

SYMMETRY IN HINDU PHILOSOPHY

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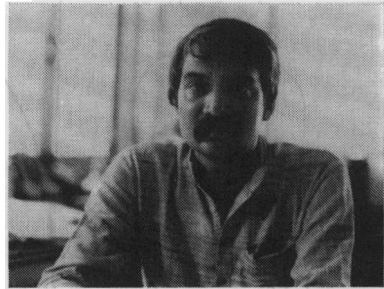
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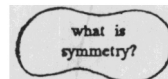
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QUESTION 1 SYMMETRY IN HINDU PHILOSOPHY



Om
That is Whole
This is Whole
From Wholeness emerges Wholeness
Wholeness subtracted from Wholeness
Wholeness still remains

This peace invocation from the *Isha Upanishad* (one of the principal *Upanishad* texts of ancient Hindu philosophy) puts forward the most fundamental proposition of Hindu philosophy about the nature of cosmos. The Cosmos and the Cosmic Process is essentially holonomic. Each fragment of it is whole in itself. Implicit in the notion of holonomy are the properties of homogeneity, isotropy, self-similarity and symmetries of various kinds. The Cosmos is a vast symmetrical field with its centre everywhere.

These notions are reiterated in many texts of Hindu philosophy. A verse from *Kathopanishad*, another principal *Upanishad*, says, "Whatever is here, that is there; what is there, the same is here." (*Kathopanishad*, 4.10)

This symmetry extends across time and scale. The *Pinda-Brahmanda* theory of the *Samkhya* school of Hindu philosophy proposes a correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm. The entire cosmos can be visualised to be

contained in a microscopic capsule, with the help of the concept of *tanmatras* - subtle elements. The *tanmatras* are five in number corresponding to the five *Pancha Mahabhutas* - gross elements. These elements are *Prithvi* (Earth), *Apa* (Water), *Tejas* (Fire), *Vayu* (Air), and *Akasha* (Ether). All living beings are said to be made up of all the five gross elements in their essence. The layers of manifestation of these elements in various beings are deemed to be three: Gross, Subtle and Sublime (*Sthula*, *Sukshma*, and *Para*). The subtlety is conceived to reach the limits of invisibility. The living bodies are said to contain a subtle body in each of them. It is called the *Linga Sharira*, and it is constituted of all the components of a gross body.

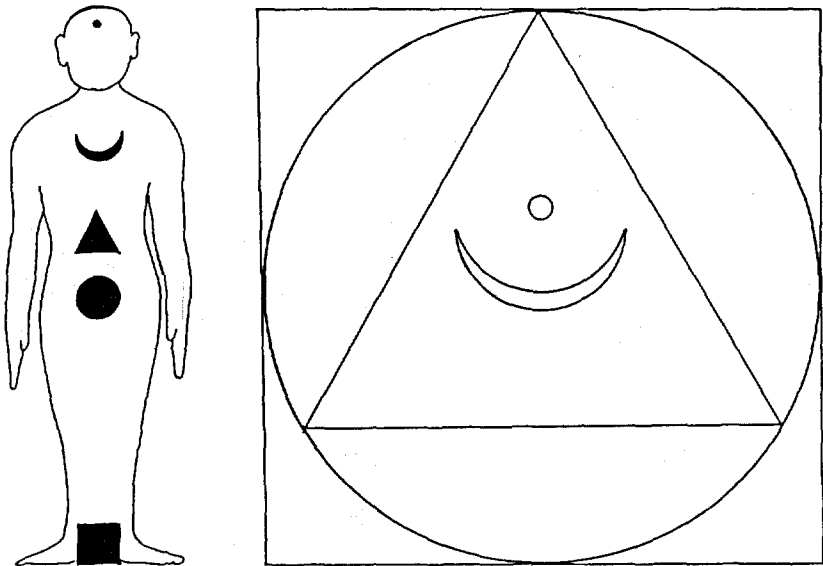


Figure 1: The five elements (Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether) in their increasing subtle, ascending order, and their location in human body. Combined they form a progression from the outer square to central point (*bindu*).

The whole cosmic principle replicates itself again and again in ever smaller scales. The human being is said to contain within itself the entire cosmos. The notion of *Antaryami Brahma* – the cosmos within, and the invocation *Aham Brahmasmi* – I am the cosmos; originate from this philosophy.

This invariance under scaling of the cosmos, may be thought of as a kind of dilation symmetry.

Another major proposition of Hindu philosophy about the cosmic process is that the cosmos evolves out of the union of two complimentary principles, and that this evolution is cyclic, and symmetric over time. The cycle of creation, sustenance and dissolution repeats itself endlessly. The process is viewed as a continuum. In the cosmic cycle, no phase is absolute in itself but each is a synthesis of opposite principles, the principle of unity neutralising the apparent disequilibrium. In the first phase of the cycle, for example, creation is seen as a vast cosmic activity, in which

certain forms of life are evolving, others are simultaneously vanishing, while some are static. In the second and third phases, the same principle asserts itself, for while sustenance or dissolution dominates, certain forms of life simultaneously evolve, are preserved and dissolve. Thus each phase of the cosmic cycle is a dynamic whole.

A commonly used metaphor to describe this process is of a spider sitting at the centre of its web, issuing and reabsorbing its threads in concentric circles, all held at one point.

*Just as a spider spins forth its thread
and draws it in again,
The whole creation is woven from Brahman
and unto it returns.*

(Mundaka Upanishad, I.i.7)

The spider's threads symmetrically expand into a visible circumference, and in spite of the divergency of the lines and the differences in the spanned distances, they can all be traced back to the central point of the web.

The expansion can be atomic or infinite, no matter what their magnitude, the expansions and contractions are interconnected and integrated in the general framework supported by the centre.

