wood away so the wanted pattern standout in reliefs. Animal figures are shown etc. without line and human figures are shown as a geometrical symbol. Fish is supposed as a symbol of fertility and tortoise stands for stability therefore, Gond designed tortoise on there floor to insure the security of the building. It is a magical belief that if we have pictures of fishes on the wall we get more babies and the tortoise are on the floor the building will not collapse.

*Tolemic Emblems*: In India many tribes are still totemic. They have either a totem animal or plant. One such tribe is in Ranchi Bihar. The people prescribe wood or clay emblems of the animals. For example if the founders belonged to the tiger clan a carved tiger was found there hanging and it was at the festival time
that this emblem is taken out. Emblem are believed to
be connected with the 'luck' of a place. In southern
India the Gollas propitiate the ancestral dead with floor
paintings called muggu and the Saora pictures called
as ittal.

These muggus are made in honour of the dead, to
avert disease to promote fertility and on the festive
occasions. The Saor as draw always in white on a
background.

Witch craft:

The word witch comes from the Anglo saxon
word wicca, meaning 'wise'.

Through the years however, only women came to
be considered witches. Men with similar powers were
called sorcerers.

According to the encyclopedia definition "witch
craft is the use of supposed magical powers generally
to harm people or to damage their property".

A witch is a person believed to have received
such powers from evil spirits.
According to some scholars, more than half the people in the world today think witches can influence their lives. European witchcraft is anti-Christian and involves an association with the devil. A person wanted to become a witch might sell his or her soul to the devil in exchange for magic powers. The non-European witchcraft seek to harm people but it may also be used to help people.

Magic has its tools, amulets, talismans, fetishes and magic symbols etc. Every event of life comes under the magic circle and magic is used both for protection and for attack, because magic has its roots in the primitive society, it is important that we keep in our mind the problems of these primitives who get scared of all the forces of nature. Sickness and death are especially conceived as magical but it is the work of invisible forces so they perform magic action for their protection.

Except the magical protection the primitive people also used other remedies which contain in themselves
the therapeutic powers such as remedies from the animal and plant world and mineral remedies.

**Animal and Plants Remedies**: There are number less remedies which are taken from the vegetable kingdom such as the roots of plants possessing medicinal effects are rue worm wood, mugwort, ferns, byssop, easter oil plant and verbena, the popular flowers like peonies, asters roses and iris.

The popularity of magic plants is due to the therapeutic power which these plants contain. The use of cinchona bark and roots is sanctioned by the scientific medicine because its has power of curing intermittent fevers. Kindey disease are cured by Ranunculus a yellow colour flower.

According to Paracelsus theory of "signatures" plants reveals in their appearance signs of their curative power.

One of the famous magic plant is mandrake. Different parts of this plant are used for various medicinal preparations. The fruits, leaves and roots of
mandrake are used as a sedative, this plant is also famous as an aphrodisiac and for facilitating pregnancy. The roots of this plant represent male or female bodies hence this plant became an amulet, a talisman and was placed on the shields of warriors.

Another magic plant which contain powers to avert danger or evils is misttetoe plant. It is believed to bring good wishes and good luck where it is hung. This fame is because this plant is a parasitic plant and grows an other plants. It is supposed to have super natural powers and it help against epilepsy, abortions. In America and Europe this plant is hung as an amulet on the doorway to protect the house from the evil effect.

*Mineral Remedies* : The magic medicine like baths, oils, fumigations were used in several illness. Great power was attributed to water especially to the water of rivers and seas. Due to the belief in the power of water for purification and protection arises the custom or practice of bathing the babies.
"Let your magic, your poison, your curse disappear with the water from my body and he wrenched from my hands with the water of purification" (Anturo).

This concept of the magic bath removing curses, a conception naturally founded on actual truth was preserved in the most ancient civilization. The water of Jordan was believed to cure leprosy. In India bathing in the Ganges or pouring water from the river on the infected parts of one's body is considered similar to Arabs practice of washing their face and hands before entering into a mosque, or the purification of the Egyptian priests, derives from the same origin.

Fire: Another fundamental idea of purification through fire is present in all primitive races. In Assyrian magic medicine, the magician poured highly combustible objects into the fire pronouncing these words.

"As the object burn and disappear let disease and impurities vanish from this man" (Arturo). In Hinduism it is a fundamental idea or concept of attaining

111
purification by passing through fire. In ancient Rome there was a concept of candle hearing Goodness who protected child birth by preventing evil spirits. This may be the reason why we use lights on ceremonies and at funerals and tombs to protect both the dead and alive from the evil spirit by lightening, as it is believed that the evil originated from the darkness.

_Earth_ : The role attributed to the earth, considered both as Goddesses and as mother from whom everything arises and to whom everything returns.

