Lotus
(in thought, legend and culture)

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PREAMBLE

Before understanding the role of lotus in Indian art and sculpture, a preamble on the nature of Indian art would be essential. Indian art and religion are closely intertwined and Indian sculpture is essentially religious. The temple, an epitome of Indian artistic conception is conceived by the Hindu mind as a complete work of art construed according to well laid out rules and prescriptions. Divinity is meshed in complex philosophical and religious issues, and its comprehension is beyond the ken of the vast masses. Further, although God is omnipresent and omniscient, a complete understanding is beyond the limits of human mind and ethereal senses. It is to cater to this limited receptivity of the human mind that Indian art is directed. Its functions are representational and symbolic. The instruments of worship serve the object of holding the mind of the devotee and directing his dhyanana or concentration to aspects of divinity which are not necessarily outside the devotee, but to invoke in him the presence of God. Indian art, to a large extent is, therefore, more a vehicle of ideas and symbols rather than merely a secular representation of real life images. Among the key symbols used one can think of the lotus, the purnaghata, the conch, the vahanas etc. These have brought beauty into Indian art but in most cases have served, as carriers of symbolic ideas. A perfect and harmonious use of these elements has only been evaluated as excellence in art. In short, these symbolic representations are pegs on which the Hindu and Buddhist metaphysical and religious thinkers could hang these conceptions. These had external and inner meanings which were presumed to be deeply ingrained in popular consciousness. The skill in use of these
keys to popular understanding was a major qualification of the Indian artist. Even so, for a considerable length of time, Indian religious artists relied on geometric symbols in support of contemplation like the rimbo or the mandala. The spread of the new order, the need to reach the laity and the masses and the rigours required on the part of the devotee gradually led to abandonment of this extreme form of abstract symbolism and the use of the more easily understood popular idiom.

Similarly, mythology and art in India are inseparable. The ornate and intricate ornamentation on the doors, walls, facades and the arches of temples are veritable pictorial cyclopaedias of mythology as much as of religion. Revelation, scholasticism of the philosophers, popular beliefs, ascetic experiences, yogic practices and intuition all interacted with one another to produce a pictorial exposition which is a luxuriant display of intellect and art at the same time intertwining in this the popular legends and profound metaphysics. As against the Western art that demands acute observation from without, Indian pictorial representation calls for kinship with the author on a conceptual and metaphysical plane by looking into himself and discovering the sheet-anchors of intellectual cognition. For these reasons, Indian Art is at once a combination of sensuous appeal, sheer magnificence, delight, popular imagination and intellect. Also architecture is not a spiritual phenomenon, but rather a model to be sought for and a concretisation of form which would invoke clear and vivid images.
2. INTRODUCTION

Among the elements of popular flora, that which has caught the imagination of India, from days of yore, is the lotus. It is a flower that predominates in the whole of Asia, and more so in India. No wonder it is closely associated with aesthetic manifestation of human form, decorative floral motif, and since religion and mysticism stand uppermost in the mind of an Indian, in symbolism.

Lotus has been exalted to a divine position from the dawn of Indian history and given a name Lakshmi. Mythology has it that lotus had divine birth and has descended on earth. The lotus-goddess is the moving force, sakti, which converts the slumbering potential power into actualisation and transcends all mortal laws of causality. It is verily an instrument of divine dispensation.

Growing in water brings increased potency to the lotus. It symbolises creative power, fertility and abundance, a trait that associates on account of its association with the primeval sea which bore the goddess of wealth and the lotus flower. The lotus has come to symbolise all elements of prosperity and wisdom—the goddess of learning is endowed with two lotuses one in either hand.

Lotus is distinctly Indian in its evolution to the present stage. The lotus in the hair of the Mohenjodaro goddess was merely a precursor to the long tradition of art and religion which venerated the tree as the life-giving power and the lotus as the epitome of such vital powers of sustenance, nourishment and wisdom. The Vedic origins of the practice of ascribing power to the lotus are undisputable. The first
identification of the lotus with Lakshmi can be seen in the Sri-Sukta and this can be dated at second century BC if not before. We would have occasion later to see how the later uses and explanations of the lotus are but extensions of the Vedic notions. The aniconic Vedic style impinging on the later works, merits prime attention.

