SYMBOLISM OF HINDU RELIGIOUS RITUALS AND TEMPLE STRUCTURES

Of all religions in the world Hinduism provides the highest use of symbols. According to Hinduism the ultimate truth is unknowable and undefinable. In all its principle, practice and teaching, it seeks to make definite approach to the reality by suggestive type of symbolism. This approach can never find its goal, but can only draw nearer and nearer. Symbolism fully and faithfully reflects the true, and embodies the largest part of a reality which entirely is inconceivable by the human mind and inexpressible in the language of men.

“The symbol is the necessary and helpful intermediary between the inadequate capacity of the mind of the would be worshipper and the incommunable nature an fullness of unknown whom he adores”\(^1\).

“The symbolism in Hinduism is not far from being co-extension with religion itself “\(^2\). Of this the literature of Hinduism and its systems of doctrines are sufficient illustrations.

Further Guenon stresses that “Initiatic symbolism by its very nature defies reduction to more or less narrowly systematic formulas.
Such as those in which profane philosophy delights. It is the function of symbols to be the support for the conceptions where the possibilities of extension are truly unlimited while all expression is itself by a symbol. Therefore one must always make allowance for that part which is inexpressible, and which in the realm of pure metaphysics is precisely that which most matters.\(^3\)

Generally, most of the scholars of art are of the opinion that everything is a symbolic which serves as a direct support for spiritual realisation. A mantra or a divine name or in a secondary manner a graphic pictorial or sculptural symbol are such as sacred images.

Guenon defined in detail about the real foundation of symbolism. His descriptions are worthy sources to the scholars like me, to understand the real nature and foundation of symbolism. His analysis runs like that, “All that exists, whatever its modality, necessarily participates in universal principles, nor does anything exist except by participation in these principles which are the external and immutable essences contained in the permanent actuality of the Divine Intellect. Consequently one can say that all things however contingent they are in themselves, translate or represent these principles in their manner and according to their order of existence, for otherwise, they would purely and simply be nothing. Thus from
one order to another, all things are linked together in correspondence contributing to the total and universal harmony, harmony itself being nothing other than the reflection of elementary unity in the multiplicity of the manifested world; and it is this correspondence which forms the real foundation of symbolism”

The well-known scholar in the faculty of fine arts and one of the authoritative writers, Ananda Coomaraswamy refers, symbolism is the language which renders intelligible often with geometric formality and precision. Much of the exposition of Coomaraswamy and Guenon are really an unveiling of traditional symbols. Yet, it is in as much as he “knows immortal things by the mortal”. That the man as veritable person is distinguished from the human animal, who knows only the things as they are in themselves and is guided only by this estimative knowledge).

Ghazil writes that “Metaphysically it would be more exact today that the visible world of necessity reflects the supernal, being but an emanation from it. It may well hap that one thing in this world may symbolize several things in the world of the realm supernal, and equally well that some one thing in the latter may have several symbols in the world visible, we call a thing typical or symbolic when it resembles and corresponds to its antitype under some aspect.”
Dionysus defines that symbolism is a language between God and man. He writes; the divinest and the highest of things perceived by the eyes of the body, or the mind are but the symbolic language of things subordinate to him who. Himself transcendeth them all.

Quran also speaks of the very necessity of symbols, referring that “Allah citeth symbols for men in order that they remember”.

Generally the truth can be understood by means of material representations. Abbe Sugar of Saint Denis points out “Our dull understanding can only grasp the truth by means of material representations.”

Symbols are the most powerful media between one another. Any symbol may give an idea according to the capacity of imagination of an individual. The sweetest ideas that an individual acquired through symbols cannot be defined in simple words. “In symbols – there is a meaning that words cannot define.”

Symbols have been considered as a broad bridge to link man and God. The Holy Saints and Priests taught the illiterates about God only through symbols. To support to this idea, Plotinus refers, “things here are signs; they show therefore to the wiser teachers how the
Supreme God is known; the instructed priest reading the sign may enter the holy place and make real the vision of the inaccessible"\textsuperscript{11}.

Lamblichus also refers that “the mode of teaching through symbols, was considered by Pythogoras as most necessary. For, this form of erudition was cultivated by nearly all the Greeks, as being most ancient. But it was transcendentally honoured by the Egyptians, and adopted by them in the most diversified manner. On conformation to this, therefore, it will be found, that great attention was paid to it by Pythagoras. If anyone clearly unfolds the significations an arcane conceptions of the Pythagoras, symbols, and thus develop the great rectitude and truth they contain, and liberates them from their enigmatic form. For, they are adapted according to a simple an uniform doctrine to the great genious of these philosophers and deity in a manner which surpasses human conception”\textsuperscript{12}.

Geber defines, “philosophers speak many things by similitude”\textsuperscript{13}. Insanu- idn – Latif refers; “all names and attributes are metaphoric with us but not with Him”\textsuperscript{14}.

Plato explaine “All souls do not easily recall things of the other world ..... they are seen through a glass dimly and there are few who,
going to the images, behold in them the realities, and these only with difficulty”\textsuperscript{15}.

Maximus Tyre points; “Unable to grasp God’s essence. We seek help in words, in names, in animal forms, in figures in trees and flowers summits and sources”\textsuperscript{16}.

