CHAPTER - 5

Abstraction Through Indigenous Sources

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Chapter 5

Folk Art

The discovery of folk and tribal art is a 19th century phenomenon in the wake of the national consciousness which was generated due to the imposition of British concepts in art. The other factor partially, may be the increasing interest in folk and traditional art throughout the world and a rapid and enthusiastic adaptation by Gauguin, Picasso and other abstractionists.

Folk and tribal art as being simple, bold, symbolic and elemental became the best source for abstraction for both eastern and western artists. Folk and tribal art which are known as an extension to the primitive art, produced an inspirational source to the abstractionists - Miro, Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Cubists - Czanne, Picasso and Primitivist Gauguin etc. In India this source was first exploited by Jamini Roy, Nandlal Bose, Ravindranath Tagore & Amrita-Sher-Gil which was later handed down to the
next generation artists, who experimented and exploited folk and tribal motifs and elements into various personal styles

In India, folk art was discovered in Bengal and began to be collected by the Tagores, Ajit Ghosh and other artists and connoisseurs early in the 20th century.¹ The origin of folk and tribal art goes back to the art of primitive society, while its persistence is attested by the survival of Indian tribal communities which have succeeded in preserving their respective cultural identities in the very heart of the developed Hindu community of today. On the subcontinent, as in Africa and Oceania, tribal art (or traditional art), bears the unmistakable stamp of an achievement that is not only ancient and indigenous, but also notably creative.² In India, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa were, as they still continue, important centers of folk art. And a large number of tribal communities are settled and their descendants are still restoring their heritage through their artistic creativity.³

There is a very little information to be gleaned from early literary sources on the history and nature of folk art. The very earliest works, such as the poetry of *rigveda*, do not provide a complete catalogue of crafts and calligs.⁴ Early Buddhist literature is a source of much detailed information on the work of craftsmen
and contains many allusions to their organization and their local and social obligations as well as accounts of whole craft villages located in the neighborhood of the larger towns. In the towns themselves craftsmen lived in certain districts or streets, while crafts determined by caste and handed down from father to son.\(^5\)

The art of the hunters and food gatherers of the earliest peasant settlers and of the urban dwellers of the Harappan culture, while forming part of a continuous chain of development, is in each case comprehensible only when considered in the context of changing economic and social circumstances. Not only prior to, but also during the earlier phases of the class society, all art was functional or, one might say, utilitarian, no matter whether its object was to give aesthetic shape to tools and articles of everyday use, or the bolster the ideology of social structures by the production of ritual objects and paintings.

The continued independent development and recognizable local character of folk art in any given region was not determined by the narrow confines of state or province but, rather, given stable conditions, by supra regional and, in particular, socio-economic factors such as climate, the nature of the soil, the routes taken by hunters and food gatherers and the potential for agricultural settlement.
The earliest manifestations of folk art could be distinguished through the archaeological findings. The history of Indian folk art must be traced in indirect references found in early writings as folk art materials are perishable and easily destroyed. The usefulness of such objects expires once they have served their ritual and religious purpose. Sculpture and paintings produced specifically for domestic or public festival are completely disregarded once these are over. They are laid aside or thrown into a river or the sea, while the murals and the paintings on mud floors outside the houses are left to fade in the sun and crumble away in the rain. Continuity in folk art is achieved solely by means of constant repetition and reproduction. Thus a modern work of folk art may also be regarded to some extent as an indirect source of information on the folk art of earlier periods.

The most important artistic link between past and present consists in a number of decorative motifs, attributes and symbols, motifs which regularly recur and can be shown to have remained constant throughout, although the message they carry may vary from epoch to epoch. They constitute what might be described as a formal, structural framework of tradition, the only pitfall here being that the visual message, though apparently easy to read, nevertheless admits of a number of different interpretations. The inner logic of historical processes would seem to suggest that, in
each concrete instance, this clarity of the image should be placed within the context of the conventions prevalent at the time. There can be no doubt that in the art of today symbols such as the sun and the moon lend themselves to a different interpretation from that applicable in, say a community, of hunters and food gatherers. By and large, it may be said that the outward, formal manifestations of folk art are more readily comprehensible than is its actual significance.

In India, some form of folk art is found in most provinces in local variations. The range of work is immense: terracottas, wooden and clay toys, dolls and images, paintings objects of pith and cane, rag, embroidery, metal objects, an objects of miscellaneous materials most of them require some form of craftsmanship, and show a lively imagination and of uncultured understanding of the materials. Their strong living shapes and bright colours contribute to a vigour and animation not to be found in more complex art.