_Minerals_ : A series of remedies was taken from the mineral kingdom. Among these remedies are precious stones like topazes, beryls, emeralds, sapphires and pearls and diamonds. Gold, silver and iron are reputed for their therapeutic powers.

Gold and silver are considered excellent remedies against evil influences. Copper and bronze also possess exceptional magic.

Iron is famous for its protective power that is why it is used to make weapons and tools.
Zinc, antimony, mercury and magnet also contain in them the healing and magic powers.

Now-a-days magnet is used for reducing weight and for controlling blood pressure.

**Amulets and and Talismans:** Amulets word indicate an object with a healing power Talisman is also amulets or vice versa.

Magic symbols are also important and from this originated the practice of tattooing which has become universal and has persisted throughout the world. Even today this practice of tattooing gaining popularity among the younger generation. Mostly geometric designs symbolic figures like birds, serpent dragan figure of woman, name of beloved or written words are commonly used for tattooing.

All ornaments of the body were derived from amulets. In early times all these ornaments were signs of well being and wealth but now their magic significance is forgotten. Amulets must be worn next to the body, as their magic power arise from direct
contact with the skin.

All those objects, animals which are believed to bring luck and to protect against dangers and misfortune, belong to the amulets or talismans.

**Tantra Art:**

"The root 'Tan' from which Tantra is derived meaning to 'spread out'. The term "Tantra" means that by which knowledge is spread" (Ajit).

It is a sign language which symbolises the man universe relationship. Light and sound are important concepts of Tantra. According to the tantra the cosmos is evolved out of 50 matrika sound. Among the basic sound, shrin, klin and Rhin, these symbolize creation, existence and dissolution. Another sound contain in themselve the whole cosmos that is the ultimate sound of 'OM'.

The tantra represent a philosophy, comprehensive enough to embrace the whole of knowledge, a system of art, of meditation, which will produce the power
to concentrate the mind upon anything, what so ever. An art of living which will enable one to utilise each activity of body, speech and mind, as an aid to the path of liberation.

"The tantra ideal is the same as that of the orthodox Hindu and Buddhist, that it is a supreme concern with and directed towards enlightenment and self realization. In tantra the universe is the result of the continual interaction of Purusha and Prakriti. The universe is compared to a seed of gram, which have two halves so close that they seem to be one. The two halves of the gram are Siva and Sakti. The universe works through the interaction of Siva and Sakti" (Krishnan).

All creation according to tantra is preceded by a focal tension called bindu or point limit. This is the centre of every creation based on a fundamental dualism, a male principle known as the person or purusha and a female principle known as Nature or Prakriti.
Space or linga in which the whole universe is in the process of formation and dissolution.

"From space came air, from air fire, from fire water from water came solid earth from earth came living plants, from plant food and seed came a living being Man" (Krishnan).

The common practice in Tantra ritual is to make a mantra out of each sanskrit alphabet and to associate each with a different part of the body, the purpose is to feel that different parts of the body are merely manifestations of different aspects of one power which is known as Tantra sastras as Kundalini Sakti or the coiled up energy. Kundalini Sakti reveals itself, or the individual and universal beings are one.

The tantra, on the yoga, describes the colours of several vital forces seen in trance vision. These colours include emerald or Prana red like evening sun or apana, milky or samana white like the dhatura flower or vyana, colour of fire and lighting (udana).
Tantra, Yantra and Mantra are important concepts. Mantra give the formula, Yantra give the diagram and pattern and the Tantra correlates all system of relations.

Mantras are related with sound and the Yantra consist of simple geometrical figures like triangle, rectangle, circle. The geometric symbols are interpreted as follows.

When a point moves independently of any external attraction its movement is a straight line. The straight line represent unhindered movement that is the principle of all development.

**Triangle:** Movement in upward direction is represent by a vertical arrow. The triangle with upward apex is also believe to represent fire which is the identification of a male principle that is purush of a symbol of Siva or of comos. The downward pointing triangle shows the suppress activity or the female principle that is Prakriti or Sakti.

**Circle:** It is the symbol of all return, all the circle, the rhythm, that makes existence possible.
The visual motifs of tantra art may found the answer to the modern Indian painters excogitations to find a more meaningful and relevant source of inspiration.

_The Mystic Kundalini_: It is the most important concept of Tantra, Kundalini is the psychic power which lies dormant in the soul and the purpose of the yoga is to rouse this power and make it ascend and gain union with Siva, the supreme reality.

The concept of power the Sakti is central to all tantra. It is the power of the ultimate reality that creates, preserves and destroys the universe.

The breathing process that is obvious in a living being is but the tangible expression of the psychic power so in the stage of ignorance it sleeps as it were, in coils, it is called Kundalini Sakti.