All our greatest philosophers and theologies unanimously assert that the visible universe is a faithful reflection of the invisible and that from creatures, we can rise to a knowledge of creator. The fundamental reason for the use of symbolism in the study of spiritual things that we know for a fact that all things stand in some sort of relation to one another; that, in virtue of this inter-relation all the individuals constitute one universe and that in the one absolute the multiplicity of being is unity itself. Every image is an approximate reproduction of the examplar; yet apart from the absolute image or the examplar itself in unity of nature, no image will so faithfully or precisely reproduce the examplar, as to rule out the possibility of an infinity of more faithful and precise image\textsuperscript{17}.

When we use an image and try to reach analogically whatever is as yet unknown, there must be no doubt at all about the image; for
it is only by way of postulates and things certain that we can arrive at the unknown\textsuperscript{18}

The outward world is but a glass, or representation of the inward; and everything and verity of things in temporal nature must have its root; or hidden cause in something that is more inward\textsuperscript{19}.

1. PRINCIPLES OF HINDU SYMBOLISM

Symbolism is the art of representing ideas, objects, process, etc., through signs of symbols. A thing which typifies or recalls something naturally by possession of analogous qualities is called a symbol\textsuperscript{20}.

It would help us to understand more easily what is its folio if we first discuss briefly what may be called the principles of Hindu symbolism. These principles as far as I know, have not been studied or set forth systematically and one can only deduce them from a general study of Hindu religion and philosophy combined with the deeper knowledge of the realities of life which is found only in true occultism and mysticism. “Symbolism is an art and not a science and the symbols are selected, except in the case of natural symbolism, not on a scientific basis but with a view to convey to the common man the underlying ideas as easily and effectively as
possible"\(^{21}\). So the study of symbolism is mostly a question of interpretation and not scientific investigation and presentation. The interpretation should be such an appeal naturally to one’s reason and commensences\(^{22}\). Infact, it is possible to have more than one interpretation of the same symbol both equally reasonable and illuminating. It is also possible that one may not be able to interpret a particular symbol or may interpret it incorrectly\(^{23}\). The important thing about Hindu symbolism is not what is the exact meaning of everything, but that every thing has a meaning and generally a profound significance connected with spiritual life\(^{24}\).

But this does not mean that a person is free to interpret the symbols according to his own will. Those who devised the symbols were men of real knowledge. They had definite ideas in their mind which they sought to represent by means of symbols. True interpretation means catching those ideas through institution and reflecting them as faithfully as possible for the benefit of others. It is necessary to point out this fact because there is a tendency among a certain class of people to make all kinds, of wild suggestions in the way of interpretation, based on very superficial consideration. This kind of interpretation makes confusion worse confounded and further weakens the faith of the average student in the profound significance of the symbols.
In considering symbolism as a method of representing the truths of the inner life. It is necessary to distinguish first between symbol and allegory. That two methods corresponding to these may be called static and dynamic symbolism. In the first method we use a form to symbolism the thing to be represented. The form may be simple or complex. It may symbolism a particular law or quality or power or it may symbolism a number of these in a integrated form. The common characteristic of all such static symbols are that no movement in time or space is involved.

Dynamic symbolism is generally known by the name of allegory. In this, there is a narrative description undergoise of which a moral law, a natural process or spiritual truth is sought to be conveyed in an interesting manner. The story may, or may not, suggest by an apparent similarity what is sought to be represented. Generally it does not, and that is why such stores are taken liberally by the unwary. The general characterisitic of dynamic symbolism is that there in movement in the form of a story or the unfolding of a gradual process with different stages.25

Static symbolism may be subdivided into two classes. Which may be called natural and artificial. An artificial symbol is chosen arbitrarily to represent a particular thing because it recalls the thing
by virtue of its possessing analogous qualities or through association in thought. There is no natural relation between the two and it is possible to select another symbol which is equally or more effective in this respect\textsuperscript{26}.

A natural symbol, on the other hand, not only symbolises the thing in question but also manifests it in a mysterious manner on account of some hidden natural relation between the two. A home is chosen arbitrarily and has no natural connection with the object for which it is used. Another name could serve the purpose equally well. But a vachaka is a special noun which embodies in a mysterious manner the power and qualities of the vachya, the thing which it indicates. So it is possible to establish a relation with, and drawn upon, the power of the latter with the help of the former, as is done in Mantra yoga\textsuperscript{27}. Similar is the relation between a natural symbol and the object it represents. These things will become clear when we consider illustrative examples of each.

In considering artificial symbols which are used in the Hindu religion it appears to be a fundamental principle that in representing anything the symbol chosen in such that it naturally and easily suggests the thing which is sought to be represented. Symbols were meant to give to the common man a concrete object which he could visualise easily and through which he could associate the truths of the
inner life in his mind in an integrated form. They were not meant merely for scholars who could grasp abstract ideas and to a certain extent and do without any concrete representation. It was, therefore, essential that the symbols used were those taken from familiar objects and such objects as would naturally suggest the quality, state or power which was sought to be represented. Even when a person could grasp the abstract ideas and had to a certain extent outgrown the use of the concrete symbols, these symbols were meant to help him to fix the different ideas in an integrated manner in a composite mental image. The human mind needs something concrete to hold on. It cannot work in a vacuum. It also needs to keep before it an idea of the inner realities. A concrete symbol, therefore, satisfies very effectively both these needs and may be considered as a very happy synthesis of the concrete and the abstract.