Usually the folk artists are recruited from the villages by princes, municipalities and religious bodies to work on their ambitious artistic undertaking. Although the caste of the artist-craftsman means that he is intimately bounded with his faith, there appears to be no religious restrictions upon his professional activities. In this respect he is a free agent who may undertake
work from anyone, irrespective of caste or religion. Thus tribal members may commission work from Hindu craftsmen, who, for their part, show themselves in every respect capable of meeting down to the last detail of their customers' requirements in regard to style, form and content.

The second largest group of craft workers in the village consists of women whose artistic activities are bound up with home and family. Their work has never been of a commercial nature rather regarded as a part of their other domestic duties. The materials and techniques they use are purely of local origin. The amateur production of these women relates largely to ritual, magical ideas and is directed towards obtaining results which they hope will promote the welfare of the family. Being made of perishable material, their products have a limited life. The continuity of this form of art has persisted through generations, passing from mother to daughter and is assured, both as regards techniques and content, by the transmission of an uninterrupted sequence of experience. The historical development of professional village craftsmanship, like its content tends towards Indian high art, whereas the distinctive nature of female domestic art is reminiscent rather of the earliest beginnings of artistic activity, as are its absolute fidelity to tradition, its unsophisticated aesthetic, non-industrial creativity and its conservative technique.
brings it far closer to the tribal art than the caste restricted craftsmanship of the men. In the amateur production of the Indian housewife today we may see a reflections of the earliest type of India’s pre-historic folk art. The traditional arts, practiced by women in the home still, continue to service in the major cities of India.

Among some of the characteristics of folk decoration few are emphatic as:

1. Simple and bold outline, and rejection of unnecessary emphasis.
2. Simple and flat use of colour to omit shading.
3. Size and gesture exaggeration to enhance expression.
4. Decorative representation of motifs and patterns.
5. Emphasis on rhythmic repetition of lines, figures, dots, motifs or designs.

Two-dimensional representation in folk art

The two-dimensional art have recourse to materials which, though subject to decay, are not only easily available but are to be found in their natural form almost everywhere in India. The raw materials for mat-making are universally to hand. Cotton is known to have been grown at a very early date consequent upon
the development of agriculture. Silk yarns came somewhat later, while animal fibers were also available long before. Besides possessing the ability to extract a rich range of colours from plants, the Indians are also skilled in producing dyes and paints from minerals, clay shreds and other materials. Suitable rock faces, flattened earth, leaves egg-shells, bone and even the skin of human beings and animals (tattooing) had always served as foundations for painting or, where appropriate, as surfaces for incised and relief decoration as later on, did house walls and the internal and external surfaces of simple pottery. All these materials were available to everyone no matter how poor the individual might be. Finally the formal content of two dimensional art was not subject to any kind of restraint. On an even ground, decorative geometrical and vegetable forms can be multiplied and varied at will and lend themselves to the play of fancy. Again, simple figures, both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, disposed haphazardly or otherwise at the top, the bottom or an either side of the composition, evidently formed part of the artist's immediate environment and, while evincing a degree of creative imagination, cannot have required more than a modicum of skill.

The two-dimensional folk paintings generally in flat areas are finished with strong lines tersely delineating the form. There are variations in the type of painting occur in different provinces, we
may take the example of Bengal's Kalighat pat which were in point of time the earliest to be discovered as art.

Kalighat pat

These paintings are either single sheets or paper mounted as a scroll. They are known for their strong simplified brush-work and their lively depiction of religious and social motifs. The painted scrolls generally illustrate the epics and function as the visual accompaniment to the recitation of a story. The composition is not continuous but divided into picture areas in each of which some episode occurs. In the illustrations the heroes and heroines are the largest in size which by their gestures and actions impart animation to the scene. The figures are generally painted in tempera, in flat colours enclosed by strong brush lines. There may be some surface decoration or indication of landscape but in most cases the paper itself function as a background and scenery is left to the imagination of the spectator. A parallel obtains in 'Yatra folk' drama, where properties are negligible or minimal. Painted folk toys made of wood or terra-cotta show the same characteristics. Each part of the figure has a ground colour and is finished with bold brush strokes. The finishing is generally restricted to details such as jewellery, folds of the drapery, the facial feathers, hands and feet. There is no colour gradation except
sometimes for a red line accompanying the black line forming a transitional 'modelling line. One notices in the toys especially the strong frontality characteristic of primitive art, the figure faces the spectator, the back is often ignored. Also the head is comparatively large and special attention is paid to the eyes which are large and staring.