Rgveda itself refers to two kinds of lotuses: pundarika and puskara, the white and blue varieties of lotus respectively. Rgveda has on more than one occasion used the word which may be taken to mean 'Sri' 'glory', 'beauty' which are attributes of Agni. Lakshmi as an auspicious sign is mentioned but once. The Atharvaveda calls lotus a heart in symbolic significance. The Brahmanas go a step further in lotus symbolisation. Here as for instance in the Pancavimsa Brahmana (XVIII 8.6) and the Maitreyi Samhita (No 4.7 & 58.16) one reads. 'Through the dawn shining (avakase) of the lights of heaven (naksatram) the lotus (pundarika) is brought to birth (jayate) thus implying the divine source of lotus and its equivalence to the earth as against the lights which stand for the other world, i.e. heaven'. The Pancavimsa Brahmana also brings to lotus the new symbolism of sensible operation, virility and temporal powers stating that the wealth of lotuses put on by the Brahman officiating in the rajasuya ceremony would be attended by the attributes of indriyam, vyram and ksatram (XVIII.8.6 & 9.6). The Krsna Yajurveda describes the Lord in divine slumber as adorning himself with a lotus garland implying thereby that the whole cosmic manifestation is in his grasp. Popular legend has it that Brahma, the creative element of the Trinity was born from the lotus-navel of Visnu. Padmanabha (lotus-navel) is a popular incarnation of Visnu. When Visnu wanted to save
the world from deluge as Mahavaraha, he was led to find it through the medium of lotus (Taittiriya Aranyakā). Even religio-literary texts came to be named after the lotus i.e. the Padma Purana and the Padma Samhitā, a prominent Agamic text. Padma Purana contains an account of the period when the world was a golden lotus and that of all the occurrences of that time, and the wise call it the Padma.

In Indian symbolism lotus stands for self-creating and self generating power. Born of aquatic origins lotus refers to the transformatory powers of the primordial waters. Such self generating power is demonstrated in the act of burgeoning with sunrise and fading at sunset. The Garbhopanisad calls ovary a lotus. In Indian numerology the words ‘padma’ and ‘mahapadma’ come close to infinity and stand at the numerary apex. In palmistry the lotus sign on one’s palm would presage sovereignty of temporal power. The lotus-goddess is venerated on the rock carvings at Bharhut, Sanchi, Udayagiri and other locales. Buddha idols at Rajgir, Kaneri, Gordhas, Burma, Nepal, China and Tibet show Buddha seated on a lotus. Lotus is the sixth ornament.

Padma or lotus-feet is a great religious leader and a pontiff in Advaita order who was reputed to have walked on water, which feat he would not have achieved unless his feet have the magical association with the lotus. Padmapani or ‘lotus-in-hand’ is a famous Bodhisattva in the Buddhist pantheon. Laksmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth holds a lotus in her hand. The sixth and twelfth first Jain Tirththankkaras have white and blue lotuses as tokens of their identification. Lotus is venerated in Indian literature too as an upamana or synonym of excellence, form, shape, colour and delicate perfection. To describe feminine charms
as well as face, arms, hands, eyes, feet etc. Indian poets readily turned to lotus for inspiration. The lotus is a beautifying element and an ingredient in beautification. As an ornament it can be worn on the head, on the neck, on the chest as a garland and on the arms. Lotus as a religious symbol occurs in Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and other sectarian literature as also that of Sakta and Pancaratra. One who paints on his body a figure of lotus or puts on a lotus on his body is a repository of all tirthas. Lotus is a celebrated example of detached life: padmapatram iva ambhasa. Some of the popular Indian names today take after the lotus like Ambuja, Saroja, Padma., Padmaja, Pankaja etc. Kamala is a name of a danceuse as also of a city. When Kalidasa had to show warm feelings coming from the deepest portions of his heroines’ heart he chose lotus leaf as a medium.

