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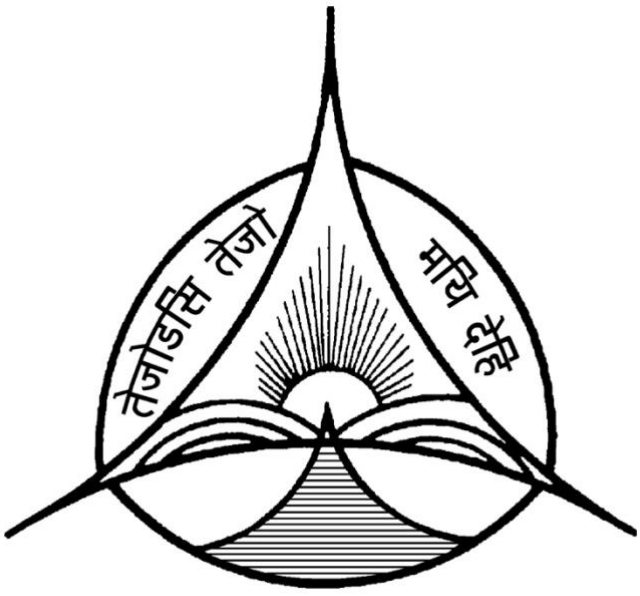

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One who performs his duty abandoning attachment, surrendering the results, into the supreme lord, is unaffected by sinful actions, as the lotus leaf remains unaffected by the water on it.

Bhagavad Gita 5.10

THE LOTUS: UBIQUITY AND AMBIGUITY IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

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Over the millennia, Hinduism has created and adopted several motifs that form part of its rich iconography—an iconography of material objects and an iconography of the mind. Subsequently, and sometimes simultaneously, these motifs were imbued with a religious meaning, based on cultural traditions derived from local, oral and literary, scriptural 'texts'. Through the ages, the importance and popularity of some motifs gradually waned, while others not only doggedly endured, but were further laden with new meanings and new concepts, insufflating myriad aspects of life. This was not the product of individual experiences, but was produced and treasured by the collective working of the community, thriving on the ever-renewing approval and assent of successive generations. Therein lies the ambiguity—what have been the characteristics and the reasons that have helped the survival of certain motifs over the millennia? The answer may lie in the arena of symbolism and in a necessary synoptic view of the historical trajectory of the motif. Yet, a caveat is also essential: that the exact significance accorded to any of the motifs would vary with region, period and denomination of the users. The lotus[1] is one of the most celebrated and widely encountered flowers in the cultural and religious history of India. Although it is not worshipped directly, it has been, in many circumstances, an auspicious and a foremost sacred plant.

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It is difficult, indeed, to find any other Indian motif that has played such a wide- ranging role in the artistic, mental and esoteric world of India. From the very obvious visual form with deities seated on a lotus or holding a lotus bud, it encompasses so many facets of life: the *padmasana*, a yogic seated posture,[2] *mudras*, Bharatantyam hand gestures,[3] metaphors to describe the beauty of the eyes and other parts of the body, [4] not just for deities but for human beings as well,[5] and also in the most abstruse realm—in the subtle opening up of the s*ahasrara*—the 1,000-petalled lotus of enlightenment. The lotus is seen everywhere.

In this essay, an attempt is made to trace the journey of the lotus in India from its earliest expressions and manifestations. The endeavour will be a diachronic one; however, because all manifestations cannot be discussed here, especially when illustration and substantiation of a pertinent point is needed, chronology may have to be compromised. An attempt will also be made to examine the lotus as a multivalent symbol with a long history of use in religious imagery, and to show how it has sustained its position as one of the best loved motifs in Indian religious art.[6]

The lotus is native to other regions in the world as well, such as the Middle East, New Guinea and Australia, but nowhere does it play a role comparable to the Indian subcontinent, whether in Buddhism, Jainism and even in Christian[7] and Islamic manifestations.[8] These communities, besides sharing a common geographical space, also seem to have shared a common visual vocabulary, cutting across religious boundaries. The lotus corroborates the view that some motifs are just Indian, and it would be trivial and limiting to ascribe them a cultic alignment. They belong to the large pool of Indian culture. Although this essay mostly deals with Brahmanism and subsequently Hinduism, it may be said, at the risk of generalising, that over the centuries the lotus emerged as one of the most distinctive emblems and dominant ideas in Indian life.