The second general principle which we should keep in mind is that in representing a Devi or Devata, everything in the form, and associated with the form, is meant to have a symbolic significance though we may not be able to trace the relation between a particular symbol and the thing symbolised. The complexion of the skin, the smile on the face, the object held in the hand, the manner in which the hand is raised, all these things have their meaning as well as the more concrete and prominent objects associated with the form.
therefore, the aspirant keeps in his mind the total image with all its component parts and knows also what each part represents, he can have a very elaborate and comprehensive idea with regard to the nature and powers of the Devi or the Devata.

The need for such a concept becomes imperative when, he tries to pass from the worship of the mere counter form to that of the reality within. The devotee usually starts his meditation with forming an image of the form of his 'Chosen Deity' in his mind. But the next stage is meditation on his qualities or attributes and this knowledge concerning the symbology of the deity helps him a great deal in this stage. It is only through such a meditation that he can draw nearer to his 'Chosen-deity' and prepare himself for the still higher stage in which he tries to transcend the mental concept and grasp the reality by fusing his consciousness with the consciousness of the Ishta – Devata. The Devata of the mere beginner is the external form, that of the advanced aspirant in the realm of the higher mind and that of the Siddha, the perfected individual, in his heart, in the realm of consciousness which transcends the intellect.

It should be noted that the remarks in the previous paragraphs are applicable only to forms which are purely symbolic in character and not to those which represent historical figures, either divine
incarnations or spiritual features of mankind. These forms are generally the product of the imagination of artists who try to give expression in those forms to the traditional ideas with regard to those historical or mythological figures. Thus the form of Krishna is not symbolic in character while that of Vishnu is. The devotee may use such a form in meditation but he will have to draw upon historical or mythological accounts of the life of the Teacher or upon his imagination for the attributes, etc., associated with him. Sometimes such a historical figure is taken as an Avatara or incarnation of Devata and it is then permissible to see in the form of the Avatara the attributes and powers associated with that Devata.

After considering the principles of Hindu symbolism we shall now take a few examples to illustrate these principles and to show the profound significance hidden behind these symbols which most Hindus know and worship and only very few can understand.

2. THE PURPOSE AND THE USE OF SYMBOLS

The purpose and the use of symbol is two-fold. Firstly, to set forth in visible and audible likeness, it cannot be really or fully expressed to the physical eye or even clearly conceived by the limited faculties of the human mind. All language is in the last report of symbols. The religious language is a special degree, for it
endeavours to present a mystery, a reality too deep for words. The Hindu faith had at its service a language of the utmost delicacy and flexibility with a vigorous and fertile growth and an utmost unlimited vocabulary, and found itself in a world of tropical luxurious with a tropical wealth of beauty and suggestiveness.

It was not to be wondered and that it became profuse in type and symbol and laid under contribution all the facts and phenomena of nature to serve its religious and priestly ends. All the great Gods have their resemblances of animal or material forms, in which they presented themselves embodied to human sight. Other more rare and refined symbols were presentative of qualities or attributes, as the lotus, the emblem of spotless purity preserved under the most unfriendly conditions. All idols, totems, fetishes are symbols. The symbol reminded the invisible substance or reality which they each represent.

Secondly, to meet the religious need of those whose minds are uncapable to grasp the conception of an unseen formless deity, the image or symbols serves this purpose of such people, if left without, a visible object to which their reverence and fear may wander in a maze of doubt, disquiet and unbeliever to. It is better that they should worship a thing than that they should not worship. There is
much that might be urged in favour of the Hindu view that regards the worship of the external symbol as a stepping stone to higher or clearer forms of belief; and in Hinduism, whatever may be solid or claimed by the wise and an instructed thinker, the puja of the multitude to the image of the God is reverent and sincere. In some respect also and within definite limits, the Indian contention has justified itself that the symbol has proved a sign-post and a guide to better, higher thoughts and to a truer worship of Him, whom no form can express.

Generally, there is a misconception that our sacred scriptural texts are having full or fairy stories and absurdities. The so-called rationalists are taking advantage to stabilise and mobilize their rational views only with the tales and myths39. They may appear to be so superficially, but in reality, they are symbolic expressions of the subtle psychological and spiritual phenomena40.

If asked to picture anger, one would at best portray red eyes, a furious face or some other gross physical representation associated with the formless emotion of anger. Similarly, one cannot express love except through some bodily gesture, or through the exchange of gifts of material objects. The widespread use of symbols has, therefore, become prevalent in cultured societies and developed
literature, our puranic literature being no exception, without the help of physical symbols, it is in fact practically impossible to communicate the psychological exchanges and spiritual experiences, with which religious scriptures are mainly concerned\textsuperscript{41}. The basic conception of the symbols used might be unfamiliar to us. Illustration is given here. The Puranas contain narrations depicting wars between Devas and Asuras i.e. between God and demons, with all the horrors, excitement, victory and defeat. As a matter of fact, every human being, every category of them or the human society itself is a seat of struggle between divine forces and demonical forces. Devas and Asuras are the sons of the same creator.

They are co-existent in nature. The mother of the Asuras is Diti. The mother of the Devas is Aditi. Thus the sons of the Diti out of their ego-centred short sightedness, prefer to see the creation as fragmentary, rather than as the manifestation of an underlying unifying reality. For the purpose of enjoyment through variety, they run from one object to another. Instead of deriving any real satisfaction, they increase their craving for enjoyment and are thus lead from one error to another, and finally to destruction. The Devas, the sons of Aditi on the other hand tread the opposite path, as they stand for illumination for knowledge and wisdom. In the struggle
between the divinity and the dark forces of short-sightedness and egotism, the ultimate victory of the divinity is assured, no doubt, but often times the Asura in man and in the society succeeds. Drunken with such short-lived successes, the short-sightedness and egotism in man tend to ignore even the basic laws of nature, that is to say of Dharma itself, like the Mahishasura depicted on the chamundy Hill, Mysore, the ultimate fate of the Asura of course being well-known.