The temple sculpture abounds in lotus motifs, in creepers, plant or flower form. The lotus was a prominent flower in Egypt. It can also be seen from its murals and scroll paintings. In Indian literature and mythology lotus appears unbroken over five thousand years.

Indian mythology views geography and metaphysics from the same vision and imagination. The lotus is the womb of the universe which blooms at the Manasarovara lake, the heart of the Himalayas wherefrom the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Indus all originate. Therein resides Prajapati in a lotus. Jambudvipa in Asia is viewed as a lotus with four petals. The hill ranges of the Himalaya are also lotus petals only they are inverted and the Deccan plateau is also a petal thereof.

Mahayana Buddhism believes that in the Sukhavati
heaven every soul has a lotus seat in the padma vana or the lotus garden. Lamaism has been found by Padmakara who also holds a lotus in his hand. Lotus is venerated even in Jain literature.

Allah resides in the seventh sky of the heaven where lotuses bloom. In Islamic sculpture also the lotus can be seen in the shape of the dome of the mosques and other religious buildings.
3. SYNONYMS OF LOTUS

Lotus has many synonyms in Indian literature testifying to its immense popularity among poets and scholars. The various synonyms also help us to understand its symbolic meaning and the derivative sources: born out of the waters: ambuja, kusesaya, tamarasa; born out of the mud: pankaja; born out of water reservoirs or ponds: sarasija, saroja; that which binds: nalina: on the shape of the leaves: aravinda; on the number of leaves: satapatra, sahasradala, rajiva; a beautifier of waters: kamala; born out of the lotus thread; bisa prasuna; as a sustainer: pusakara; as an abode of Laksmi: srivasa, indiriyanilaya; demonstrating motion: padma, utpala; demonstrating a resemblance to a shape: putakam; pleasing to the cakravaka bird: Kokanada; as a protector: kutupa; pleasing to the goose: kairava; pleasing to the ear: kuvalaya; that which is ever fresh: amlana; that which pleases Laksmi: indira

There are also specific names for specific types of lotuses like those that bloom on seeing the sun, those that bloom on seeing the moon, the red kokanada, the white sitambhoja, the blue utpala etc. Being of aquatic abode kamala symbolises waters as also the life sustaining river Ganges; also the terms puskara, parna and salila denote waters. Kamala in the masculine is used for a fast running deer. Among the gods Kamalasana is the name of Brahma whose seat is the lotus and Kamalanabha is the name of Visnu. In the Rajendrakarnapura Kamalasana is given as a name of Sambhu.

Padma is one among the nine treasures. Padmaka refers to the droplets of sweat on the forehead of an elephant. In
the Samgita Damodara it refers to a variety of Dhruva. Kamala is also a metre. Padmavyuha is a strategic army formation. Padma as a creative force is also symbolised in a posture of copulation. Utpala refers in literature to the nailmarks effected on the breasts of a maiden sportively. A periodic division of Brahma is called Padmakalpa. Among the four sites enumerated as good for construction Padma or supadma is one. Kamala is also the name for the orange fruit. Padma is the sun that activises the earth and life on it. It is also a tree and a medicine. Abja means Dhanvantari a heavenly physician and also the moon. Lexican Medini calls Padmini a serpent. Padmini is also the name of a she-elephant. A beautiful blonde is also called Padmini. A sacrificial pot is also called padma because it resembles a lotus.

Kamala is the name of the seat of Indrani, as also that of Indrani’s father in earlier birth. Kamala is a variety of rice and a common name for a wealthy man. It is synonym for the aerial chariot of the gods, a plate, a drum, and a quarrel. A magician is called padmasambhava and a poisonous snake is the padma sarpa. The name of one of the wives of Ravana was Kamala. A yaksa was also called kamalaksa and a city of the Vidyadharas is Kamalajaya. Padma was also a king of Iksvaku family.