These propositions about the nature of cosmos were formulated and laid down thousands of years ago, when philosophy and natural sciences were not considered as different disciplines. The ancient texts of Hindu philosophy, the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, contain these propositions, which are said to have been revealed to the sages during their quest for the absolute truth. The same sages, who propounded these theories, are also attributed with the founding of the basic canons of art and architecture. To maintain harmony all man-made objects and structures are enjoined to be fashioned with the same measurements and principles with which the cosmos is made; and so the underlying order and symmetries of the cosmos manifest themselves in the designs and representations made by man. The second part of this paper will examine some of these representations.

It is interesting that in spite of the notion of an all pervading cosmic order and symmetry (*Rta*), there is no specific word in Sanskrit, the classical Indian language, to describe symmetry in general. The phenomena of symmetry are denoted by many different expressions, describing different kinds of symmetries, depending on the use context. The word *Sama-miti* (*Sama* = same, equal, *miti* = measurement) is of recent origin and has been coined to mean symmetry in view of requirements of translation of technical texts.

The prefix *Sama* — meaning same or equal or equivalent — is found in many Sanskrit words describing different aspects of symmetry. *Sama-rupa* indicates sameness of form. *Sama-bhava* is used in the sense of equanimity, as unchanging emotional response to different situations. *Sama* is also used in the sense of 'even' when applied to numbers as against *Vishama* which means 'odd'. *Saman* means similar. *Samanjasya* — 'balance' — is a property of symmetry. In iconography, the basic classification of the types of images is on the basis of the symmetry of the

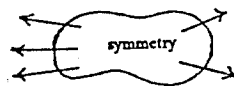
posture. *Sama-pada* or *Sama-bhanga* indicates a perfectly symmetrical posture representing perfect equipoise, balance and equanimity. Degrees of variation from this perfect symmetry are expressed by the other three postures in ascending order: *Abhanga* (*a* – slight, *bhanga* – flexion); *Tri-bhanga* (*Tri* – thrice, flexion) and *Ati-bhanga* (*ati* – extreme, flexion). The flexing of the body represents the attitudes of the image, the break away from the symmetry of equipoise.



Figure 2: Four basic postures of images according to the canons of Indian iconography: *Sama-pada*, *Abhanga*, *Tri-bhanga*, and *Ati-bhanga*. The basis of classification is the degree of deviation from perfect symmetry.

The central quest of Hindu spirituality is to achieve total experience of the 'One' and the 'Whole', to be fully awakened to the symmetries of the cosmos within one-self. That is considered Enlightenment, Buddhahood, Nirvana. The last part of this paper will discuss the means and the process prescribed for discovering these inner symmetries.

QUESTION 2 MANIFESTATIONS OF SYMMETRY



The concept of an ordered, symmetrical, and stable cosmos is expressed symbolically in diagrams variously in Indian ritual art. The *Mandalas*, *Yantras* and *Chakras*, as well as many other motifs are representations of some aspect of the cosmic activity. Concentration and symmetry are common characteristics of these diagrams.

Basic geometrical figures such as the point, straight line, circle, triangle and square have a symbolic value in presenting the basic energies of the universe. They can be

combined in increasingly complex figures to represent particular qualities or forces embodied in some aspect of creation, evolution or dissolution.

Bindu or the point is the source of all creation, from which the cosmos evolves. It represents concentrated energy, the primordial centre. From this centre emanate the various lines, triangles and circles culminating in different shapes. It is the drop that swells itself into the ocean of consciousness, the zero which gives meaning and value to the numbers, the cipher through which every thing is deciphered. It contains in itself everything. *Bindu* is the nave of the great cosmic wheel, the navel from which the whole creation originates.

Bindu can also be considered as a point-circle, not yet having a radius. It can also be thought of as a triangle with no area, a point where the would-be three vertices coincide. All forms are potentially present in the *bindu*.

The circle represents the principle which has no beginning, no ending, perfectly symmetrical and at all points equidistant from the centre. It indicates the realm of radiations from the one centre, at times an enclosure, a periphery, a circumscribed field of action. According to *Vastusutra Upanishad*, an ancient text on the significance of form in sacred art: "The Circle is All (universe). The breath of life (*prana*) is (contained) in its form, even as the mind is in Man. The Circle is Time. The circle consists of its station (centre) and its boundary like a state of mind (consisting of the mind and its movement). The support of the circle is the immortal, the *bindu* is its firm position (station) like the *Atman* (soul) in man. Starting from the *bindu*, and connecting it with another points arises the circumference (enclosure) surrounding it."

The triangle is the basis linear figure of enclosure. Since space cannot be bounded by less than three lines, triangle is conceived as the first symbolic form to emerge from the chaos preceding creation. The downward pointing triangle is representative of the female principle (*Prakriti* or *Shakti*), whose kinetic dynamism awakens the inert forces in existence. The upward pointing triangle denotes the male principle (*Purusha*). The interpenetration of these two triangles represents the concept of fusion of polarities: the male and female, matter and spirit, the static and kinetic in a perfect state of unity.

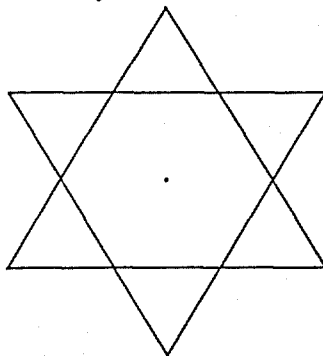


Figure 3: Interlocking triangles symbolising the fusion of polarities.

Square denotes the manifest world, the stable linear form representing the earth. It is the fundamental format of most *Yantras* and *Mandalas*, denoting the terrestrial world which must be transcended.

In addition to these geometrical figures, the blossoming lotus is an important symbol, as it introduces the temporal dimension in the diagram. The unfolding lotus petals are representations of the unfolding of the cosmic evolution in time. With its geometrically abstract petals pointing outwards towards the circumference, it is an appropriate image to illustrate the symmetrical unfolding of cosmic energies.