Another way of looking would be to consider the different Devas and Devis as seats of psychological power, which can be awakened by means of the prescribed forms of worship. Note that those who worship Gods and Goddesses do not think them to be merely in symbols. The objects of worship are considered as living entities capable of responding to prayers. If a rationalist does not believe in deities, he has the freedom not to do so, in view of the flexibility of the Indian culture, but as pointed out before he need not and should not disrespect the genuine faith and sincere devotion of the believers.

3. SYMBOLS OF SCULPTURES

Plato defines: "we believe that when we worship the images, the Gods are kindly and well-disposed towards us". The temple in India is designed to serve many purposes social, economic,
aesthetic, and religious. The religious interest of the temple consists in its being a dwelling for an icon and the images that are sought to be evoked by the icon. The icon is to the temple what the spirit is to the body, and images are like the vital currents that relate the body with the spirit.

The icon-makers work in a traditional framework, and their artistic abilities are channelled in well-defined modes of expression which are relevant to the images associated with the icons. The variety of Indian icons acquires meaning only in a polytheistic context. It is a fact, often ignored, that Indian polytheism does not militate against the deeper philosophical conviction of monotheism, even monism. This apparently paradoxical detail has not been widely appreciated because scholars and critics, not rooted in the temple tradition, tend to stop at the icons and do not inquire into the relevant images which are stylized in the Agama texts.

Hocking W.E. States, "as bodies are reflected in mirrors so incorporeal things are reflected in bodies, and the intelligible Kosmos is reflected in the sensible Kosmos. Therefore, my king, worship the statues of the God's, seeing that statues too have in them forms which come from the intelligible kosmos"45.
According to Hermeneia of Athos "all honour that we pray the image, we refer to the Archetype, namely Him whose image it is……
In no wise honour we the colors or the art, but the archetype in Christ, who is in heaven".46

"Worship me in the symbols and images which remind thee of me" 47. "By the visible aspect, our thought must be caught up in a spiritual suge and rise to the invisible majesty of God"48.

"It is for the advantage of the worshippers and not by any intrinsic that Brahma –whose nature is intelligence beside whom there is no other, who is impartite and incorporeal is aspectually conceived rupa-Kalpana"49.

The simple folk were led into error by this .....for instead of regarding those sensible expressions as an image they took them for the truth itself50. The result of this was that the masses become idolaters, where as philosophers for the most part, continued to have a correct idea of unity of God, as can be attested to by anyone who has carefully read the ancient philosophers and cicere's. "De Doorum Nabural Nicholas of Cusa Pichres," means that ornaments in Churches are the lessons and the scriptures of the deity51. whence, Gregory denotes, "it is one thing to adore a picture, and another by
means of a picture historically to learn what should be adored …. We worship not images, nor account to them to be God's, nor put any hope of salvation in them; for that were idolatry. Yet we adore them for the memory and rememberance of things done long ago⁵².

Historical perspective of iconographic involvement in India has been continuous at least for about seven thousand years now. The iconic specimens are found in the sites of the Indus valley Civilization. The descriptive hymns dealing with iconic conceptions in the Rig-veda provide background, for the nation-wide iconographic tradition that has held the field till this day.

The art form that developed in the north-western region during the days when the Indian princes repulsed the invasions of the Greek generals has been called 'Gandhara' after the name of the region⁵³. Although this art-form is heavily Greeko-Roman, it did not materialize here when the Greeks were in the ascendant. It is only when the Indian princes under the leadership of the Mauryan prince Chandraguptha of Magadha around 340 B.C. assumed control over the area, allowing the Greeks to reside here as citizens. The Greek sculptures and artisans were encouraged to exhibit their artistic talent and temperament. They found it expedient to integrate the
Hellenistic craft with the Indian idiom, and this is how Gandhara art was born.

The Greek sculpture had an eye for the human figure; he had a penchant anatomical perfection. He treated God's as robust and prepossessing humans, modelling the body as realistically as possible. He introduced the detail of drapery in a conspicuous manner. The Gandhara artist shared this love of the perfect human form, and the tendency towards naturalism. We have a large number of Buddha and Bodhisattva images, both large and small, in relief as well as in the round, answering to the Gandhara type in Texila, Peshawar, Baniyan where there is a colossal statue of Buddha measuring 50 feet in height carved on a rock face, Hadda and Jalalabadall in the Gandhara region of those days. The statues are designed as if they were meant to be accommodated in an architectural pattern, although free-standing statues of those days are not rare.

But Gandhara art is notoriously impersonal. The artists were commissioned to execute works on Buddhist monuments by Indian patrons, especially by the kushana princes. It is unlikely that the artists had much sympathy for the Buddhist themes that they asked to handle. This becomes evident by the rigidity of most of the statues.
belonging to this period. The Buddha images of the Gandhara type are more portraits than icons; they scarcely suggest a transcendental feeling or the divine element. That is why the Gandhara art was short-lived; and it disappeared after sixty or seventy years, leaving no lineage and no impact\textsuperscript{57}.