In the Jain community also the name meaning the lotus is very popular. The name of the maternal grand father of Ajitanath was Kamalamala. Padmapurana of Ravisena contains the life story of Rama who is called Padma. Paumacharia contains a biography of a king with the name Mahapadma Chakravarti. In prosody and literary style a metrical formation of a verse is called padmabandha.
Padmapani is the name of the sun, as well as that of the Buddha. The Sabdacandrika a lexican, gives the term padmamukhi as a synonym for a very exceptional therefore highly unobtainable maiden. Padmaraga is a precious stone and aravinda is a weapon of Cupid. Sriprasna Samhita (Ch 48, P 413) speaks of a Kalharotsava.

Khruva praying in the Padma Purana says; 'You are verily nilotpala among the flowers', indicating the supremacy of lotus as a flower. Visnadhrumottara refers to vidyavrata to be organised on a eight-petalled lotus and there is a vrata called kamala saptami. Kṛtya-Kalpaturu gives a Nilavrata where the performer is ordained to take only lotus (nilotpala) which assures of the Visnu's abode. Markandeya Purana recommends Padmini vidya, an esoteric mystic knowledge which guarantees all pleasures of life to one who performs it. In Mantra Mahodadhi a sacrifice is recommended wherein a king is controlled by offering a lotus flower and minister by offering oblatory offerings of kumuda. Indra's theft of lotus for getting the mystic knowledge from the sage Agastya is given in the Anusasana Parva of the Mahabharata, this device worked where all the other schemes failed. Lotus signs on the body in the Samudrika Sastra affirm many royal and uncommon accomplishments such as a person having lotus signs on his feet shall enjoy sovereignty or a woman with eyes as that of lotus shall never see her husband's death etc. Kamalapuja in Rajasthan has special meaning. A devotee who in his ecstasy offers his head to the goddess as if it were a lotus performs kamalpuja for the lotus flowers are dear to her. Here in this context kamala is a head ready to be offered to the goddess by the devotee himself. A beautiful verse in the Mahimnastotra says that Visnu was offering worship to Siva with a sahasranama
(one thousand names) of lotus flowers and the last lotus was the 999th. To make it one thousandth as the worship formula demands, Lord Visnu offered his eye which is similar to and a close substitute for, lotus.
4 SYMBOLISM OF THE LOTUS MOTIF

a Prosperity

Lotus is a preeminent motif in Indian and Buddhist art. It has various symbolisms and meanings when used in different contexts. In the pre-Buddhist period, however, lotus stood for and symbolised Lakṣmi, the Hindu Goddess of prosperity and abundance. References to Lakṣmi are found in the earliest Indo-European literature and the Rigveda. Padma is however, not referred to in the Rigveda. The adoration of fire that the Aryans brought with themselves subsumed all local gods of whom Lakṣmi was definitely one. The characteristics typical of native Lakṣmi were attributed to Vedic gods who were to develop later into multi-formed symbolism from this nascent stage. In Rigveda (VI.11.13 and VII.33.11) the term kamalodhava is used as an adjective qualifying fire. There is no goddess Pādma eulogised in the Rigveda. The Aryan pantheon however opened gradually its floodgates to the influence of Lakṣmi. References to early literature show descriptions of Lakṣmi as born out of lotus and seated thereon. This privilege later on extended to Brahma and other minor Hindu divinities and even yaksas. Lakṣmi possessed the colour of the lotus, was lotus-eyed and lotus-thighed. Lakṣmi bears close association with the waters wherein the lotus flower grows. The water is symbolic of nourishing the cradle of life and universal motherhood. Lotus and the white elephant were both born out of the sea and hence share a fraternal relationship. Lakṣmi then is an auspicious symbol presaging prosperity and abundance. A first century representation of Gajalakṣmi shows Lakṣmi the lotus-goddess seated on the lotus, flanked by two elephants who are showering water on the goddess with their trunks.
The showers are falling on the goddess Laksmi as also on the lotus on which she stands. Laksmi is variously called Sri and Padma.