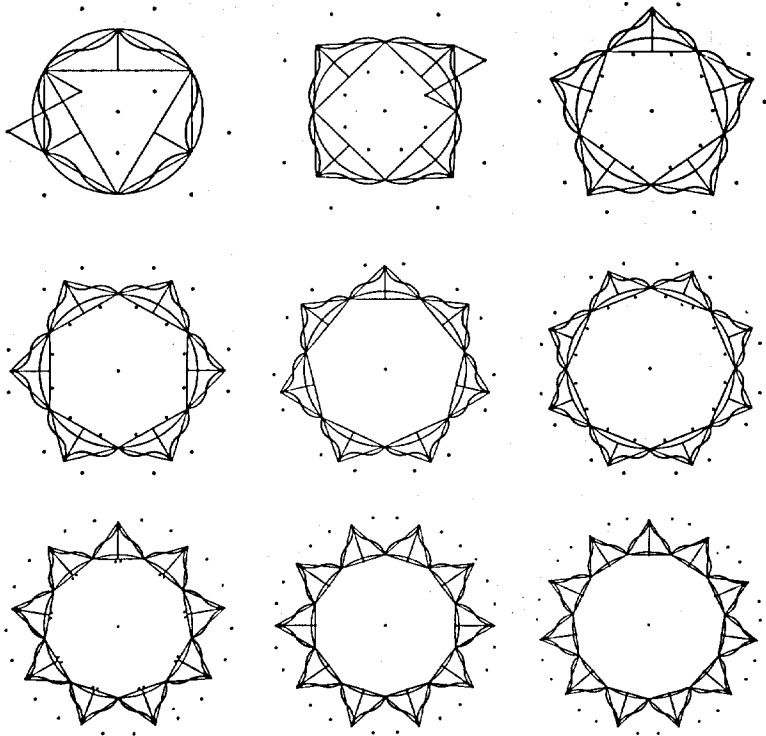


Figure 4: Unfolding lotuses as symbols of unfolding of cosmic energies.

Mandalas, Yantras and Chakras

Mandalas, *Yantras* and *Chakras* are all geometrical diagrams, representing the various symmetries and energies of the cosmos, and are used as meditative tools or instruments to awaken in oneself these energies. By themselves the constituting symbols of these diagrams convey only partial meanings, and cannot carry the universe of meaning that the diagram as a whole contains. The symbolic syntax of *mandalas* and *yantras* reveal a 'universe-pattern' of the totality of existence, a synthesis of hierarchical, apparently heterogeneous planes of existence. This synthesis

allows one to discover the underlying unity of the world and at the same time become aware of one's own destiny as an integral part of the world.

The Sanskrit word *Mandala* means a polygon. In ritual diagrams, its most preferred shapes are circle and square, though *mandalas* of other shapes are also described. Universally inherent in man's consciousness, the *mandala* has continually appeared in his constructions, rituals, and art forms. From its various manifestations, *mandalas* can be said to have three basic properties: a centre, symmetry, and cardinal points. The first principle: centre is constant, but the latter two change according to the nature of the *mandala*. Symmetry can be bilateral or dynamic, rigid, and well-defined, or absolutely fluid. The cardinal points may be finite and precise, or infinite and non-existent as in a circle. Traditionally, the circular *mandalas* are symbols of the cosmos in its entirety, and the square is a symbol of the earth and the man-made world.

The *mandala* is fundamentally a visual form which is easily grasped by the eye, for it corresponds to the primary visual experience as well as to the structure of the eye.

The *mandala* is wholeness. An archetype released by the unconscious, it is a universal symbol of essence, which is, which becomes, and which returns to itself, thus indicating how every form is in itself whole, self-consistent, and a paradigm of a larger whole. The universality of the holistic concept of the *mandala* can be observed in organic nature and in human consciousness alike. From atom to star, each particle's structure represents a wholeness in potentiality, which becomes manifest in space and time according to its nature. This is perhaps the origin of inspiration to portray the cosmos in the form of a *mandala*.

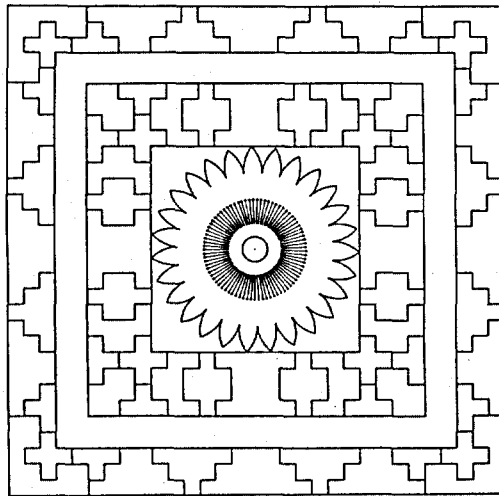


Figure 5: *Paramanand* — the *mandala* of Ultimate Bliss, the last in a series of 25 *mandalas*, according to *Paushakara Samhita*, a religious text from 2nd century AD.

The concept of *mandala* pervades all Indian art forms. All architecture (*vastu*) proceeds from a potential ground-plan called *Vastu-purusha Mandala* or *Vastu-mandala*, which functions as a basic programme, a plan of plans, which contains within

it the possibilities of various constructions. The essential form of the *Vastu-mandala* is a square divided in a grid of smaller squares. A series of 32 types of *Vastu-mandalas* is said to exist, progressing from a plan of one square by one (1×1) to a *mandala* with 1024 (32×32) squares sub-divisions. The two most commonly used *Vastu-mandalas* are those having 64 (8×8), and 81 (9×9) squares.