Tribal Art

The tribes in general are integrated groups which are more or less independent of each other. Their main occupation is agriculture, mostly slash and burn cultivation, fishing and bumming supplement food-production, crafts such as weaving and basketry.

Magico-religious beliefs and practices have a predominant role in the religions of the majority of the tribes. Disease, death and calamities are attributed to malevolent spirits, who are appealed to and appeased for protection and succour. The idea of a supreme Being prevails among certain tribes, which, however has no active part to play in their religion. The institution of priest though present among all the tribes is not properly organized, and any one who has the capacity, can officiate as a priest. Birth and death ceremonies are performed with elaborate
rituals. Marriage seems to be an economic contract; there being no ritualistic observance for marriage. Payment of bride-price is most important factor in marriages.

The bonds of tribal folk and their plants surrounding are inseparable. It provides them food, medicine, clothing, domestic utensils etc. Cane and bamboo form the raw material which meet the requirements of everyday life - from house building to making baskets, fishing traps, items of dress, construction of suspension bridges, religious paraphernalia etc. In fact there is nothing in a tribal hut which is made without using indigenous plants.

"It is remarkable that in the art of many tribes the world over ornament that appears to us as purely formal, is associated with meanings, that it is interpreted." Various authorities on primitive art including Boas, Golden weiser, etc. found that geometrical patterns invariably represent zoomorphs. As for example among the Brazilian Indian various geometric forms in their art represent fish, bats, bees, uluri and many other animals. "The patterns on pots, baskets, rugs, walls of caves or houses sides of canoes, dished and the like, often suggest more or less realistically the form of animals, birds, snakes, crocodiles or of plants or objects of human manufacture." Every geometrical pattern and symbol have a meaning attached to it is the ultimate result of thought to realism as diamond and
angular patterns symbolize an eye and the butterfly. A lot of animal symbols, surprisingly in many cases, are entirely negative.

Body tattooing and decoration is another important and serious factor of the tribal folk where they use different signs, symbols and patterns to maintain the identity of their tribe, individual person and to decorate their body.

In Indian contemporary art of mid 40s folk and tribal art forms are attributed as indigenous inspirational source firstly, as a part of the revival and Jamini Roy took the lead in turning to more robust clarity of folk art, in an effort to free his art from the romantic directions of the Bengal school. Paradoxically this reflection again led the occurrence of romantic selection. His invented style was derived from 'Kalighat pat' with a certain individual style. Folk toys, terracottas etc. were also looked into with deep interest.

Secondly, the folk and tribal art elements flavoured with contemporary abstraction elements to create certain decorative or abstract form for the modern painters of 50s as Hebbar, Chavada, Sanyal, Sailoz Mookherjee, Satish Gujral, M.F. Husain, Nirod Mazumdar, Rathin Moitra etc. All of them used folk and tribal motifs and elements in certain phase of their return towards nationalistic mood.
of ones desires, feelings and situations as human beings. It is neither a religion or mysticism but an empirical-experimental method valid to everyone and not limited to any exclusive group or sect.\textsuperscript{15}

The sign-language of tantra art and the work of many modern abstract artists run parallel. Tantra which possesses an age-old foundation only recently rediscovered and anticipated by contemporary artists. We find an striking similarity between the spiritual aspects of tantric art and the works of several twentieth-century abstract artists, such as Klee, Mondrian, Brancus. In the contemporary art of India, Tantra possesses an important role for more than two decades (60s and 70s), to provide signs, symbols, pictorial language, patterns and designs for the artistic amusement and their nationalistic feelings.

In view of the critic Jaya Appaswamy "The most successful of the modern paintings based on indigenous sources are Tantric... This label however, is controversial, because the artists who use these formulae are not practicing tantrics in the original sense of this word nor do they use the pictures as devices to do their contemplation, they are tantric only in - so far- as the ancient yantras, mandals or other diagrams have served as origin. The tantric painters make compositions here there are male and female or other similar symbolic elements which
seem to conjoin or are contrasted with one another, many of them are organic but still in a way that only pattern allows."\(^{16}\)

It is difficult to determine the exact origin of tantra but its ritual symbols are found in Harappan culture (Indus valley Civilization, C. 3000 B.C.) Its base is determined as Indo - Aryan. The influences of Upanishads, Epics, Puranas and Vedas are detected. In the early medieval period the reference of tantra is found in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Literatures. Tantric practices are also found in Nepal, Tibet, China, Japan, parts of South - East Asia, Mediterranean Cultures such as Egypt and Crete. In India the most important canters of Tantric worship is Bengal, Orissa, Maharashtra, Kashmir, the foothills of the north western Himalayas, Rajasthan and parts of South India.\(^{17}\)

The principal sects of Tantrikas are broadly divided as Saivas (worshippers of Siva), Vaishnavas (worshippers of Vishnu), and Saktas (Worshippers of Sakti or female energy) which are divided into various sub-sects.\(^{18}\)

Though derived from the Indian philosophy and traditional system, it grew independently and acquired its own outlook. Tantra's psycho-experimental technique has highly elaborate systems of atomic theory, space-time relationship, astronomical observations, cosmology, palmistry, astrology, chemistry, alchemy
and the like. Human experience owes to tantra the discovery and location of the psychic centers in the human body and its various yogic disciplines which are supported by visual and abstract symbols.