In the Sri-sukta of Brahmana-Upanisad period she is addressed by names such as Laksmi, Sri, Padmasambhava or born out of the lotus, Padmasthita or residing in the lotus, Padmavarna or of the colour or class of lotus, Padmoru or lotus thighed, Padmamalini or one with a lotus garland, Padmaksi or lotus-eyed. Lotus is the firm base or ground of existence or that which makes life possible. Puskarini and Padmini who hold the lotus in their hands possess infinite power. Laksmi is also synonymous with Karisini, the mother of Kardama and Ciklita. Laksmi is also called Madhavi vitalising like honey, sweet and palatable. She also bestows health, longevity, prosperity, progeny and fame. She is Hiranmaya full of the noble metal and Visnupriya, that which is dearest to Hari.

Laksmi being a metaphorical expression of the lotus stands at the apex of all vegetation, which is fruition, plentifulfulness and abundance. Normally, as in Sanchi, Bharhut and Mathura she appears on a brimming vase of water, the purna-ghata, which is exuding as it were the waters of life, reminding one of the Vedic descriptions of her: ‘who is gladdened by elephants..... bathed by elephant kings with golden vessels....Mother Sri the lady in the lotus lake the pillar golden...’. In such a stance she is river goddess personified, she is essentially Aditi, Prakriti, Maya, Apsaras, Urvasi and the maternal personification of the possibilities of existence. As the apotheosis of the nourishing principle, lotus represents the fruit bearing and sustaining quality. The tree principle is the element of continuity between the
pre-Vedic and post-Vedic conceptualisation of generation. It is the Kalpavriksha, the Tree of Life and the Wish-fulfilling Tree, which is co-eval with the creative deity. Under a similar tree Buddha attained his enlightenment and obtained knowledge. While the Tree is all existence i.e. that which is manifest, the lotus is that wherein is manifestation. Lotus is the symbol of prosperity [Visnudharmottara (iii.28.22)] and hence the tutelary deity of the Gupta sovereigns.

b Feminine Principle

Closely associated with the idea of Laksmi as prosperity, plentifullness and abundance is that of the creative process, fertility and the female principle. Lotus is intimately connected with the mythology of the creations of Brahma and the universe. When the creative forces were let loose to shape the cosmic frame, the cosmic waters brought forth the thousand-petalled lotus or the sahasrapadma. This golden lotus was as radiant as the sun. Lotus was the mould of the mundane creation— the first flower of the cosmic fecund exercise, being unstained it is pure, suvarna or of the best pedigree. This was also the stage when Brahma was born. The first creation, from the lotus-navel of Visnu slumbering on the Adi-sesa, was embryonic only in concept but really superhuman and supermundane. It may be noted that this conception of the birth of Brahma i.e. from the lotus navel of Visnu is a Gupta and post-Gupta idea despite the motif itself being Vedic.

This is a clever use of the lotus symbol proselytised and popularised by the Buddhists whose order had spread by this time. According to the Taittariya Samhita the birth of Brahma has a similar myth. It was all waters in the
beginning—primordial waters as it were. Prajapati then assumed the form of Vayu and struck the lotus leaf thus generating fire and leading to creation of earth and the birth of Prajapati. The Vedic formulation is that of the Tree of Life rising from the space into the navel centre of Varuna, the deity reclining on the waters, the trunk representing the axis of the universe and the branches symbolising existence on various planes of being. However, post-Gupta popular motif makes Narayana Anantasayin or Visnu recumbent on the waters, and Brahma-Prajapati is the navel-born, lotus-born and lotus-seated. Be that as it may, the creative potential came to be ascribed to lotus which was the creating instrument as well as the flower of creation. While lotus is the material aspect of evolution, petals are its consecutive forms (Agni pura XLIX). From this single golden lotus which emerged at the dawn of creation came many others indicating the multiplicity of existential planes and the multiformity of life. Hindu mythology ascribes to cosmic waters, wherein lotus grows, the productive or creative power of the primal incubating on the waters of the primeval pre-existence by the Lord symbolising the creative unison of which lotus is the flower and creation. Lotus is verily the form of World-Mother or Universal Mother through whom the Brahman is galvanised into performing the creative function. The water cosmology places water in the centre of the creative matter and activity. Water as the source of all life and creation is no new idea in Indian thought. The concept of water as the inert primeval mass from where life rose when impregnated by the male element of creative breath appears in the Vedas. Rigveda (X,129: Nasadiya Sukta) says: ‘There was then neither non-being, nor being; there was no atmosphere, nor sky which is beyond it. What was
concealed? In whose protection? Was it the deep unfathomable water?'