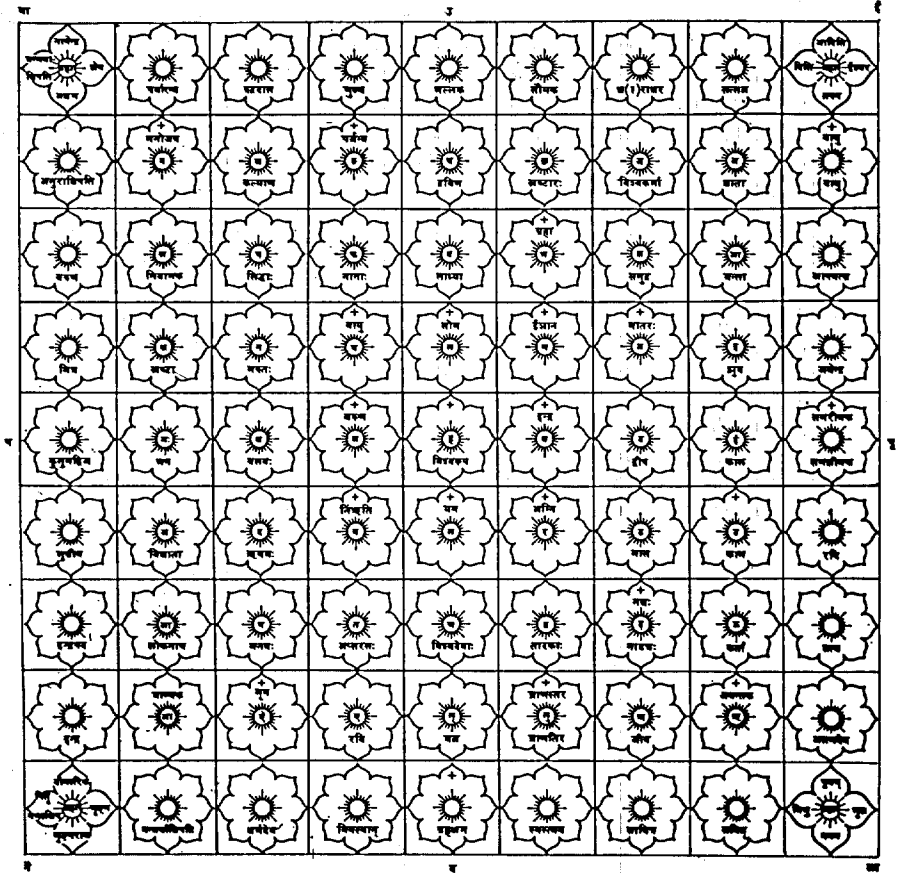


Figure 6: *Vastu-purusha Mandala* of 81 squares (9×9) from the *Paushakara Samhita*. *Vastupurusha* is described as a reflection of the Omnipresent Lord in whose body the entire congregation of deities takes shelter. All the squares contain lotus motif. Each of the inner enclosures possesses a syllable in addition to the presiding deity.

The form-pattern of *mandalas*, having the qualities of centre, symmetry, and cyclic-ity are used to characterize and classify the arrangement of words in poetry, in construction of rules of verse metres, as well as in the overall arrangement of the whole work. The text of *Rig-Veda*, the most ancient of Hindu scriptures is organised in 10 *mandalas*. *Mandala* like figures and arrangements abound in the *Chitra-kavya* tradition of Sanskrit poetry, where the words of the verse are written in a diagram form to further emphasize the existing circularity of the sequence of letters. In such

a symmetrical arrangement, a verse may begin from any letter and not have a fixed beginning or end.

In music, *Swara-mandala* denotes the recurrent circularity of musical notes. In classical dance movements, *mandala* form patterns extensively occur.

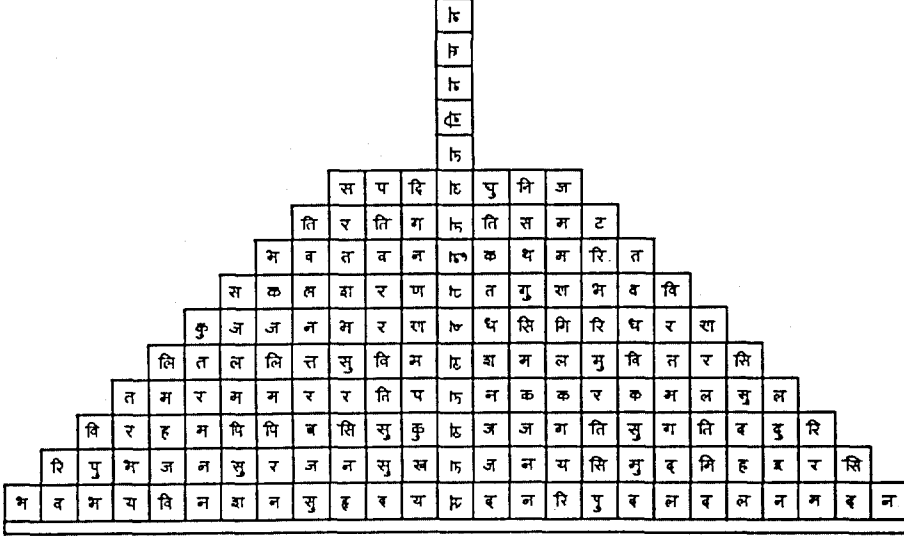


Figure 7: *Meru-bandha*: a diagrammatic rendering of a verse within the symmetrical form of the cosmic mountain Meru.

Like *mandala*, *yantra* is also an abstract geometrical design intended as a 'tool' for meditation and increased awareness. The Sanskrit word *Yantra* derives from the root *Yam* meaning to sustain, hold, or harness the energy inherent in a particular element, object or concept. *Yantra* is an instrument, a machine, a store-house of power.

While *mandala* is cosmic, a *yantra* relates to a specific aspect of cosmic power and may be the representation of a particular deity – a specific *yantra* containing in itself in a controlled form the uncontrollable power of the deity. Mystic *yantras* are aids to and the chief instruments of meditative discipline. Every *yantra* is a sacred enclosure, a dwelling or a receptacle of a chosen deity. It is a substitute for an anthropomorphic image of the deity, and is an abstract translation of the attributes and powers of the deity.