The early Buddhist monastic settlements were chiefly cenobiums, and did not accommodate any iconic worship of the Buddha, although the lay-folk that supported these-settlements were given to the worship of numerous spirits and demi-Gods\textsuperscript{58}. Even when the Buddha images were made, as in the Gandhara period, they were intended more as works of art than as objects of worship. The relic-worship and the worship of symbolic representations like foot-print, bodhi-tree, umbrella were in vogue from early times. When the theme of the Buddha's life and career caught the fancy of sculptures, especially inspired by the Hellenistic models, it was the narrative aspect that was dominant\textsuperscript{59}.

During the latter part of the second century, Nagarjunakonda in the south, a celebrated Buddhist centre of Mahayana persuasion, witnessed the transformation from the iniconic representation of the Buddha\textsuperscript{60}. A section of the Buddhist monastic assembly, the mahasaughikas, favoured iconic worship in the shrines of common
devotion in opposition to the more conservation Mahisasakas who were against both the shrine idea and iconic representation of the Buddha although in course of time they conceded the former.

The art-form that emphasized the Indian idiom and tempered the Hellinistic realism with idealistic symbolism that was indigenous to India was the one that developed in the city of Mathura, about fifty miles south east of Delhi, when the Gandhara-style was half-way through its career. Mathura, under the Kushanas, was an important trade-centre and attracted large concourses of mercantile people owing all elgance to different religious orders. Craftsmen, skilled in local style of making stylized stone and metallic icons of folk God's, Buddhist and jain deities, plied a busy trade.

Preparations of icons for money and sale of icons were known even to patanjali. Mathura icons now became popular all over the country and even abroad. The great demand necessitated the mass manufacture of icons. The iconography that originated at Mathura during this period developed and attained maturity in the golden age of the Guptas.

It is interesting that the city of Mathura in those days was frequented by merchants, generals and noble men from central Asia;
and other parts of Northern India especially from Indus Valley, Taxila, Gujarat gulf etc. And there were four centuries, in the city generous sprinkling of more or less resident foreigners; Greeks of Bactoria, saythians of central Asia, parthians of Iran and Kushnas of Mongolia. The craftsmen of Mathura were thus exposed to numerous extra-India influences. Notwithstanding this circumstance, they evolved an iconographic style that was perfectly indigenous and that was in complete accord with the idiom that is illustrated in the canonical texts. After a phase of initial development, the subsequent period saw a large number of canonical works in Sanskrit in the nature of iconography manuals.

It was about the same time that temples also began to be built in a manner that was different from the stupa chaitya or vihara. It was about the same time too that the Bhagavata cult was making a headway in the main land of India. And it was about the same time that the nucleus of the puranas had been formed and the myths and legends of God's were becoming popular. The folk deities as well as the divinities of the sophisticated classes had risen to importance; they needed elaborate shrines and complicated rituals of worship.

Agama as the prescriptive temple-literature took shape in answer to this demand. There was already an Agama corpus in
Tamil. It had got formed during the early centuries before and after Christ$^{67}$.

The Vedic hold had an extended slackened, and the Tantrik-framework gradually assumed considerable importance. Worship in a temple is of course not a Vedic idea. There were no temples even in the earlier Indus valley phase, although there were house-hold icons$^{68}$. Now the elaborate Vedic rituals and sacrifices as community affairs receded to the background, and the temple as a public place of worship was taking its place$^{69}$.

There is a curious inscription found in Ghosundi near chittor belonging to the second century B.C., which mentions that the king Gayayan, a Bhavata who had also performed an Asvamedha sacrifice, got a temple, now Narayanavatika for Vasudeva and samkarshana. The inscription suggests the co-existence of Vedic rituals of a collective nature and the temple as a religious institution during the initial phases of this transformation. It was in this context that the Agama developed$^{70}$.

The Bhagavata cult, which advocated devotion to the iconic representation of Vishnu, encouraged the building of public shrines. Even in the first century A.D., we have an inscriptional reference to a
'sacred shrine' at Mathura dedicated to the 'Worshipful vasudeva, during the reign of the saka satrapredesha, son of Rajuvala; we have also references to "the icons of the five worshipful heroes of the Vrishni clan" installed in this shrine.

The cult became wide-spread during the rule of the early Gupta Kings. Samudragupta performed an asvamedha sacrifice, but his son Chandraguptha II styled himself a "Parana Bhavata". The Varaha Vishnu temple in Udayagiri near Bhilsa was a Bhagavata shrine of 402 A.D. A rock inscription dated 404 A.D. at Mandsor by Mara – varmah, a feudatory of the Gupta King, begins with a verse which transforms the Vedic purusha into a personal iconic deity.

The Bhagavata-cult began with an adoration of Vishnu, but its basic creed of devotion drew within its fold other popular God's also. The later Guptas were devoted to Siva almost exclusively. Even Patanjali, commentator on Panini, was acquainted with "Sivasthalas" built as early as the first century after Christ. There are several inscriptions which unmistakably bear iconic representation of Siva. Besides the later Gupta Kings, Bharasivas and the Vakataka rulers, the Huna generals Maitrikas of Valabhi, and the Maukhari chief of Kanoj encouraged the Siva-Bhagavata cult.
The innumerable folk divinities were accommodated within the general ideology of Bhagavata, which was the impulse to partake of the grace and glory of Godhead. The icons of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas were already being reverence. The icons of Tirtankaras known as perfected saints guiding humanity were object of adoration among the adherents of the Sramana-tradition. These iconic saints were accompanied by folk divinities such as Yakshas and Yakshinis.