The one, first, that is the male principle (of Rigveda I, 164, 46, 'what poets call manifold is only one'), that which is svayambhu (i.e. self-generating), was required to create life. The second verse speaks of the 'One' that 'breathed breathless'. Lotus which rises from the waters represents the three principles of creation i.e. the creative breath, the primeval waters, and the principle of life. Water, the element in which the lotus rests, is a primeval element, obscure, chaotic and with no shape. Satapatha (VII.4.1.8 and X.V.2.8) explains that lotus means the waters and earth is a leaf thereof which lies spread on the waters. Waters produce and preserve all creation—even the earth, mountains, clouds etc. which are aqueous (or varunam) (Mahabharata XKK, 6805). In fact it assumes different forms—earth, sky, mountains, gods and men, cattle, birds, herbs and trees (Chandogya Upanisad VII, 10, 1). The water was the root-yonder world was the sprout (Ait.Ar.VI, 8, 8, 1). As in Rigveda (X, 125, 3), '...my cradle is in the waters of the ocean; thence I divide myself in all creatures and mightily growing, reach up to heaven'. Water (apah) is also vach (Sat. Br. VI, 1,1,9), and like vach water is Prajapati's own, as his second; Prajapati sent forth Vach, who on his bidding went forth and persuaded the whole universe 'continuous like a stream of water' (Panch. Br. XX, 14, 2). Also from Vach, Viswakarman produced creatures (Sat. Br. VII, 5, 2, 21) and 'all this was created by vach, and all that existed was vach' (Sat. Br. VIII, 1, 2, 9). Water is the foundation (pratistha) of the universe (Sat. Br. VI, 7, 1, 17: the worlds are based upon the waters). Likewise vach the word,
embodied in the sacred documents and in the mantras, sustains the universe. Vach is in a sense, the Veda, the custodian of all knowledge. Prajapati first created the Vedas, which became a foundation (i.e. pratistha) and resting on this foundation, he created the waters from the world of Vach or Veda (Sat. Br. VI, 1, 1, 8).

Vach is not only waters, but in later anthology, the goddess Saraswati, wife of Brahma, who rests on a lotus. Saraswati appears as the sakti of Prajapati, who produced through her the first living creatures. Being associated with waters alone could give her such procreative powers (Kathaka XII, 5). Veda enabled Prajapati to enter the waters (identified as Vach) whence arose an egg. (Sat. Br. VI, 1, 1, 10). Waters are the primordial element into which the male element, the ‘One’ penetrates in order to beget the germ of life Hiranyagarbha (R.V..X,82). In essence, Hiranyagarbha, the golden germ, was born in the beginning to create other things in the world. And this Hiranyagarbha is the primordial egg which arose from the fusion of the One with the inert, feminine waters which bear the lotus, as they bear the germ (Ath. Ve.IV,2, 8). This Hiranyagarbha or the golden germ gave rise to the cosmic tree the trunk of which is the axis of the universe. Lotus which resembles the waters in its capacity to generate, to create and sustain life in its multiform aspects, and seats the creator as it were, it is equally entitled to the aqueous qualities. Since the One is all pervading, from his navel rose the lotus-stalk (even as it grows in water) which bore Brahma the Creator of the universe. In fact, as Bhagavata Purana (III, 20,14) puts it, the Lord (Isvara) dwelt in it (i.e. the egg-shell lying lifeless on the waters of the ocean) for a complete thousand years. From his navel sprang forth a lotus splendid as a thousand suns, he desiring to produce
various creatures from his body, first created the waters and deposited in them a seed, which became the golden egg (Manu I, 5). Lotus grows from the golden germ (Bhagvata Purana III, 20, 14). Also Rigveda mentions a primeval being dwelling in the middle of the waters and from whose navel rises the one, the origin of all creation and of all created things (X, 82, 6 and 1, 164).