In the third millennium BCE, in the context of the Indus Valley Civilisation, the lotus is encountered, albeit not frequently but significantly, in a ceramic vessel meant for guests on ceremonial occasions. The conventionalised geometric pattern painted on the underside of a bowl on an offering stand, called 'dish-on-stand', demonstrates that the Indus people were familiar with the lotus. It is similar, in its mature stylisation, to the carved version of the lotus petals on Mauryan pillars (Kramrisch 1983: 328). In addition, there are two painted

potsherds from Mohenjo-Daro with a circle of lotus petals around the neck which, according to Kramrisch, seem to suggest, in their own terms, plenitude, as seen later in the Lajja-Gauri sculpture from Alampur (ibid:: 152). The Indus potter is known for the florid designs and the numerous motifs on pottery vessels which included other vegetal and animalistic motifs such as the *peepal* leaf, the fern leaf, the horned deity and the gazelle, all of which were extremely popular.

Following the Indus sightings, the Rigveda has a few hymns in which the lotus is mentioned. In a hymn dedicated to the Ashvins, the beauty of the lotus blooming on the water surface comes through:

Like as the wind on every side ruffles a pool of lotuses. [9]

The next two references show the connection between birth and the lotus. In a hymn dedicated to Agni:

Agni, Atharvan brought thee forth, by

Rubbing from the lotus flower,

The head of Vishva, of the priest.[10]

It is explained, in a footnote on the same page,[11] that the lotus flower was apparently a figurative expression for heaven, and Vishva was heaven personified.

In a hymn dedicated to Vasistha, one begins to imagine that perhaps it was the practice of laying a new born baby on a lotus leaf:

Born of their love for Urvashi, Vashistha

thou, priest, art son of Varuna and

Mitra:

And as a fallen drop, in heavenly fervour,

all the gods laid thee on a lotus blossom.[12]

In other hymns, as in this one dedicated to the river Sarasvati, the upright lotus stem is referred to:

She with her might, like one who digs for

lotus-stems, hath burst with her strong

waves the ridges of the hills.[13]

The lotus is used as a simile in the next hymn addressed to Indra, describing all the donations made by different princes:

For me ten bright-hued oxen have come

forward like lotus stalks from out a lake upstanding.[14]

The next hymn eulogises *dakshina,* that is the largesse, guerdon or honorarium presented by the institutors of the sacrifices to the priests who perform the ceremonies. The *yajamanas,* who give this guerdon liberally, are alternatively the deified subjects of the hymn.[15] In this hymn, many other gift items, besides the lotus lake, will come the way of those who gift abundantly—horses, cattle, fair maidens, golden robes and liquor, besides conquering foes in battle.

His home is like a lake with lotus blossoms,

like the gods' palaces adorned and

splendid.[16]

In yet another hymn dedicated to Agni:

On thy way hitherward and hence let

flowery Durva grass spring up.

Let there be lakes with lotus blooms .

These are the mansions of the flood.[17]

It is amply clear from these references that as early as c. 1500 BCE, the lotus was already seen as something beautiful and praiseworthy, and there was a familiarity with its qualities. Perhaps not necessarily seen as a symbol as yet, the lotus is longed for and lauded for its intrinsic beauty.

Since time immemorial, humanity has had the proclivity to give meaning to all kinds of phenomena and to all manner of objects, which is where symbols have played an important role. The lotus is an important example of how a natural object has been utilised for its own inherent traits and as a symbol as well. In later periods, one seems to enter the realm of symbolism in the lotus' historical trajectory. Both physically and mythically, the lotus assumes the greatest importance in Indian cosmology, speculative thought and art. Since one can turn anything into a symbol, there is a profusion of symbols in any society, including in the Indic culture. Symbols being the created language of a community and ethos, they are open to all forms of interpretation. Symbols or *pratika* are only rarely sectarian, but are a part of a linked heritage out of which each religion picked up over the eons what it surmised would represent their ethos best.