The basic tenets of tantra could be started both in ascending or descending order, from cosmic plane at tantra's precepts concerning the ultimate reality and come down to its notion of creation and the constitutions of the objective world, and finally arrive at its understanding of the human body and its properties, and the psychic process which interlink man and universe, or through man - world - cosmos, culminating in the nature of the ultimate reality. It could be achieved either through the human body (Kundalini - Yoga), through performance of rites and rituals, or visually through Yantras, Mandalsas and deities, or verbally by the repetition of seed syllables (Mantra). Tantra's diverse methods which invoke the involvement of all senses, at different levels - physical, mental or psychic - in concert or singly, are directed towards self-enlightenment and a realization of the vision of unity.

The abstract approach of contemporary artists to express the complexities of life and nature was, long time back, achieved by tantra artists. Many of the tantric forms, their colour
combinations, patterns signs etc. are included in the works of contemporary artists. An striking difference between the two is that what a modern artist struggles to achieve through a process of distillation by and expression of his individual consciousness, came spontaneously in the aesthetic vision of the tantric artist within the defined collective sign - system tantric artists exposes in their art mysteries of the universe and the laws which govern them. Tantra art has a deeper significance when compared with barren abstraction, which has arisen principally from a search from the unconventional contrast to the tantra's deep spiritual faith and vision.

But some of abstract artists like Klee, Mondrian, Kandinsky, Brancusi etc. tried to reach this spiritual depth as for them art was not merely an optical manifestation but a revelation of certain metaphysical concepts. "Mondrian's chief concern, for example was to transcend the particular in order to express the universal. Throughout his life he was interested in Hindu philosophy and was so inspired by mystic ideas that he equated plastic expression with the spiritual. The vertical and horizontal theme in his work reflects the interplay of contrasting forces: male and female, active and passive, spirit and matter ' he expressed it himself as the static balance and dynamic equilibrium which constitute reality. Mondrian identified the vertical with the female. In a similar way, Paul klee explored spatial
energy through the concept of polarity: a concept is to thinkable without its opposite - every concept has its apposite more or less in the manner of thesis-antithesis. To express the eternal dialectic of the static and dynamic in its essence, he aligned the notion of polarity to geometry, creating an infinitely variable harmony of coloured plane. These artist's pictorial affinities to tantric art and their metaphysical ideas suggest a link with tantra's dualistic philosophy".¹⁹

Tantra Art

Like most of the Indian art Tantra Art being an age old form is also based on the spiritual values to bring out the hidden universality of basic forms. Tantra art reveals an abundant variety of forms, carried inflections of tone and colours, graphic patterns, powerful symbols with personal and universal significance. In tantric imagery, the power-patterns and configuration are built up from primal abstract forms to complexity. Tantra art forms retain their intrinsic character and serve to create visual reactions both psychological and spiritual. Most tantric images tend to stress the analogies between the individual and the cosmos, and the life forces which govern them. Tantric images have a meditative resilience expressed mostly in abstract signs and symbols. A geometrical configuration such as a triangle representing Prakriti or female energy is a primal root - form representing the governing principle of life in abstract imagery as a sign. In Rig
Veda, the creative principle of life is conceived of as a 'golden embryo' or Hiranya-garbha, the womb of energy from which the universe develops. The same symbol is used in the conception of the Siva-Linga, or cosmic egg, in the tantras. Such representations are abstract as opposed to imitative, universal as against individualistic and cognitive as opposed to emotional. Tantric art form once accepted, continues to retain its significance through the centuries providing a timeless quality and pre-established code as mathematical formulas.

In tantra art the act of creation becomes a contemplative process, an orchestral symphony in which both the seer and the seen become one. The achievement of emancipation from surface perception is the aim of tantra art. The artist does not attempt to absorb something external but releases what he has experienced inwardly, in this way tantra art is visual metaphysical. The world of art and the world of experience, though different in their very nature, are not separate entities. Tantric art is in union with the nature and its order and is a projection of an intrinsic consciousness permeating the outer and the inner world.