Waters are generally associated with the power to produce, regenerate, perpetuate and protect life. They are pure and unpolluted (Tandya, Mh Br.VI, 5, 10), and hence their power to cleanse from worldly stains as also from moral guilt, violence, cursing and lying (R.V. I, 23, 32 and x,9,8). They bestow wisdom, wealth and offspring (RV 10,32,12) grant prayers (Chand.Up.VII, 10,2), afford protection against demons and other powers of darkness (Sat. Br. I, 1,1,1), contain all remedies and also amrita the nectar.

These qualities of waters come through the life giving essence or 'rasa' which in its unsullied form is available in the sap of plants which are the 'embryo of the waters' (apam garbhah, AV VIII, 7,8), in fact they are like water (udakamanah, AV, IV, 4,5). The sap of plants draws from Rasa and sustains on rain water, and in its purest form is Soma, the king of plants which in its vegetative essence is represented in the lotus, and occurs in cow’s milk, rain, dew, mead, blood, semen virile and liquor (sura). These liquids share the qualities of health, generation and protection from death.

Lotus is representative of waters as in case of the purnaghata representations. Even as water is purifying and life sustaining, so is lotus. The purnaghata has overflowing
water and lotus emerging from it. Lakshmi is water herself, which has the qualities of a sustaining mother (us’atir i va matarah), and hence deserves prayer (Rigveda 10,75,5). The River Goddess is the Goddess of Prosperity, and Ganges is one of the aquatic and manifest forms of Siva himself[1]. Often the river or Nadi-mutruka is represented as a purnaghata brimming with water and lotus creepers in temples and other gateways are purifying elements like water. The purnakumbha which has water as sweet as honey, truly represents Sri herself who is Kalasabdhiputri (daughter of the oceans), contains 7 mothers, 4 oceans, 7 continents, 4 vedas and their 6 angas. The Kalasa which may have human face made on it, that of the Universal Mother, has Visnu as its mouth, Siva at its neck, and Brahma in the belly. It is thus immensely auspicious, and embodying all dieties secures precedence in any worshipping order.

Lotus is not only water but all types of reservoirs of water Padmini and Utpalini are two types of ponds.

The lotus is also viewed as the result of the contact of puruosoottama with the waters. This is the symbolic representation of mothercraft wherein waters constitute the feminine element and lotus is Visnu’s creative essence. The terms flowering, flower and deflower in common parlance stand for the acquisition of the potency to conceive. The supreme association of lotus with creative power becomes all the more apparent from the fact that the Lord of Creation himself abides in the lotus and is born on it and through it, the birth being made possible through the instrumentality

[1] Such is Abhinavagupta’s description in his Abhinavabharati (a commentary on Bharata’s Natyasastra. Kalidas has similar feelings (Kumarsambhava 10, 26).
of the lotus.[2] The Padma Purana relates the myth wherein the thousand petalled lotus gave rise to mountains, woods, everflowing waters, the stream, the yaksas, the gandharvas etc. After each Kalpa period, the God of Creation Brahma is born from the lotus navel of Visnu only to be dissolved and subsumed in it after the kalpa is over and then the existence is destined to grind to a halt. Subsequent creation after such dissolution is again the function of the lotus. The universe itself is described as a golden lotus. Besides symbolising creativity the lotus stands for the self creative power. The blooming of a lotus is, moreover, not a chance part of a universal occurrence or law, but a fruit of the universal principle in which the manifest part is related to the whole in much the same way as atman is related to the Brahman, or this world is related to the other. Kalidasa also describes the Padmanabha aspect of Visnu as Narayana sleeping on the serpent couch in Raghuvamsa (13.6).