Yantras exist in the Vedic, Tantric and Buddhist traditions, each of which has adopted the use of *yantras* to its own specific metaphysical ideas. They are most commonly drawn on paper, or engraved on metal or rock crystals, although any flat surface such as floors or walls may be used. Three dimensional *yantras* may exist on small scale, or on architectural scale in the form of temples. *Yantras* used in ritual worship are of various kinds: those devoted to male deities, to female deities, conjointly to two deities, or to various aspects of a single deity. *Yantras* are used also

for occult purposes and as talismans. In some *yantras* the sound equivalents of the deities are symbolically represented by the Sanskrit seed syllable inscribed in the space within the pattern.

There are several kinds of purely abstract designs of a symbolic kind, similar to *yantras* and *mandalas*, which are drawn by women on the floors and the walls of

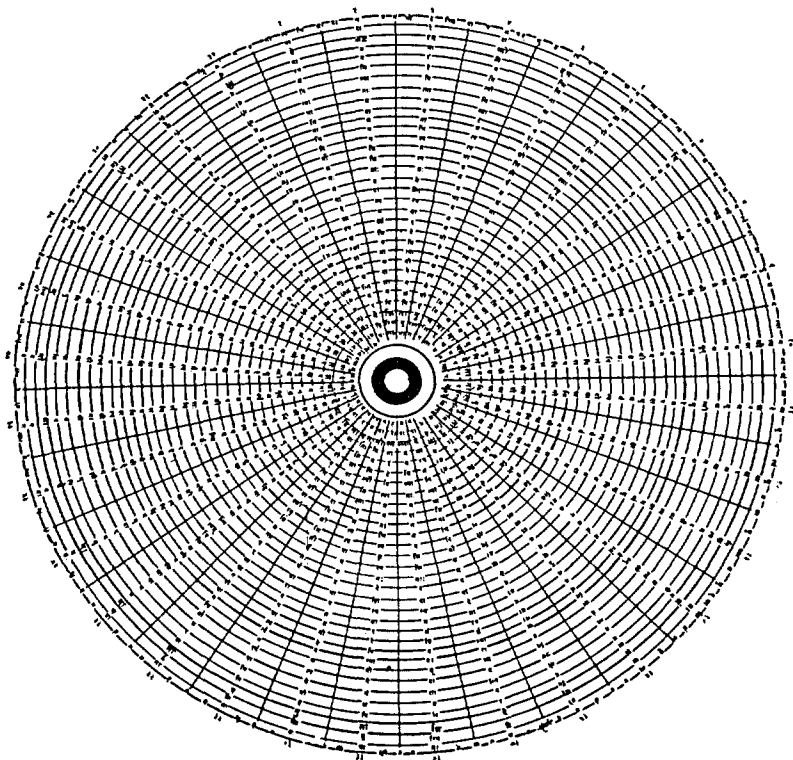


Figure 8: *Dvatrinshadar-chakra Bandha*. Verse written in the form of a wheel of 32 spokes. To be read from the circumference to centre in the first sixteen spokes and from centre outwards in the remaining sixteen spokes.

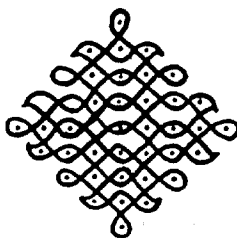


Figure 9: An *alpina* pattern.

houses with rice-paste or powdered colours during festivals and religious ceremonies. These patterns are variously known as *Alpana*, *Rangoli*, or *Kolam*, and are found all over India.

The most celebrated of the *yantras*, the *Sri Yantra* (also known as *Sri Chakra*) projects a very powerful metaphysical concept. The construction and symbolism of the *Sri Yantra* will be described in some detail to give an idea of the complexity and the profoundness of the concepts which may be condensed in a geometrical diagram.

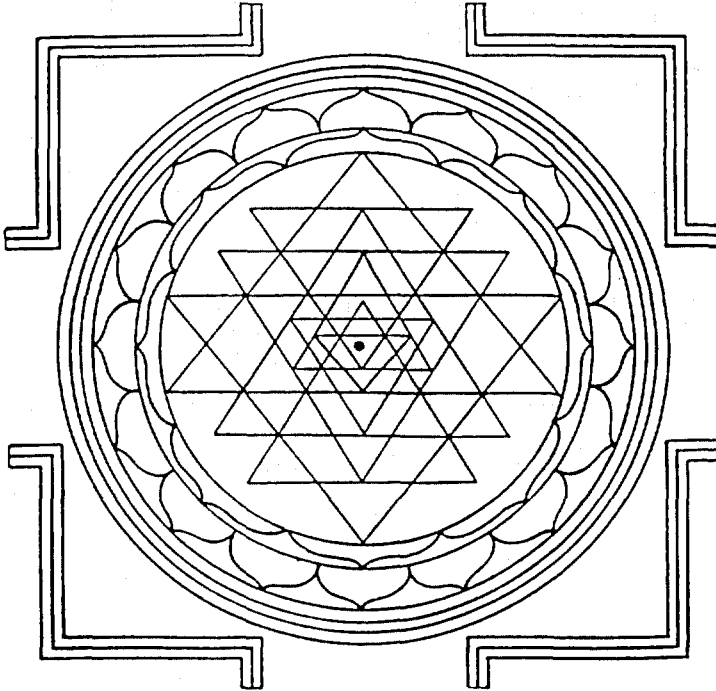


Figure 10: *Sri Yantra*.

The *Sri Yantra* is also called '*Nava Chakra*' since it is composed of nine circuits (*nava* = nine), counting from the outer plane to the central point (*bindu*). Through contemplation on the *Sri Yantra*, the adept can rediscover his primordial sources. The successive phases in the process of realisation are symbolically indicated by the nine circuits. They rank from the earthly plane (the realm of the gross) and progress slowly step by step to the final point (sublime and subtle realm). The outermost circuit (*chakra*) is a square of three lines, the lines one inside the other, opening out in the middle of each side as four gates. This is the *Bhupura*, the ground plan of *Sri Yantra*. Through the gates in the *Bhupura*, one enters the precincts. Immediately inside the square are three concentric circles which serve as three girdles. The space between the square and the three girdles is the *Trailokya Mohana*, the enchantress of the triple world. At this stage the adept is infatuated by aspirations and desires. The being comes under the spell and can rest content here for a very long time.