Today, virtually every Indian deity is linked with the lotus, whether depicted in calendar art, bronzes, plaster or on television, seated, standing on or holding a lotus. In early India, Lakshmi, patron of wealth and good fortune, was the first goddess to be persistently connected with the lotus. This is not to say that she was not associated with other motifs like the *kalash* or elephant and *abhishekha* (lustration), but the lotus is the one memory that has dominated her delineations in all depictions. The standard way of explaining this is that just like the lotus, Lakshmi is also born in water and mud. Hence the association with Lakshmi and the lotus[18] in the early period is seen in different genres—literary as well as iconography. The *Shri Sukta* on Shri/Lakshmi, which is perhaps a 5th century BCE addition to the Rigveda, makes the earliest allusion to the lotus as the seat of the goddess. Besides the seat, she is bedecked with lotus flowers and appears as lovely as a lotus. In fact she is often referred to simply as Padma, meaning 'lotus' in Sanskrit. The adjectives used to describe Lakshmi all have to do with the root word, Padma—Padmasambhava (lotus born), Padmavarna (lotus coloured,) Padmauru (lotus-thighed), Padmapriya (lover of lotus), Padmahasta (holding the lotus in hand), Padmamukhi (lotus faced), Padmakshi (lotus eyed),

Padmamalini (garlanded with a lotus), *Padmasthita* (living in a lotus), and Padmanemi (having the circumference of a lotus) (Pattanaik 2002: 108).

In subsequent periods, there are numerous iconographical, sculptural, numismatic and architectural references that depict Lakshmi in relationship with the lotus. Around three centuries after the *Shri Sukta*, Lakshmi's image appears on coins found in varying parts of northern India from the 3rd century BCE onwards. These coins include those of Shunga king Jyesthamitra, and the Scytho–Parthian king Azes II and Azilses, where Lakshmi is seen seated or standing on the lotus (Singh 2009: 438). A miniature image of the Kushana period shows her holding a lotus. In one striking depiction,[19] Lakshmi is on a lotus flanked by elephants, also standing upon lotus flowers to lustrate her (Dehejia 1999: 275).

The worship of Lakshmi was widespread and clearly adoration was not confined to a specific sect. The earliest images of Lakshmi in stone are from the 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE at Sanchi and Bharhut in Madhya Pradesh, and Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh. By the 2nd century BCE, most of the distinct visual symbols and attributes belonging to Lakshmi had been formalised in the Indian subcontinent (Srinivasan 2010 :77).

It is clear from these very early depictions that the lotus, already encountered in the Rigveda, formed part of the vocabulary to express Lakshmi's life-sustaining nature. Despite its early mention within Brahmanical texts, it was Buddhism which first brought the lotus symbol to prominent use as lotus medallions/roundels are prominent on Buddhist places of worship.

A captivating surmise by Stella Kramrisch completes the identification of Lakshmi being the lotus itself. She first brought to notice one of the roundels carved in low relief on the railing post of Stupa 2 in Sanchi which shows two winged lions prancing forth from pod-shaped bases, carried on stalks that issue from a central device resembling an inverted flower shape. There are lotus leaves along with lotus blooms tossing petals and filaments. The central lotus is unlike a stalk but suggesting somehow 'lithe female limbs—topped by the lotus bloom' (Kramrisch 1983: 151) It has an exact counterpart in another medallion with similar design, and the central figure which had a lotus in the previous medallion, now has a complete anthropomorphic form. It is similar in design but is flanked by two birds instead of the lions,

and standing on a central floral, the figure draws to itself the long lotus stalks and the large flowers are upheld by its hands. It is crowned with two large lotus buds.

A relief at Stupa 2 depicts Lakshmi with lotuses, standing on an elaborate lotus bed, and a *Yaksha*[20] couple standing on lotus leaves with the male holding a lotus bud, and beneath are paired lions followed by paired gazelles. In a balustrade post medallion of the Stupa in Bharhut, the figures are set in relief within a design of lotus flowers. There are filled vases (*purnaghata*)[21] and lustrating elephants. Lakshmi stands cupping one of her breasts upon the central lotus rising from the *purnaghata.* Two other magnificent lotuses rise on either side of the vase, and on each stands an elephant whose trunk holds a jar of water. There is a predominance of lotuses emanating from all sides with buds as well as fully bloomed lotuses. Lakshmi is being bathed by elephants standing on lotuses, holding upturned pots in their trunks.