With the spread of the cult of devotion to personal God's and Goddesses, the Agama manuals attempted a classification of deities and stylization of their iconic forms. By about the fifth century after Christ, Indian iconography was more or less finalized and formalized. Technical development in metal-craft also reached a stage of maturity so that casting of metallic icons began to be attempted on a mass scale. The class of workers known as sthapathis, involved in the preparation of icons, came to be well-established.

An icon is, in the nature of a paradigm. The idea of a paradigm, popularised by Thomas. S. Khun, an assumption derived from a specific achievement, and the sharing of this assumption in a community, which act of sharing will facilitate coordinated effort. ‘A paradigm’ is a framework; it has a binding function, in the sense that
it prevents the user of this framework from wasting his time and energy on trivial issues, and helps to concentrate on relevant and specific issues. It brings into being a way of looking at things naturally, meaningfully and purposefully; and it develops its own language. "A Paradigm", in the words of Margaret Masterman, "is something which can function when the theory is not there". It is like a local road map, which is used when it is needed and which is meaningful when relied upon.

A paradigm works, especially when it is shared in a community. The success of the paradigm provides delight to the user of the paradigm; and human become emotionally attached to what gives them pleasure. The role of an icon in a tribe is exactly the same. It binds the members of the tribe in a exactly the same. It binds the members of the tribe in a generality of understanding, and helps them communicate with each other as well as function with in a framework. Its relevance and value are confined to the community which has generated it and within which it operates.

An icon as an object of reverence satisfied not only the religious impulse of its user, but the artistic expectations also. It thus develops a 'vital quality' and a 'protective role'. No user of the icon can derive any benefit from it unless he regards it as imbued with a
living quality and unless he had trust in its special, although unseen, power. An icon is a "charm", it can work. The earnestness and concentration of the user of the icon determines how the icon going to benefit him. It was not the mad love of Pygmalion prompted venus to give him the woman that he loved, out of the inert stone that he skillfully carved.

The temple is a structure designed to house an icon, which both an object of veneration and a work of art. The icon in the temple has a cult, a tradition, a function that is laid down as paramount within the community. The Indian words for icon are 'pratima', 'bimba' and 'bera'. 'pratima', emphasizes representation of the actual object of veneration or divinity; 'bimba' brings out the character of image; and 'bera' the origin of which word is obscure, means an idol in which certain traits and powers are especially invoked. There is another synonym, 'Murthi' that is sometimes used; it signifies personification, incarnation and formation. It is making an abstract idea concrete and practical.

The word pratima is an ancient one, found even in the Vedic hymn's. It had become popular in the centuries just proceeding the Christian era, for we find it used in the sense of icons in several inscriptions belonging to the second and first centuries before Christ.
For instance, an inscription of this date on the pedestal of a stone image of Manibhadra Cattlefolk God has been found in pol near Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh and another in a well in mova near Mathura which mentions the icons of the five heroes of the Vrshniclan. The Rig-veda employes another word 'Sub – pratika' in the same sense as 'pratima'.

'Biama' and 'bera' however, are more frequently employed in the Silpa texts. They are specifically sculptures in stone, wood, clay or metal, as distinguished from coloured line – drawing and painting. 'Bera' in particular refers to the variety of icons worshipped in temples in the contexts of different rituals. We do not know whence this word was derived, for it is clearly not a regular Sanskrit word.

4. ICONS FOR WORSHIP

Polytheism is the characteristic feature of Hinduism. But no Hindu seriously believes in a multiplicity of Gods. He is aware that each of the many Gods that he worships is merely an aspect of the one God, who is also the God of other religions. Sectarian strife is thus a non-issue with the Hindu population, which is divided into an almost infinite variety of sects, creeds, castes and cults. It is not merely a question of tolerance but a positive conviction that God is
one, whatever the name or form in which he is conceived or invoked, underlies the religious life of a Hindu. 89

But the devotee reveals in multiplying the images of the one God, who, he knows, is really beyond imagination and above all images. He invokes in a thousand names the one God, who can never be adequately represented. And he houses in a temple the 'One God' who envelope the entire universe and rises above it by ten inches. 90 The God, that transacts with man intellectually and emotionally is never mistaken for the God who is the abstract source of all existence, animate as well as inanimate.

The God that the devotee chooses to worship is an approach to the God who has need neither for worship, nor for the devotion. The God is worshipped for material gains, health, security and happiness; the God is also worshipped to cleanse the human constitution so that the light of God may shine through it. The latter worship, of course, is the highest form of worship. But it appeals to a few; the larger section of the population is content to seek from the God's this or that benefit.

When human beings are in need of gain or comfort, they invent Gods according to their needs and temperaments. The group mind
then stylizes the forms as well as the rituals connected with these several Gods, who are but creatures of human need. This is the framework of polytheism. There are God's of diverse shapes, moods and modes of appearance; they are specifically related to the variety of human needs.

The devotee knows that the image of a God is a mere artifact and toy, unless it is properly consecrated. And consecration involves the investment of the devotee's devotion and passion, and getting the devotee effectively related to the particular God invoked in the image rituals are naturally important for transforming an artifact into an icon. The icon is meant to accommodate the rituals, so that human devotion can flower out in the light of God that is reflected through the icon.

Rituals are acts done by the devotee's body, speech and mind. The icon is seen and handled. But it is the first step. The icon must evolve into a verbal image, a concept. This is aided by descriptive hymns, mnemonic words sprung into an articulated goal and or repetition of power-laden epithets of God. God as a verbal concept of mantra is subtler than the material icon of Murthi. But subtler still is thought-complex in which speech is transformed into
essential ideas that ultimately merge in a 'point', where God's presence is focused\textsuperscript{93}.