Next are two concentric rings of sixteen and eight lotus petals respectively. These are called *Sarvasa paripuraka Chakra* – the fulfiller of all desires, and *Sarva Sanksobhana Chakra* – the agitator of all. Though desires are fulfilled, this fulfilment of desires leads one nowhere, there comes discontent, an unrest, and an agitation. This state of agitation is good, because only from here one proceeds to the inner precincts of progress. A figure formed by the super-imposition of five triangles with apex downwards on four triangles with apex upwards comes next. This complex of triangles consists of forty-three smaller triangles.

The outermost fourteen triangles figure is known as *Sarva Saubhagyada Chakra*, the giver of all auspiciousness. The next two *chakras* are each constructed of ten triangles. Called *Sarvartha Sadhaka* and *Sarva Rakshakara*, accomplisher of all purpose and giver of protection, they indicate a stage when inner realisation begins to dawn.

The seventh *chakra*, consisting of eight triangles, is called *Sarva Rogahara*, the remover of all desires and ills, and represents the stage when the being is free of earthly bonds, and is at the threshold of the inner circle of realization.

An inverted triangle is the eighth *chakra*, *Sarva Siddhiprada*, giver of all accomplishment. It denotes a stage before realisation, perfection in all things. The culmination is the last *chakra*, the *Bindu*, known as *Sarva Anandamaya*, full of bliss. This is the state of union with the ultimate, the state of perfect symmetry.

Most *yantras* have a similar symbolic meaning, though in a restricted sense, applied to a specific creative force. *Sri Yantra* is the *yantra* of all *yantras*, since its project 'all', is all-encompassing. The symbolism of the *Sri Yantra* may be understood intellectually through analysis, the aesthetics of its symmetry and proportion may be immediately grasped visually. However, its subtle meaning and the power it manifests cannot be grasped easily or instantly. Its understanding is said to grow gradually, till one identifies and progresses in spiritual ascent to grasp the wholeness it enshrines.

Temples as architectural *yantras*

All Hindu temples are built on the scheme of the ritual diagrams: *yantras* and *mandalas*. These architectural *yantras* can be interpreted as three-dimensional models of the cosmos and the cosmic process. The ground plan of every Hindu temple must conform to a *Vastu-purusha Mandala*. This *mandala* is basically an imprint of the ordered cosmos. The *Vastu-purusha Mandala* is not an exact blue print of the temple, but a 'forecast' – a marking of the potential, within which a wide range of possibilities are implied. The *mandala* is an ideogram while the temple is a material manifestation of the concepts it embodies.

The symbolism of the Hindu temple is a fascinating and vast subject in itself. Of special interest from the point of view of symmetry is the existent of self-similar symmetries portrayed in its form. The invariance of the temple form, under change of scale, symbolizes the idea of wholeness described in the peace invocation from *Isha Upanishad* in the beginning of this article.

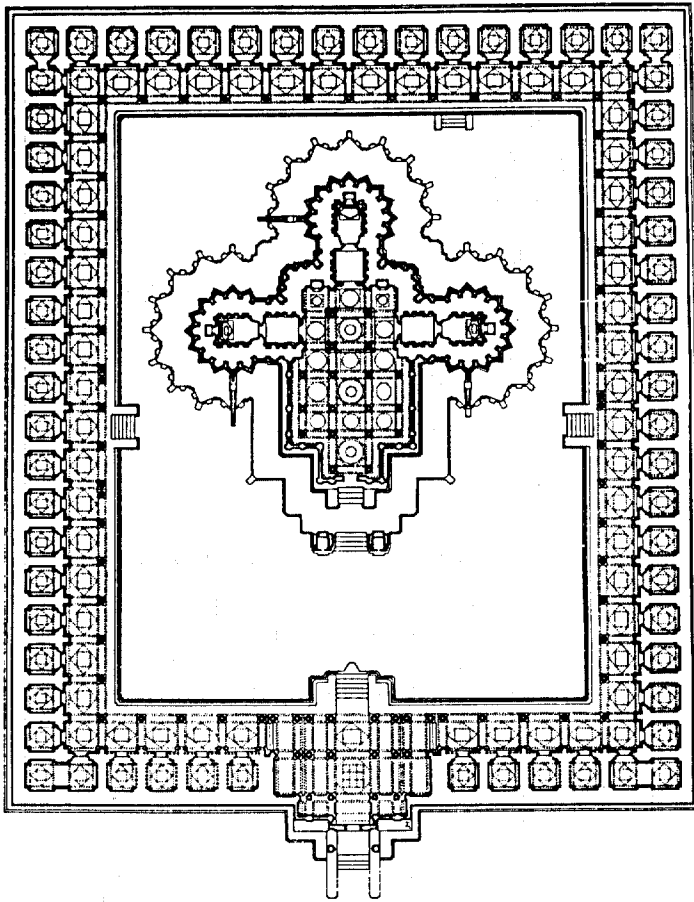


Figure 11: Plan of the Keshava Temple, Somanathpur, displaying the snow-flake curves characteristic of fractal figures.

The formal features of the Hindu temple can be described to have a preponderance of fractal symmetry, if we use the notion of fractals put forward by Benoit Mandelbrot. The snow-flake like appearance, typical of Koch's curve in fractal geometry, is commonly seen in the plans of many Hindu temples. Many features of the temple – from the details of the minor decorative motifs to the overall form – are generated through a process of self-similar iteration.