Tantra art which has a deep spiritual faith and vision, is understood by Philip Rawson as: "The essence of these works is that they are all meant to provide a focus for mediations. Their diagrams
are meant to open doors in the mind that reflects them and so open for it a new and higher level of consciousness."^{20}

Many aspects of tantric art have been adopted quite frequently by contemporary Indian artists like Biren de, G.R. Santosh and S.H. Raza, hence achieved an extra prominence during 70s. In Biren-de’s each work a central point is found, the concept of Garbha Griha, the union of Purusha and Prakriti are approached with an individual abstract language. G.R. Santosh also represented the meditative poses, creation of life and the union of Shiva - Shakti. “The most well known of the tantric painters is undoubtedly G. R. santosh. His vast compositions consist of curvilinear forms which are partly seen and partly lost in mystery.”^{21} S.H. Raza found his niche in the concept of a bindu - the origin of life, the central point of the whole world, bigning, and a compressed or concentrated point of every thing.

Here a precise study of such prominent aspects and forms adopted by Indian contemporary artists, with their original interpretation is approached.

Yantras and Mandalas

Yantra

A yantra, which means aid or tool is generally drawn on paper or engraved on metal, either to aid meditation or as a tangible
image of the deity. Just as a mantra is a sound equivalent, the yantra is a diagrammatic equivalent of the deity and consists of linear and spatial geometrical permutations of the deity. The primal abstract shapes, such as the point, line, circle, triangle, square and the lotus symbol are harmonized in composition to provide a formal equilibrium which is both static and dynamic. If we could penetrate the reality behind this static structures we could see the vibrational patterns, which are regarded as a primary cosmogenetic element which gives rise to all structures and movement. As movement increases, form is condensed into a whole which is represented as a mathematical point of zero dimension. When the movement decreases, currents and eddies are set in motion and form becomes more differentiated; the bindu begins to evolve into a primary geometrical shape till the multiple spaces interpenetrate, overlap, collide and generate energy to form the whole pattern.

The yantras are not only based on mathematical form but also on a mathematical method. The artist must look beyond appearances and penetrate to structure and essence; he must reorganize reality in terms of distinctions and relationships of mathematical dimensions as Cezanne did "To relate nature to the cylinder, the sphere, the cone, all put into perspective so that each side of the object, of a plane, moves towards a central point." This central
point is a Bindu which is place in the center of the yantras. Bindu is the ultimate point of power beyond which a thing or energy can not be contracted or condensed. It is the repository of all manifestation in its complexity and variety and the basis of all vibration, movement and form, it controls everything which is projected from it. A point also functions as a mental point or mano-bindu ‘serving as the vehicle of the mind, an area which is the meeting ground of subject and object. The bindu being the last chakra in a yantra is known as Sarva-anandamaya, full of bliss in union. The point is light itself, beyond all colours, and is therefore represented as colorless.

The straight line signifies growth and development. Pure linear patterns are drawn lyrically to illustrate sound vibrations, or geometrically in criss-cross manner, to form a certain order of the divisions of space, measures of time and the base lines of the universe. A striking line-form is the matrika yantra: on a plane of yellow ochre horizontal surface, a sweeping red line evokes tension and divides the picture field. The red line denotes Sakti as the epitome of energy.

The circle is derived principally from the motion of the revolution of planets. It symbolizes wholeness or totality and, in a yantra, is normally placed within a square pattern with four re-entrant gates.
The square symbolizes the elemental earth or the material quality of nature. The four gates represent the earthly plane which one must transcend gradually to identify with the core of the pattern in which resides the essence.

The triangle represents the three worlds: the neutral, the positive and the negative Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. The triangle with its apex downwards represents the yoni, the female energy or nature (Prakrit). The triangle pointing upwards is identified with the male principle (Purusha). When the two triangles penetrate each other in a form of five-pointed star or a pentagon, each of its five points represent the five elements - earth (Kshiti), water (ap), energy (Tejas), air (marut), and space (vyoman). When the two triangles are separated and from an hourglass pattern or the shape of a danoru, the drum of Bhairava, they represent dissolution, time and space cease to exist.

**Mandala-**

The word mandala means circle, is an archetypal image signifying wholeness and totality. Usually painted on cloth or paper, it is initiated to visualize the primal essence of the mandala in its external contemplation into a psychic force. It represents the cosmos or the potent core of psychic energy, and is a perennial
balance of force whose beginning is in its end, whose end is in its beginning. The square, triangle, labyrinthine patterns etc., represent the absolute and the paradoxical elements of totality. In mandala the predominant shape is the circle, or concentric circles, enclosing a square, which is sometimes divided into four triangles; this basic composition itself contained within a square of four gates.