Thus, the icon by itself is in complete, it should be accompanied by its effective verbal counterpart mantra as well as the appropriated ideational representation. This is an important detail of iconography that is often ignored by writers on the subject. The God, suitable for worship is both iconic and graphic, which binds the two aspects in the involvement of stylized articulation.

The Craftman whose job is to fashion icons to fulfill the needs of devotees must naturally be acquainted with the relevant mantras and yantras. But more importantly he must be familiar with the descriptive mantras, known as dhyana – slokas; which specify the posture, the mood, the number of hands, the weapons, decorations and other format details of the particular icon meant for worship. Manu of the mantras are mnemonic in character. The training of the traditional sculpture necessarily included committing of these dhyana – slokas to memory, so that he would be ready to translate any stylized icon in stone, metal or wood\textsuperscript{94}.

There are numerous texts in Sanskrit which incorporate such descriptive verses relating to several deities. The Tantric manuals of
Vajrayana Buddhist persuasion are especially replete with dhyana-slokas, for they prop for visualization during sessions of contemplation. They serve the purpose of the mediator as well as the icon – maker. And, true to tends often times to identify himself with the form that he can readily and vividly project. There is a familiar saying that the devotee who is not a deity himself must never worship the deity\textsuperscript{95}. This applies equally well to the icon – maker; unless he becomes one with the form of the deity, he can never fashion the form well-enough.

This phenomenon explains why some icons exclude a compelling power about them even when their aesthetic quality is not considerable. There are, on the contrary, icons which are very pretty are nevertheless spiritually flat. Icons acquire power to the extent their maker's pour themselves into their handiwork. Texts insist that making of icons for worship must always follow a period of ritualistic preparation of the icon –maker as well as the material chosen for icon-making\textsuperscript{96}. Convention again insists that the icon-maker must be ceremoniously honoured before the worship for the icon begins, for he is in a sense. 'the parent of the deity'.

The later expressions, used for worshipful ones viz., body and form indicate that the icon's were no longer regarded as just symbols
or reflections, representations but as divinities in their own right\textsuperscript{97}. A mere look at them was believed to confer greater benefits. The owners of such icons would also arrange to get copies made of them, of course, for a consideration.

Art, pressed for a commercial end, naturally departs from the traditional norm, and seeks to adopt the prevalent fashion. The aesthetic quality also degenerates to an extent. When duplication becomes the frequent need, the craftsman involved in this enterprise can ill afford to devote his time for ritualistic preparations or for visualization of the dhyana. Sloka; his motivations are different. The icon's that he made thus were no longer 'spiritual products'; but pieces conforming to a dull and stereotyped convention. A large number of icons that we find now in the country belongs to this class of uninspired artefacts. And most of them are very faint and distant reflections of the relevant dhyana- slokas, because the acquaintance of the craftsman with the textual prescription was meagre or second-hand.

If the craftsman, was clever, and the need of the patron unusual, the Craftsman would evolve his own style of making an icon, entirely outside the framework of dhyana – slokas and numerous minor deities and folk divinities which became popular in
course of time and in different parts of the country did not have dhyana - slokas only way; and the craftsman had to follow his own genious and inclination. The custom of making the incons altogether independent of the dhyana –slokas has continued to this day. The Craftsman does not feet the need to be guided by the canonical texts any more.

There is however, a provision made in the texts that the icons should be in the regional styles of dress and decoration\(^9^8\). It is also laid down that the Craftsmen must bring into play his own taste and skill while making an icon, within the broad traditional framework. The dhyana- slokas specifies the number of hands and the nature of the weapons help in them; but it leaves the artists free to would the hands. Portray the weapons, in the way he chooses. the dhyana-sloka of deity may indicate that the icon must be represented in a dancing posture. The artist has to decide on the postures depending on his own familiarity with dance postures.

Simplistic stylization which obviated the necessity of the dhyana – slokas is best illustrated in the images of Buddha and Jina\(^9^9\). While both Buddhists and Jaina icons conform in general to the traditional framework in which the classical deities were represented, there were some unique features about them. The icon's of th Buddha and the Jinas are to be found only in two
postures, sitting and standing. Seated icons of both persuasions are in the conventional postures. The Buddha images are shown either as engaged in contemplation or as teaching, as offering comfort or as calling the earth below as witness for his own integrity. The position of the hands vary in these situations, while rest of the body remains rigidly alike. While standing, the Buddha is represented either as preaching or as on his begging round.\(^{100}\)

The images of Jinas are always shown as absorbed in contemplation. Whether seated or standing in an upright posture known as Khadgasana or the positions of a drawn sword; while seated his hands are poised on his lockedley, the right palm over the left, but while standing, his arms hand down on the sides. The standing posture is commonly known as Kayotsarga or pratimayoga which expression actually refers to a practice undertaken by Jina ascetic for heightening the rigour of his austerities and for abandoning the effects of Karma.

The images of Jinas are altogether nude, where as Buddha is unvariably shown as wearing an upper cloth in addition to the normal underrobe. Neither the Buddha nor the Jaina, however, is shown as wearing any ornaments whatever.
The difference among Jina icons become important in view of the fact that twenty-four Jinas, known as Tirthankaras are recognized, the last of whom is Mahavira, contemporaneous with the Buddha, the simplistic stylization would represent all the Tirthankaras as exactly alike with the exception of Parsvanatha, the twenty-third Jina, whose head is shown as sheltered by a many-hooded serpent,\(^{101}\).