The most fascinating examples of this fractal symmetry are found in the spire (*Shikhara*) part of the temples. The high tower of the *Shikhara* throws forth diminutive multiples of its own shape in high relief, each one of them subordinated to the bulk of the total *shikhara*. These part-*Shikharas*, each being a sub-multiple of the total shape, have further smaller *Shikharas* clinging to them, each a miniature model of the shape of the total *shikhara* with all its component parts.

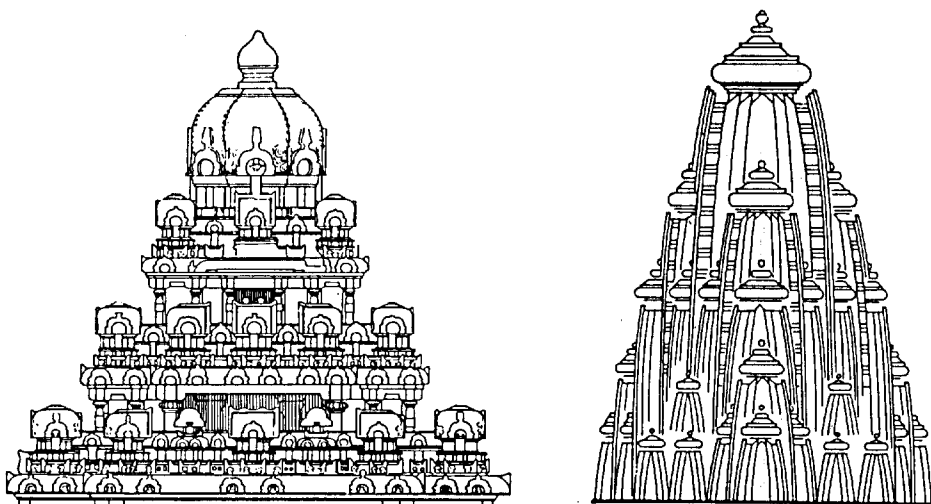
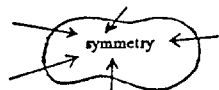


Figure 12: Fractal symmetry in the spires of Dravida and Nagara styles of Hindu Temples.

The significance of this process is described by Stella Kramrisch in her *Temple as Purusha*: "While the several, graded diminutions of the size of a given shape are of an intellectual nature, by expressing a hierarchy or valuation in measurable form, the repetition of the diminutive shapes of the same size springs from more vital sources within the creative process stemming from a will to assert itself again and again in measurable intervals by means of a chosen shape and its meaning. The measurable, quantitative nature of rhythm stipulates direction while implying variation of intensity, like those of ebb and tide, where one is not without the other and each anticipates the next."

Mandalas, yantras, chakras and their countless variations and manifestations in Indian art, perhaps owe their being to a deeper spiritual urge in the Indian psyche, an age-old quest for grasping and being one with the 'Ultimate Truth'. The same urge also shapes the basic attitude of viewing the outer physical world as mere illusion, and the insistence on looking inward, for the realisation of greater symmetries inherent in one's own being, as microscopic representations of the 'Whole'.

QUESTION 3 REALISING SYMMETRY



"The Sun is red when rising and is the same colour when setting. So should be the unchanging behaviour of an enlightened being."

(Sanskrit aphorism)

The symmetry of behaviour, which remains unperturbed, untainted and same under all circumstances, is considered one of the qualities of an enlightened being who has acquired an equanimous attitude towards all beings and all circumstances.



Figure 13: The image of Gomateshwara as an Enlightened Being, from Shravanbelagola, South India.

Such enlightened beings — Buddha, Mahavira and other Jain Tirthankaras — are always depicted in a symmetrical posture, the symmetry of the pose reflecting the symmetry of being. Indian tradition has developed the concept of an 'Enlightened Being' or a 'Realised Soul'. A being who has acquired this status, has developed a state of perfection, maturity and inner understanding of reality which is definite, complete and universal. Having seen the transient nature of the worldly pursuits, the only worthwhile goal is to work for a permanent spiritual achievement of perfection using methods of systematic spiritual training.

A true spiritual being masters the opposite poles of spiritual bliss on one hand, and the agony of worldly existence (*samsara*) on the other. He is called a *muni* (sage), because he frequently spends his time in *manan* (meditation). His path is not of this world. He has shifted the centre of experience of himself from the sheath of the material body with which ordinary people identify themselves into the sheath of a spiritual body which does not die. Such a being is one with life, and also with the cosmos.

The systematic practice of cultivating a spiritual personality is known as *Yoga*. The tradition of *Yoga* or spiritual practice is very old in India. Methods of training are mentioned in the *Upanishads*. Buddha (6th Century B.C.) is mentioned to have followed *Yogic* practices, before achieving enlightenment.

According to *Yoga*, we suffer because of ignorance of our real nature which lies beyond the cares of worldly everyday existence, and can be experienced as an undying and omnipresent vastness. It is Absolute Consciousness — the perfect symmetry field, the source and goal of all life.

The core of *Yogic* practice as preached by Buddha is the 'Noble Eightfold Path' which is the oldest known scheme of a *Yoga path* — a method for attaining true enlightenment. Buddha's eightfold path proceeds to form and develop man's personality using three main avenues: that of knowledge and wisdom, that of morality and ethical behaviour, and that of meditation and absorption. The eight paths are all characterised by the prefix '*samma*' in the sense of rightness or correctness. They are: Right Viewing (*Samma Diṭṭhi*), Right Thinking (*Samma Kammanta*), Right Livelihood (*Samma Ajva*), Right Effort (*Samma Vayam*), Right Mindfulness (*Samma Sati*), and Right Absorption (*Samma Samadhi*). Proceeding through these paths, one reaches a state of perfect equilibrium, finally taking the last step towards liberation, the achievements of Nirvana.

Patanjali summarised the teachings of *Yoga*, a few centuries after Buddha, in his '*Yoga Sutra*' which is still the authoritative classical exposition of the spiritual path to liberation. Patanjali's system is also eightfold and starts with two steps which concern the development of a moral and ethical foundation. They are *Yama* — the laws of life, and *Niyama* — rules for living. In the third and fourth steps attention is turned towards the physical organism. *Asana* — posture requires from the *Yogi* the ability to assume a steady meditating posture. *Pranayama* is the discipline of breath control.