Painted in fine brush strokes between the spaces in hot reds, evanescent emeralds, soft terracottas and pearly whites, are labyrinthine designs, serene and static images of deities in meditative postures or terrific deities spewing out aureoles of smoke and flame. Each of the five component part of the mandala - the four sides and the center is psychologically significant; they correspond to the five structural elements of the human personality and five Buddhas of the Diamond vehicle: Vairochana, The Brilliant one: Akshobhya, the Unshakable; Ratnasambhava, the matrix of the Jewel; Amitaba The Infinite light; and Amoghasiddhi, the infallible realization. The five colours also correspond to the five cosmic elements: white water, yellow earth, red fire, green earth and blue space.

Mandala's each inner circuit makes a phase in spiritual ascent. The outer boarder denotes a 'barrier of fire or metaphysical
knowledge which burns ignorance: next comes the ring of diamonds suggesting illumination or the quality of unchangeability, never lost once knowledge is attained. In mandalas dedicated to terrifying aspects of divinities the iconographic motif of a cemetery is drawn within the girdle of diamonds and outside the inner circle. Symbolizing the eight aspects of disintegrated consciousness, these are what bind the adept to common run of the world and they must be conquered during one's spiritual pilgrimage. The four portals which open up in the middle of each side of the mandala are useful flanked by awe-inspiring divinities, obstructive force in the unconscious which must be overcome before realization is sought.

The next stage is usually represented by a girdle of lotus petal, leaves or interwining floral patterns, symbols of spiritual rebirth. Finally, in the center, or the 'vimana', is the seat of the deity of the cosmic zone, the last stage of spiritual integration.

The human body and its representation

In the symbology of tantra art, the structures of the various psychic centers in the subtle body are represented in lotus forms known as chakras, and the paths of the energy currents are mapped visually in the form of spirals. Lotus is a symbol of the unfolding of the self and expanding consciousness which cuts
through psychic opacity and ultimately raises the aspirant from the dark depths of ignorance to the radiant heights of inner awakening.

The kundalini sakti, a serpent coiled and dormant cosmic power, is the supreme force in the human body. When the Kundalini sleeps, man is aware of his immediate earthly circumstances only, but when it awakes to a higher spiritual plane, the individual is not limited to his ascent, the kundalini absorbs within herself all the kinetic energy with which the different psychic centers are charged. Kundalini's rising, in the language of modern science, means the activation of the vast dormant areas of the brain.

The ascent of kundalini is accompanied by an experience of a mystical light of various colours. The colours of the division or Prana do not correspond on what we ordinarily associate with the solar spectrum but are the arrangement of colours on a supernormal plane. According to Goethe's analysis: colours have a mystical significance. For every diagram that shows the many colours is suggestive of primeval conditions which belong equally to man's perceptions as to nature.24
Cosmological and astrological charts

In tantra the description of the origin of the universe is represented by cosmological and astrological charts. These representations are philosophical constructs of a world image and provide a background to sadhana, it is also used for the conception of a cosmic man whose body is filled with pictorial symbols and patterns resembling some of Paul Klee's abstract paintings. Tantric cosmograms comprised of intuitive insight also manifested by a mathematical framework, also involve symbols derived from mythology.

According to cosmological motions, the universe has three zones, or lake as: in ascending order, the subterranean region, the earth and the heavenly bodies. Dominating the center of the universe is the mythical mount meru around which is the earth the island continent with seven concentric circles symbolically representing cosmic fields, spheres, atmospheric zones. Bordering the outermost circle is the cosmic sphere separating the visible world from the non-visible, and finally, beyond it, the region of non-universe space, or aloka. The diagram of this idea is a circular disc within seven concentric circles or vertical currents, all with ascetic simplicity are indispensable for transmitting the message.

As the celestial tides and the movement of planets determine
the time for various sites, astronomy has a decisive influence on tantra planetary signs found their way into cosmograms, giving tantric diagrams a great diversity of geometric patterns. Space, time, light and motion were conceived of against the background of atmospheric phenomena. Grid patterns of flat colours have a mosaic-like simultaneity; kinetic curves encircling solar and lunar orbs create powerful gestalt sensations. Planetary signs abound: the sun as a red solar disc; the moon as an opalescent crescent; Mars represented as a vermillion triangle; Mercury as a sap-green droplet; a yellow straight line represents Jupiter; a blue five-pointed star denotes Venus; and Saturn is represented as purple, the densest of all colours. Innumerable other biographic shapes and void spheres resulted as a fusion of primary shapes in an attempt to record astronomical concepts.