Both the physical body and psychic body are correlated. The physical location of the kundalini is the lower end of the vertebral column or merudanda. The centres of consciousness which the kundalini has to
pierce through are located in that column in an ascending order. The centres are six in number. The first five are the centre of five elements and the sixth is in the region of mind. The centres are called chakras because diagrams are those of a square, crescent moon, triangle, hexagon, circle and circle.

The idea is that the evolution of forms and that of sounds are two aspects of the same process. The root letter the hijak sara is placed with in the diagram of each centre. This letter is the natural sound of the element which the centre represents. The root letters of the first five centres beginning with muladhara are lain, vain, ram, yam and ham each of which signifies respectively water, fire, air and ether. The root letter of Ajna chakra is Om, the basic mantra.

Some of India’s significant painters have been influenced by the symbolic iconography of tantra art, they derived assurance and substance from its methods. Artists are J. Swammanthan, G.P. Santosh Nirode Praful Dave, Shankar Palsikar and Prabhakar Barwe.
Omens:

Every one of us on some occasion or the other at some moment of crisis may face a sense of insecurity. It is at such times that we turn away from the world, and get close to that higher supernatural power and hope that this supernatural came to succour believing the way our ancestors did, that somehow those super power may counter the blows of fate. So we agree on performing little secret rites or talismans for warding off the evil and to bring good luck. This is valid in this modern world as it was in the ancient past.

In India the signs such as call of a bird, falling of meteors, throbbing of limbs are generally termed as 'Shakuna' or 'Omen' and the branch of knowledge dealing with this subject is called 'shakuna shastra' (Bijalwan).

Though the term shakuna had its origin in the association of sounds of birds, its etymological meaning is 'the source of foretelling'.
In India the origin of such omen's or belief goes back to the ancient times of the vedic civilization when the teachers used to run their education or philosophical centres in the dense forests. Living such close to nature obviously necessitated a study and awareness of its various moods and changes. Therefore, the sound and movements of birds even noticed and analyzed first. Thus originated the science of omen's, then media of forecasting were added to it.

"In ancient communities the seasonal changes and natural phenomena gave rise to certain believes which essentially represented the cumulative experience of successive generations of men and women, passed down to the human race" (Bijalwan).

Indian people are familiar with a number of Shakuna.

1. Granth Shakuna.
2. Churna Shakuna.
4. Shara Shakuna.
5. Divya Shakuna.
**Grantha Shakuna:** People in almost all parts of the world use their sacred or religious books as the means of seeking divine guidance. In India, at present two books are written by Tulsidas in Hindi.

1. Ramacharita manasa
2. Ramajna prashna

and 'Guru Granth Saheb' of the Sikhs and 'Bible' of the Christian are used as an authentic source for making predictions.

**Churna Shakuna:** An ancient way of foretelling, used to find out a culprit amongst a given number of individuals. According to the number of participants slips of blank paper are prepared and on one slip some sign is made then all these slips are put on the flour paste and disturbuted to all the participants. Whosoever, is found to have the slip with the sign is the culprit.

**Kukkuta Shakuna (Cock):** This divination is based upon the action of a cock with regard to the picking of grains from the letters of the alphabet in a given
diagram. The diagram contain all the alphabet and the grain is put on every alphabet. The sequence of the letters from which the cock picks up grains is to be carefully noted and answer is constructed.

**Shara Shakuna :** Divination by the use of arrows was very popular in ancient India. There are a number of recited, recitio in the Mahabharata, Lord Ramas' arrows.

**Divya Shakuna :** A form of oracular gambling was a very ancient and well known system of divination. In this process the dice is thrown on the board as many times as the number of letters indicate the answer.

Except these Shakunas, the significant role of Indian birds is mentioned in the Rig veda, the earliest and oldest repository of knowledge, the great Indian epics of Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In the poetry of Kalidas and Rabindranath Tagore.

Basically the term shakuna had its origin in the association of birds sounds but lateron natural events and other activities are also included in the science of
omens. Omens are grouped by ancient thinkers into eight categories.

1. **Bhauma Earthquakes**: Earthquakes, tremors etc. regarded as inauspicious because these events dislocate the lives of the people.

2. **Utpata**: Calamities, unusual events like drought, foreign invasion, heavy rain etc. are included in utpata. The people of India considered them as ominous because they indicate impending calamities.

3. **Svapna : Dreams** Dreams are suppose to be the reliable source of premonition. It is believed to be a media of communication between the person who dreams and the person about whom he is dreaming. Sometimes we also dream the spirits of the dead.

4. **Ulkapata: Atmospheric Events**: This category includes solar and lunar eclipses, appearance of heavenly bodies, shooting stars, comets and anything dazzling and short lived. These events are taken as ominous by the masses of India.
5. Agni : Throbbing: Throbbing is also considered as good or bad. Throbbing in the right side limbs of a man and left side limbs of a woman are auspicious. We also finds these types of accounts and their implications in astrology.