The subsequent four steps of Patanjali's *Yoga* present a gradual process of awakening the mind for the inner perception of truth. First is *Pratyahara* or withdrawal of attention from the senses and the endless flow of thoughts, ideas and images filling the mind. This is followed by applying *Dharana* or concentration focused on one particular object of mind's internal experience, whereby 'one-pointedness' is developed, as contrasted to the usual, agitated, unsymmetrical state of the mind. With one-pointedness firmly established, the next stage, called *Dhyana* (contemplation), is reached. It is a state of deep awareness in which any image, idea or experience on which the mind focuses is seen 'from inside'. *Dhyana* gives the direct cognition of the internal essence of the perceived object. The final state is known as *Samadhi*, or full unification of the *Yogi's* being with his cognition. To be here is to know and to know is to be, with respect to oneself, as well as to reality as a whole.

Following Patanjali several paths of *Yogic* practice developed. Four of them are of major importance.

Karma Yoga, the path of action without attachment. Such action does not bind and eventually a state of complete freedom is reached.

Dhyana Yoga, the path of meditation. The meditative practice extends from periods of quiet sitting into the periods of active meditation, and eventually becomes a way of life, which is calm and unperturbed.

Jnana Yoga, the path of knowledge, depends on acquisition of discriminating knowledge which helps to sort out between the essential and real from the non-essential and non-real. The final knowledge then presents itself to the *Yogi* in the form of a direct realisation of the unity of existence.

Bhakti Yoga is the path of 'Divine Love' and centres around a belief in, and total surrender to a personal God. Every thought, emotion, word, and deed becomes an act of sacrifice directed towards the Lord. This total giving up of one's personality, brings about eventually an awareness of the universality and liberation from the limited form of existence.

Kundalini Yoga is another special type of *Yoga* which emerged in the process of further elaboration of *Yogic* practice. The Sanskrit word *Kundalini* means 'coiled up'. The coiled *Kundalini* is the female energy existing in latent form everywhere and in all beings. This energy may lie dormant throughout one's life, and there may be no awareness of its existence. The object of practice of *Kundalini Yoga* is to awaken this cosmic energy in oneself and cause it to unite with the Pure Consciousness pervading the whole universe. The arousal of *Kundalini* is not unique to Tantric practice, but forms the basis of all *Yogic* disciplines and every genuine spiritual experience may be considered an awakening of this energy. Even music and dance can arouse the dormant *Kundalini*, and direct it to higher planes until its perfect unfolding is realised.

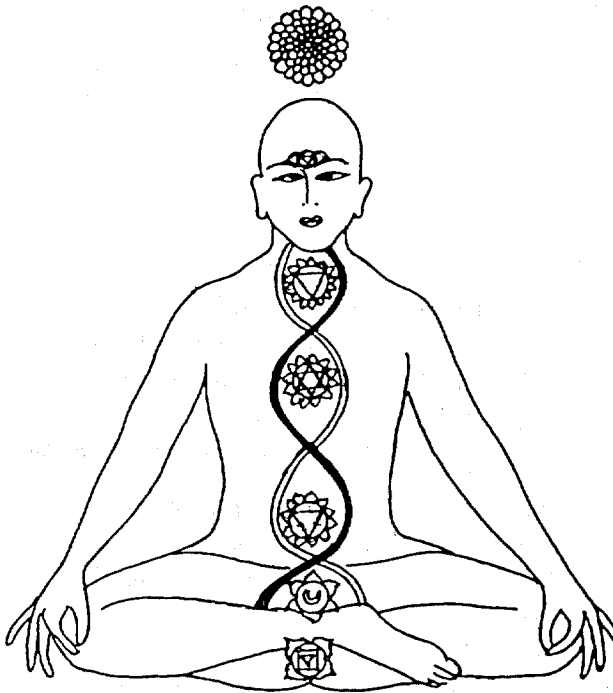


Figure 14: The awakening of *Kundalini Shakti* symbolised by unfolding of symmetrical *chakras* in the body along the axis of spine.

The unmanifested, dormant *Kundalini* is symbolically represented by a serpent coiled into three and half circles, with its tail in its mouth, and spiralling around the central axis at the base of the spine. When the *Kundalini Shakti* is ready to unfold, she ascends to unite above the crown of the head with *Shiva* (Pure Consciousness), through the psychic centres, the *chakras* that lie symmetrically along the axis of spine as consciousness potential. All the *chakras* are understood as situated, not in the gross body, but in the subtle body. The unfolding *chakras* are diagrammatically represented by unfolding of symmetrical lotus forms. Starting from the base of spine as *Muladhara*, *Svadhithana* (around the prostatic plexus), *Manipura* (around the navel), *Anahata* (near the heart), *Visuddha* (behind the throat), and *Ajna* (between the eyebrows). The last, *Sahasrara Chakra*, the thousand petal lotus (thousand is symbolically taken to mean infinity) is situated above the top of the head, and is the region of Pure Consciousness. The *Kundalini Shakti* rises through these centres, until it reaches its full flowering, that is, fusion with the Absolute in *Sahasrara*, generating Bliss Consciousness (*Ananda*) from the union of *Shiva-Shakti*.

Through whatever path, one who has these transformations, has no more desires. He looks upon the entire objective world as surging within him. He has then no need to chant *mantras*, perform rituals or worship Gods and Goddesses. For he looks upon all that as in himself.

The origin and goal meet in a single focal point: Union (*Yoga*). The knower and the known become one in perfectly harmonious symmetry.

"The 'Gunas', their purpose fulfilled, return to their original state of harmony, and pure unbounded consciousness remains forever established in its own absolute nature."

(*Patanjala Yogasutra*, IV.34)

This is Enlightenment

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