Iconographic images-

Iconographic image of sakti in both negative and positive aspects of female energy does not have any abstract quality but posses a symbolic representation through exaggeration and distortion of figure. In contemporary Indian art the pictorial aspect of Siva-Sakti union are represented in different way. The iconography of Kali have a symbolic significance. Her three eyes govern the three forces of creation: preservation and distraction. Her white teeth symbolic of sattva, the translucent intelligence...
stuff, suppress her lolling tongue which is red, indicative of Rajas, a determinate level of existence leading down words to Tamas, inertia. Kali has four hands: one left hand hold severed head, indicating destruction, and the other carries the sword of physical extermination, with which she cuts the thread of bondage. Her two right hands dispel fear and exhort to spiritual strength. She is the changeless, unlimited primordial power active in the great drama awakening the unmanifested Siva, a passive on looker. Their inseparable union reflects non-duality.

The concept of the polarity principle determining the relationship between man and woman, a creative interaction in which the conflict between outward and inward of head and heart, can be resolved. Tantra's spectrum of experiential techniques provides a possible psychotherapeutic alternative in the quest of a love and joy that unite.26

The sound

On, the cosmic sound which has been used in its pictorial value and script form in contemporary art, is a combination of three syllables - a, v, m - that represent three phases of the cosmic cycle - creation, preservation and dissolution - condensed into a single sound unit. This primal sound as the monosyllabic mantra om is the basis of cosmic evolution. All the elemental sound -
forms of mantras emanate from this eternal sound. Sound and form are interdependent, and every form is a vibration of a certain density; conversely, every sound has a visual equivalent. Sound is the reflex of form and form is the product of sound. All that is animate and inanimate are vibrations of a particular frequency. Kandinsky, too, recalled the sound-form dialectic in the tantras when he said; "sound ten, is the soul of form, which comes to life only through sound from the inside out". All the mantras have their colour forms, and when a mantra is pronounced properly its visual correlates begin to manifest. The dynamic power-pattern rooted in sound by which it is revealed is called a ynatra.

**Abstraction and symbols & Scripts**

**Symbols -**

Symbols represent the earliest record of man's urge for self-expression. The purpose of such expression was to produce a form which may be aniconic, anthropomorphic or the isomorphic. The primitive man made idols, sketches, paintings and fetishes, presumably in order to propitiate hostile spirits and to bring in mysterious forces under control. The primitive art may occasionally represent man's delight in exercising his play instinct during leisure and at other times, the struggle for existence through the worship of super personal being in the face of an
overwhelmingly hostile and brutal world around him.\textsuperscript{28}

Art is a visual expression of human mind and portrays both
the sensory and the abstract feelings about life. Art in a way
becomes the language of images and symbols by which man
expresses his perception of the world whether seen or unseen,
benevolent or malevolent.\textsuperscript{29} symbols represent a definite concept
or a theme and to be treated as the life - views of period concerned.
Symbols have their own meaning whether drawn in a painting or
anywhere on the ground or on the wall in course of rituals. At
time some unusual symbol transcended a particular age, the
people, the faith , the country or the philosophy with which they
were first concerned. The experience gained by the primitive man
facing the powers of the elements, earth, water, fire, air, and
weather, stimulated awe and in turn these elements were
worshipped as conscious entitles in different symbolic forms. A
perfect example of this phenomenon is to be seen in the ‘Svastika’
symbol, which knew no bounds in course of its dissemination
through the ages and region. The worship of the sun was also
prevalent throughout the world from the times immemorial in
different appellations and forms, such as disc, lotus, etc. The
warmth and productive power of sun have been considered
beneficial . Light which dissipates the darkness, was considered
by the primitive man as a friend and defender of humanity against
evil. Sunshine and rain were considered necessary amidst the threat of drought, flood and storm etc. These environmental forces which could not be conceived in realistic form, were represented by signs and symbols or personified by certain distinct marks.

Symbols are used by human beings not merely to communicate ideas, but also for lyrical expression and for the clarification of one’s own idea and feelings to oneself.\textsuperscript{30}

The symbols also, however, served the purpose of decoration and space-filling. Nevertheless, there too they helped in the expression of ideas aesthetically, bringing in the charm which enhanced the appeal and in a manner that contributed to the enrichment of the other forms of life in relation to the inner growth of the mind.\textsuperscript{31}

Indian art truly reflects the deep relationship between idea and life and natural observation and inner substances.\textsuperscript{32} In Indian art, we find a large number of symbols occupying pre eminent position right from the time of the Harappan culture. With our limited knowledge, it is not possible to ascertain the precise significance and meaning of all these symbols and to determine the system according to which they were employed. But generally their religious significance have been upheld.