At Mathura and Amaravati, the lotus finds its finest artistic expression in the coping stones with flowing swags, vertical stone columns and trees with foliage. There is a courtly scene from Bharhut which has elephants with riders and dancing girls with an undulating lotus stalk, which formed the coping stone around the Buddhist stupa (Vatsyayan 1982: 101).The leitmotif of Indian art, in essence, is the universe in all its abundance and the transcendental and yet omnipotent power that permeates and insufflates all forms. At the sacred Buddhist enclosures, the architecture was made to harmonise with the unending pulse of the force that flows through all living beings, including vegetation and foliage which are more than mere background for the human world.[22] The life of nature is indispensable to the Indian world—the two are interrelated, interdependent and always transmutable (ibid.: 90). The spiritual symbolisation of the Indian landscape has been taking place over the centuries and the lotus permeating symbology may be seen as a part of the sanctifying of the landscape. Growth may also be conveyed by sculptural technique, as Kapila Vatsyayan has remarked :

> In the creation of a sacred Buddhist enclosure at Sanchi, on a hilltop overlooking the great north Indian plain, the architecture was made to harmonize with the unending pulse of the force that flows through all living things. The rhythmically undulating lotus stalk and tendrils burgeoning with buds and

> blossoms is more than decoration (1982: 96).

> Through the natural symbolism of the lotus stalk the sculptor reveals his concern that the generations of men should flourish in unbroken continuity; and in so doing he re-creates in stone the ancient hallowed environment of the forests inhabited by his ancestors who knew the essence of life as an ever-flowing unity (ibid.: 96).

Images of the lotus may also have served as an apotropaic function in ancient India. This is because they implied fertility, which in turn implied growth, lavishness and prosperity, and gradually became transformed into the concept of auspiciousness. The prevalent belief may have been that this auspiciousness got transferred to the monument upon which lotuses were sculpted, just as fecund voluptuous female sculptures did to temple walls and enclosures (Dehejia 1999: 371).

The lotus is given prominence in Ashokan pillar capitals of the 3rd century BCE. The Rampurva Bull, the Sarnath and Sankisa pillars all have capitals mounted on an inverted lotus. Though highly stylised, they have sometimes been referred to as the 'bell capital'. The appearance is of a fluted bell with elongated petals (Craven 1987 40–41). These also look like a lotus with the petals turned downwards (Taddei 1978: 41).

Many goddesses are also shown with lotuses. There is a particularly expressive terracotta from the Gupta period (4th to 6th century CE). It is in high relief and the river Ganga is personified as a voluptuous woman embodying fertility and abundance. She sits astride and rides a *makara*. From this position she pours lotus blossoms from a pitcher as if it were a cornucopia.[23]

According to the Hindu conception, life on earth emerges from the eternal waters that hold the potency of the world—minerals, plants, animals, human and divine. The first product of the creative principle is female and the maternal procreative aspect of the Absolute. It is believed that when the divine life substance is about to put forth the universe, a thousand-petalled cosmic lotus emerges from the primeval cosmic waters; the most important

vegetative forms born of the waters connected to the mythical centre of the earth through its stem and always above the waters. It is the generative organ (Zimmer 1946: 90).

The lotus is the most important of vegetative forms that is born, rooted in and takes its strength from the primordial waters. The lotus symbolises vegetative growth that has distilled the life-giving powers of the waters into embodied life. The lotus then represents the fully developed blossoming of organic life (Kinsley 1995: 56). At the macrocosmic level, the lotus might be taken as a symbol of the entire created world. The lotus growing from the navel of Vishnu marks a new cosmic creation as, together with this lotus, he puts forth the God–Creator of the universe, Brahma, who is seated in the centre of the golden lotus. The centre corresponds to the navel of the earth. This is the opening or mouth of the womb of the universe connected to the mythical centre of the earth through its stem. At the dawn of each *kalpa*, Brahma re-emerges from a lotus that has stemmed and blossomed out of the navel of Vishnu (Zimmer 1946: 17). From this first awareness of the lotus as the symbol of life and supporter of the universe, the Indian mind conceives all of nature as an aspect of that universal spirit (Vatsyayan 1982: 90). This is the awareness of the lotus then, as a symbol of life and supporter of the universe (ibid.); it suggests a growing expanding world imbued with vigourous fertile power (Kinsley 1995: 56).