6. Vyanjana : Marks A black spot on any part of the body or in the pupil of the eye or some mark in the limbs of human beings. An example of this is a glittering mole on the chinay below the navel of a girl indicates that she will prove auspicious to the husband and her family. Indian people strongly believe in these marks.

7. Lakshana : Features : Reading the lines, features, 'symbols' and mystic figures on the body. Palmistry is a part of this branch.


Omen based upon the activities of cat: It is inauspicious that the cat muse when you are going to start the journey, licking of cat is also inauspicious.
A dog is seen with a piece of meat or bone in its mouth is seen on the road, good, omen.

If some one sees a buffaloes sitting or moving on the road towards his right it is auspicious.

If the pupil of the right eye pulsates a man will have occasion to feel happy especially with his children.

Throbbing of the right knee indicates difficulties from the enemies, delay in the work.

Sneezing at the time of starting business is good.

It is inauspicious to see a crow, a broom or a pair of shoes as you rise from the bed in the morning. There are countless believes of this kind.

**Deities and vahanas:**

In Bhattacharya's view "iconographically the symbols served as the keynotes to correctly identify an image and distinguish it from the others."

It is right that the whole idea of a deity is conceived in one or two symbols that is in abstract
form, then this abstract idea is expressed in shape.

Due to the weapons, vehicles and certain peculiar marks we instantly recognized the deity.

**Vishnu:** The benign Hindu Deity Vishnu is a member of the Hindu triad trimurti with Shiva and Brahma. He is the preserver of the universe and his worshipers believe that he descends on earth in various forms avataras to save mankind from evil and from sufferings.

The two most important characteristic symbols of Vishnu, the wheel chakra and the conch shell or shanka other symbols are

*Srivatsa* a curl of hair on the breast of Vishnu.

*Sarnga* The bow of Vishnu.

*Chakra* (Sudasana) The discuss of Vishnu.

*Samkha* (Pancajanya) The conch of Vishnu as vasu deva, was used by Sri Krishna a sort of bugle for military and other signals.

*Gada* The club of Vishnu.

1. *Matsya* the fish
2. *Kurma* the tortoise
3. Varaha the boar
4. Narsimha half human and half lion, the human incarnations of Vishnu include.
5. Sumana the Dwarf
6. Parashurama the Brahmin Warrior
7. Rama the noble Prince and the hero of the epic Ramayana.
8. Krishna the cow herd God who revealed the Bhagavad Gita.

The last incarnation is again as animal.
10. Kalki Kali Yoga is to appear riding a white horse.
11. Suta : or trisula The trident of Siva. It was used by him as a spear with three sharp heads.
12. Pinaka : The bow of Siva
14. Brahma : In the Rig Veda the word brahma was used to indicate the mysterious power contained in sacred utterances. Later, this was associated with the skill of the priest who spoke the words so that he was described as being Brahman.

128
Hamsa. His vehicle is the goose.

Surya: Surya Narayana. One of the important deities of the vedas (the others being Agni, Sama, Indra and Vayu) there are many ways of describing this deity, which are reflected in some of his names.

Diakara: Day maker

Grahapati. King of the planets.

Chariot: He may be shown in a chariot with one wheel that carries him across the sky, drawn by the horses, the number of which varies but is usually seven.

The cult of the mother Goddess has a long history in India. The concept of Sakti or Saktis divine powers representing the female principle. So each of the Trimurti has its female counter part as the wife of Brahma, the creator, the Goddess Saraswati, who symbolises learning and wisdom, similarly the sakti of Vishnu the preserver, is Lakshmi or Sri, who symbolises earthly prosperity or good fortune. The Sakti of Siva. As the destroyer are Durga, Gauri or
Parvati, daughter of Ninal and other fighting Goddess. But in his benign form the Sakti of Siva is Uma or Parvati, daughter of Himalaya, symbolising spirituality and purity. Kali, the female principle is worshiped as the mother of all the Gods. And is represented by black colour.

Hindu images are also symbolised by geometric signs. God the Absolute is represented in the geometric symbol by a point, or dot (palm) which is one of the Hindu sectorial marks. The symbol of God manifested in the universe is an equilateral triangle, the three sides of which represent the Trimurti.
LIST OF QUOTES

The art & crafts of India & Pakistan, Shanti Swarup, 1957, p. 86.

Adventures of the Mind Arturo Casligioni, p. 75.

Ibid. p. 75.


Reactive village floor paintings, Andhra Pradesh.
Lag-Lagta Phool - A Mandana design for festival.
Aripan festive floor painting, Bihar.
A circular design of floor painting.
A conventional pattern of floor painting.
A pleasing & intricate circular floor design.
Kali Yantra, Rajasthan, 18th century
- Sri Yantra Painting, Rajasthan, 18th century.
Satvakras & Mula, Prakriti, 19th century.
Hastakara Yantra Painting, 18th century.