A symbol can be called the cryptic representation of religions,
or generally of an auspicious idea for that matter.

The abstract ideas were also expressed through symbolic language in Indian Art from very early times. It dominated the entire realm of Indian art. The language through which art came in a form was of symbols. The symbols or signs depicting the divine and semi-divine, manifest the invisible through the visible form.\(^3\) The unexpressed concepts represent aspects of paramount truth as seen by men through the ages.

The Vedic literature is full of references to the symbolic forms revealing the truth of cosmic realities. The sense of dependence of human welfare on nature, with supposed, supernatural character, led to aniconic, theriomorphic and anthropomorphic forms of worship. The principal environmental forces, represented by Surya, Indra, Agni, Vayu an Varuna were given paramount status in the galaxy of deities personifying different elemental aspects of nature and metal state.\(^4\)

The conception of deva virtually stands for the transcendent, universal and immortal life, which is the basic creative power behind all manifestations, serving different function. For example - Agni. Surya and Indra represent the fundamental spiritual-cum-material forces. They embody the source of emanation of both animate and inanimate substances. Prthvi, Antariksa and Dyau are
controlled by an aspect of Agni under different names of Agni, Vayu and Aditya. Agni thus symbolises three great manifestations, viz., matter, life and mind.\(^{35}\)

We may precisely classify most of the symbols accepted in art, under animals. Human beings, semi-divine, vegetation, inanimate objects, attributes and auspicious motifs.\(^{36}\) Which are related to socio-religious institutions, rituals and ceremonies, that is, man's entire cosmic view itself. Those symbols which do not possess such deep significance have nevertheless some significance of social or political nature. In any case, the symbols cannot be treated as trivialities.

**Script**

Script is described in the dictionary as written words, letters or figures. This art of expression through forming the word to convey the message has been associated with a language. As the world is full of different languages, each language possesses its own typical script. India itself possess hundreds of language and their script. India possess a rich urban cultural background since Harappa and Mohanjodaro, where pictorial and sign language (heirography) is found which was lately made possible to read and understand the whole civilization. Even the primitive man also used the sign language to communicate. In folk art, tantra art
and many other local and traditional art, different scripts and signs are used for their religious rites and rituals.

Apart from its conveying quality a script could be transformed into a beautiful design and pattern through calligraphy. Calligraphy is generally understood as an art of writing. Various Indian traditional and modern languages are being calligraphed to beautify the language apart from its simple writing purpose.

In the contemporary Indian art scene of 60s and 70s, when a very strong inclination was experienced towards Indigenous and traditional art, the use of calligraphic motifs and script also regarded as an extended link with the traditional values. Unlike medieval manuscript writing, and without going into a hard competitive exercise and expertise in the art of calligraphy, a number of Indian painters during the past fifty years or so, recognizing the abstract values of the Alphabets, have tried to use some sort of script in order to supplement demand of the pictorial space. Precisely, the script is used to fill in the gaps and to harmonize the important compositional factor of the canvas.

Sometimes script is duly used to convey a message, as Rabindranath Tagore, S.H. Raza, Laxman pai, J. Sultan Ali did. It is also used for decorative picture plane as K.C.S. Paniker did, "...
The scripts are not intended to be read. To make them illegible introduce strange shapes and characters in between the group of letters."^{37}

Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic, Urdu and other regional scripts and calligraphic languages are used for filling a large area of the space, or a single word or letter as a whole composition, like \( \text{ॐ} \) om- Narendra srivastava produced hundreds of facts of Om, like \( \text{ا} \) Allah- Deyayani Krishna produced Allah series exploiting the Arabic script with an abstract a compositional background for support.

In his paintings Husain has used Hindi script in folk description, Urdu and Arabic script in his Karbala series. G.R. Santosh in late 1950s and early 1960s used Arabic calligraphic motifs like - i am a alif, do - chasmihe, and Tashdid which resembles with the sign of Trishul, as a base for his abstract compositions. Nirod Mazumdar, Shanti Dav, Satish Gujral, Mohan Samant , Man Saraim etc. used different language scripts for abstraction or some individual pictorial plane.


8. Datta, Parul, "Trends of Socio-economic Development in NEFA" (A.N. March, 1972, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, Shillong), P.12


10. Mason, O.T., The origin of Invention, 1985,

12. Ibid, P. 89.


26. Ibid,

27. Ibid,


29. Ibid, P. 485.