The second meaning concerns purity and spiritual power. The most pervasive meaning of lotus in Indian sacred art is that of a spiritually enlightened being, such as the Buddha or Mahavira, who, like the lotus, has risen from the earthly mire. It is one of the most common metaphysical analogies—comparing the lotus' rise to faultless beauty and the awakening to the spiritual reality of life, which includes the evolution of consciousness from instinctive impulses to spiritual liberation. The flower has humble origins, growing from mud; in fact, the lotus cannot grow and flower without it. It flowers on and above the surface of the water. With its roots in the mud, its stalk traversing the entire depth of the waters on which it rests. This wondrous plant, with its being rooted in earth, water and light, enacts the transmutation from earth to light, from mud to scent, through water to gleaming colour, in the regularity of its shape, not only ordered as in all directions of space, but also in the regularity of its movement , opening and closing with the measure of time of days and nights (Kramrisch 1983:153). It is a symbol for the mud of our lives—the messy physicality, the dark and hidden places within us, the not knowing, the not being able to

change our situations, ourselves or others very clearly—a consciousness that is dense. One of the words for the lotus—*pankaja*—literally means 'born from the mud'. In this sense the lotus is a transition symbol.

According to Hindu scriptures, the *atman* dwells in the lotus in the human heart.

> *The Self is hidden in the lotus of the heart.*
>
> *Those who see themselves in all creatures go day*
>
> *by day into the world of Brahman hidden in the*
>
> *heart.*
>
> *Chandogya Upanishad* 3.3. [24]

The lotus has impressed the collective unconscious of Indian poets and seers to such a degree that they see the beauty of the lotus everywhere—in palms, soles of the feet, the eyes, etc. The physical heart, the most important organ of the human body, is symbolised as a lotus, because to some it seems to resemble the lotus flower (Swahananda n.d.: 15). The devotees are asked to meditate on the chosen deity who is seated, as it were, on the lotus in the heart, which is the centre of one's very life itself. So, externally too, the deities are conceived as sitting on the lotus. It is here that it becomes very clear that the lotus as a symbol has two aspects— *adhytama* (relating to the soul) and *adhibhautika* (pertaining to living souls). Lotuses are conceived outside as well as within the human body where the yogic centres of realisation, inner and outer, are located (ibid.).

There are many local, 'little' traditions that give us glimpses into lotus symbolism in certain communities. The Birhpoors of the Chotanagpur region believe that the universe originated out of cosmic waters. Out of this came a lotus, and it was from the stalk rising up through the middle of the flower that the sun took position in the sky, illuminating the world and creating life (Mahalakshmi 2009: 76).

One of the most striking representations of the lotus is in art, the lotus-clad[25] Radha and Krishna of Basohli, dated ca. 1730. Entirely clad in pink lotus petals and sitting on lotus thrones, Radha and Krishna gaze intently into one another's eyes. This image demonstrates

phulsajjya, that is 'flower adornment'. These images are somewhat rare and the absence of inscriptional evidence prevents a precise definition of the iconographic formula (Dehejia 1999: 331). It has been suggested as the giving of flowers[26] to gods, and within the specific context of worshipping Radha and Krishna, the lotus may refer to the blissful union of the two in the land of Brindavan. Pilgrimage maps often depict Brindavan in the shape of a lotus. The *Astayaaama Lila*—an eight-day performance depicting a day in Krishna's life, held in Brindavan—begins and ends with an image of Krishna and Radha within an enormous lotus (ibid.).

In Tantrism, there are various *yantras* bearing different names, and the *Shri Chakra* is one of them. But the essential feature of all is the same. It consists in the representation of the female organ, either by an image of a lotus or by a diagram of a triangle, usually by both (Chattopadhyaya 1992: 301).