But they are differentiated by the emblems appropriate to the Jinas like bull for the first Jina, Vrshabhanatha, Conch for the twenty-second Nemi-Natha, Snake for the twenty-third and lion for the twenty-fourth Mahavira carved on the pedestal. The Bahubali or Gomatha images, which are usually huge monolithic as the one in Siravenabelagola in Karnataka are invariably free standing, with no shelter over them. They are similar in posture to the standing Jina images except of course for the emblems which are absent in the images of Gomatha on the other hand, the Gomatha image is identified by the Madhavi Creeper that entwines the legs, thighs and arms; and hills are also shown about the legs.

Iconic differences are usually indicated by the posture, the number of hands, weapons, ornaments, hand gestures and facial expressions. The postures can be seated, standing reclining or
mobile. Vishnu as Krishna is often shown as a child Balakrishna, or as an infant lying on its back on a leaf of the banyan tree. We find Lord Ganapathi is also being represented as a child moving about, but rarely. No other deity is represented in this posture.

Seated and standing are common position in which icons of all deities are represented. But there may be variations in these postures while seated, the posture may be easy and relaxed\textsuperscript{102} alert lotus like\textsuperscript{103}, riding an animal\textsuperscript{104} in a Yogic stance\textsuperscript{105}, or with one of the legs bent\textsuperscript{106}.

While seated or standing, it is usual for Vishnu and the Siva images to be accompanied by their consorts in the same posture Lakshmi and Parvathi respectively. Rama with Sita, Siva with Parvathi, Gauri, Surya with Chandhya, Ganesa with Siddhi, Puddhi, Narasimha with Lakshmi, Nataraja with Sivakami are common examples. There are some God's who have consorts on either side of them\textsuperscript{107}.

If the God is alone it is called Kevala\textsuperscript{108}. It is usual for Ganesa images to be represented alone, although in some forms\textsuperscript{109} shown with one, two or eight consorts. Balasubramania is likewise a loner, but in some forms he has two consorts. Hanuman and Garuda are invariably single icons, and so is Sudarshana. The standing posture
involves the delinquetion of flexions or bends. When the plumb line passes through the naval from the tip of the crown in a point between the two heeps on the pedestal it is samabhanga, upright symbolising perfect poise. This position is devoid of any bends and the body is held erect, firm and even rigid. The images of the Tirthankaras in the kayostsarga posture are excellent illustrations.

However, to heighten the aesthetic effect, bends are delicately introduced. If it is only a slight bend in both the upper and lower parts of the body., it is abhanga. If , the bend, is conspicuous and great, it is atibhanga. If there are three bends noticeable, it is tri-bhangha. If there are three bends noticeable, it is tri-bhangha. If the sweep of the curve in the posture is emphasized like a tree caught in a storm, it become athibhanga.

Feminine and dancing deities are shown in abhanga and tri-bhanga postures. The atibhanga; are rare posture, especially in sculpture. But drawings of Vajrayana divinities in Tibet frequently employ this posture, the excessive flexion being suggestive of violent passion.

Vishnu is shown in the dance stance only as Krishna. A pillar in the temple as top the Thirumalai Hills shows Narasimha dancing; and this is altogether a rare depiction. Siva as Nataraja is a
celebrated image. But there are several variant postures in this, which are not so well known as the famous Thiruvalangadu icon\textsuperscript{112}. Ganapathi and Saraswathi are also shown sometimes as dancing. Several Devis with Tantrik background, like Kali and Aparagitha are also shown in dancing postures, or in semi-dancing postures.

Reclining is a posture that is almost exclusive to Vishnu\textsuperscript{113}. Rama is occasionally depicted in this posture, with Lakshmana sitting at his head and Hanuman standing at the feet as in the Vijayanagar panel. This panel may alternately be an illustration of the Lakshmana fainting during the great war, and Rama deputing Hanuman to bring the Sanjivini drug.

Mobile postures include Vishnu as Varaha rescuing the earth, as Trivikrama measuring the upper regions, as Narasimha rushing out of the pillar to slay the demon, and as Venugopala playing the flute in a standing posture; Siva as the conqueror of the three realms as the ascetic on his begging round and as Virabhadra destroying Daksha’s sacrifices; and Devi and Durga setting out to kill the buffalo-demon, Mahisha and as Tara shooting arrows.

For main worship, however, the seated and standing postures of the deities are preferred it is usual therefore, to find such postures
in the sanctorum of the temple with some exceptions like Srirangam. Vishnu is usually represented as standing, and Sakti as seated, either on a seat or on lion.

For seated figures texts, like Ahirubudhaya Samhita prescribes eleven variant postures, usually, however, the lotus posture is employed by sculptures\textsuperscript{114}. The seats on which the iconic representations are lodged also figure in various forms\textsuperscript{115}. It is also customary to use detachable seats of different forms in different stages of the worship, ritual like Simhasana for bathing, yogasana for invocation anantasana for witnessing amusements and vimalasana for receiving the offering made.

Speaking of geometrical forms, we need to remember that all icons have their graphic representations as well as verbalizations. During the worship the yantras are prepared and employed and mantras are chanted. The Devi is often worshipped in the Sri-Chakra either as a liner diagram or as an aniconic image. This is regarded as the most powerful of the yantras. It is also most intricate in its design, and the worship involves an elaborate ritual.