> The texts often refer to the union of a lotus and *vajra* or diamond sceptre. Clearly lotus and *vajra* are metaphors, not literal terms. One is not meant to bring together a flower and the sceptre, but something denoted by these terms. Depending on the level of interpretation uniting the lotus and the *vajra* can mean uniting wisdom and compassion or bliss and emptiness within the practitioner's psyche or bringing together the male and female organs in physical union, or a number of other things that must be combined on the path to enlightenment (Shaw 1998, 1994: 150).

> The female organ is referred to directly as vulva (*bhaga, yoni*) or metaphorically as a lotus (*padma*). The outer opening of the sexual organ resembles the petals of the lotus, while the vulva and cervix are like the heart of the flower. The formal similarity, as well as the fact that the lotus is a Buddhist symbol of purity and enlightenment, makes this magnificent flower a natural symbol for the vulva (Shaw 1998, 1994: 155).

Connected to this idea is the *yogasadhana* of Tantrism, which is usually called *satchakrabheda.* According to this belief, these are seven centres of energy or consciousness called *chakras or padmas* located within the worshipper and within the goddess. Though commonly called *chakras,* or 'wheels' because of their circular form and whirling motion, they are perceived to look like lotuses[27] and hence called *padmas* as well. Seven lotuses are considered as situated on seven different positions of the *sushumna,* or the spinal cord/column. These are traditionally understood to be located at specific places—the anus, genitals, navel, heart, throat, forehead and the crown of the head.[28] These are major configurations of the subtle anatomy that are especially responsive to mental manipulation and are therefore often made the focal points of meditation and visualisation (Feuerstein 1998: 149). Modern writers on Tantrism usually call these the nerve plexuses. While they have physical positions, they are not simply bodily functions; they are also psychological and spiritual. The highest lotus on the *sushumna* is called the *sahsradala padma*, literally, the 'lotus with a thousand petals'. This is the highest seat of consciousness, representing the moment of ecstasy and the moment of transcendence. This is an essential experience of any mystical realisation. Within Tantrism, the lotus, like manyother terms, is conceived exclusively in a technical sense and is invariably a symbolic representation (as mentioned above) of the female genital organ. The seven lotuses on the *sushumna* are therefore nothing but the seven seats of femininity which, according to Tantrism, is inherent in every human being (Chattopadhyaya 1992: 281).

The lotus, then, does not only have multiple meanings, but it can and has been read in different, often overlapping, ways. As mentioned earlier, more than a few symbols have played a part in extending the duration of a much loved cultural thought and idea. There are several other symbols which may be seen as a vehicle for the transmission of culture. Yet, in most cases, the intrinsic meaning may have been forgotten. The lotus has retained its values through antiquity by conveying not just an idea, but several ideas throughout history. Extremely powerful elemental symbols are fundamentally necessary to conceive and meditate on the goddess who, in essence, is beyond the ken of thought and mind. How the symbol is read depends on its context, where sometimes one aspect is primary and at others secondary. For example, in several *bhakti* texts, the physical heart of the human body is symbolised as the

lotus. Yet, it has been seen that p*adma* is also the literary rendering of *bhaga or yoni*. It has been found that *a*s a perennial part of Indic culture, it is historical–religious symbols that became empowered cultural metaphors. The symbols that have survived have resisted reduction to fixed significations which would surely sterilise their magic. It is necessary to have an open mind about symbols. There can be so many other meanings of the lotus which the present author is not aware of. What is clear is that it is an aesthetically pleasing symbol, whether stylised or otherwise. It lends itself to poetry and art, and is a most popular name and logo in modern day India. As one of the primary historical–religious symbols, it was constantly reused and reincorporated, and no doubt will continue to do so, rendering new and enriched representations in the future. The lotus remains an emblem that may be said to contain many of the deepest preoccupations of the Indian imagination.

Notes

[1] Padma, or *Nelumbium speciosum*—the flower of the lotus plant that closes towards the evening (Williams 2000: 585).

[2] In the postures of hatha yoga, the lotus position, the *padmasana,* is a bodily pose which is particularly suited for meditation and is therefore adopted by those striving to reach the highest level of consciousness. The *padmasana* is a seated posture where the feet are placed on opposing thighs to resemble a lotus.

[3] *Alapadma* is the fully blossomed lotus and *padmakosha* the lotus bud. The *langula* or *kangula* , sometimes translated as a lotus, is actually a water lily, and not to be confused with the lotus.

[4] Thus god is praised as having lotus feet, lotus eyes, a lotus mouth, and dwelling like a lotus in the heart.

[5] The *Shilpashastras* provided a formula for constructing the human form. In Indian artistic tradition, a fish or a lotus petal was the prescribed model for elongated eyes which were considered the epitome of beauty. (Dehejia 1997: 13).

[6] Over time, some of the symbols, for instance, the Swastika, have come to have wider association while others, like Aum, are recognised as unique representations of Hinduism. Other aspects of Hindu iconography are covered by the terms *murti*, for icons, and *mudra*, for gestures and positions of the hands and body.

[7] The Christian icon, Virgin Mary, is frequently seen standing on a lotus; specific mention may be made to the chapel of Aikiya Alayam in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

[8] with the advent of Islam in the 12th century CE, they feature in intricate patterns on perforated screens, tiles and ceramics. The lotus garden in Dholpur, Rajasthan, was constructed on the orders of Mughal Emperor Babur. It is called *Bagh-i-Nilofar* (lotus garden) (Asher 2001: 21–22). The Red Fort in Delhi, which was built on the orders of Shahjahan, also contains lotus-shaped pools in two of its prominent buildings (ibid.: 196–201). The lotus was predominant in Shahjahani architecture as a decorative pattern, whether it was cusped arches where the lotus bud was at the centre, or the base of baluster columns, or the inverted lotus at the domes of mosques and tomb buildings. But the use of the lotus by the Mughals was confined only within the geographical boundaries of India, and did not extend to the buildings of Babur in Kabul. The Mughals probably chose this flower along with bell and chain motifs to represent Indo–Islamic architecture. This legacy of the Sultanate period was taken forward by them. During the Sultanate period, the lotus flower was also used to adorn the domes of mosques and tombs.

[9] RV, V, LXXVIII, 7, p. 278.

[10] RV, VI, XVI, 13, p. 293.

[11] RV, vi, xvip, 293, fn13.

[12] RV, VII, XXXIII, 11, p. 351.
[13] RV, VI, LXI, 2, p. 323.
[14] RV , VIII, 1, 33, p. 390.
[15] RV, p. 619, fn (no number is given).
[16] RV, X, CVII, 10, p. 620.
[17] RV, X, CXLII, 8, p. 639.
[18] Lakshmi is like the lotus, ubiquitous in Indian sacred architectural relief (Vatsyayan 1982: 116)
[19] Depicted on an uninscribed coin from Kaushambi, issued by the Indo–Shaka monarch Azes.
[20] They also symbolise the fertility of water and earth. They stand against trees, embrace them and thus become an aspect of the tree, articulating the interpenetration of the plant and the human. The tree is dependent upon the woman for its fertility, as is the woman on the tree (Vatsyayan 1982: 91).
[21]The brimming vase—the fertility of mother earth is symbolised through this image of abundance.
[22] The peepal tree and leaves, the Ashoka trees, the palm leaf, mango leaves and trees laden with the *bilva* fruit have been frequently encountered. The importance of vegetation is fully brought out in the concept of the *shalabhanjika.*
[23] Museum of Indian Art (2000). Berlin: Prestel Verlag, p. 34. A *makara* is a sea creature. Usually taken to be a half- terrestrial, half-aquatic animal.
[24] See Easwaran (2007).
[25] The lotus petal garments suggest a common act of devotion.
[26] Real lotuses are among the principal offerings made to images of all the pantheons- Hindu Buddhist and Jain. Lotus petals may be strewn upon magical and meditational diagrams (*yantras* or *mandalas*) which are drawn in accordance to with a pattern based upon the shape of a lotus.
[27] They are composed of different petals. Each petal of a *chakra* relates to one of the prime letters of the Sanskrit alphabet (Frawley 1997:164).
[28] *Muladhara, svadhishthana manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna* and *sahasrara,* as propounded in Kudalini Yoga.

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