This is the mystic sutra which extols lotus as the prime symbol of creation. The elaborate puranic mythology is grasped by the Indian artist and the meaning comprehensible to the observer. The cosmic chaos represented by the primeval waters threw forth with the intervention of the Brahman the creative principle. The Greek word chaos is akin to the Vedic kha. In Greek mythology kha represented the great chasm out of which came kham. Kha is then the navel from which arose the cosmic lotus. Kha is also the hub of the universal wheel. Lotus seat is anyhow reserved for the first creator that is Brahma and he is fully entitled to it. A rather striking representation of the lotus as a metaphor

[2] According to Vayupurana (34, 37) the earth-lotus first appeared from the unmanifest with Mount Meru as its pericarp
for creative energies is in the court scene from cave XVII of Ajanta which shows a lady protruding a lotus from her body, also standing on a lotus. This in Buddhist art is more than a representation of the creative aspect, despite the prescription of the sensuous appeal for the Buddhist artists. The self engendering fertility and creativity of the lotus is apparent from its rising over the surface of water and expanding its petals being a life supporting and life generating power. For this reason although Brahma usurped Laksmi’s rightful lotus throne, lotus or Laksmi is the appropriate consort or sakti of Visnu who is the cosmic water itself, the infinite ocean of life and sustenance which gives rise to and absorbs all differentiated phenomenon and existence.

Existence or life itself

If Visnu be the universal living waters and lotus rises therein then lotus is life itself or existence. The universal living waters in India are symbolised not only in water but in all aquatic elements including the Adisesa, the serpent couch of Narayana, the makara, the sankha (i.e. the conch) and other similar elements. In the ultimate analysis the lotus, Brahma and the subsequent multiformity and multiplicity of creation are but an outgrowth of Narayana whose gigantic body is the ultimate repository of all things. The cosmic dynamism lies in the process of creation of life and existence from the water in the shape of the lotus. When the life giving waters are withdrawn, then of course all ethereal existence ceases till the time comes again for a renewal of life. The lotus of the world is none else than the goddess Padma who is the prime mover of divine energy of the slumbering Visnu. It is for this reason that Laksmi or Padma
is Visnupriya i.e. dear to Visnu. Being the outpouring of his substance, she is as it were, the miracle and reality of life and existence. Water is doubtless the first element to come into being and early Hindu mythology associated Yaksas with waters and the treasures that lay hidden deep in the water. All treasures are in a sense embedded in the oceans which also hold life in lotus, conch, tortoise, makara, fish and the yaksas. Yaksas carrying a platter of food and a pitcher of water can be seen at Mathura and Amaravati. Yaksas are guardians of wealth as well. Lotus scrolls at Bharhut and Amaravati show lotus rising from yaksa's navel. As lotus rises in waters so does existence or life itself. Though we shall presently discuss Agnu, suffice it to say here that Agnu is kinsman of the waters and the grandson of the waters. All birth, all life, is in essence being established in the waters and being established is obviously on a firm ground, that is, the ground of existence and one who stands or sits or lives on the lotus therefore lives an existence of life. Such living is not necessarily living of this worldly nature and angelic existences are not precluded by this metaphor. Therefore lotus is life itself, earth itself, a ground of existence and a support. Taittiriya Samhita (IV.1.3 and IV.2.6) talks of the lotus being the earth whereon and whereby existence is supported; so does Satapatha Brahmana (VII.4.1.8). Earth and thus lotus support for life and the human body are also conceived of as lotus, being life on the terrestrial plane (Atharva Veda X.8.43). Lotus is also like the body of a man—'pundarikam navadvaram' meaning the lotus of nine gates, 'what selfish genius is therein only the comprehensors of the Brahman know', elsewhere (Chand Up III 12.3) earth is equated with the body of man or more so his heart[3], for

[3] The Almighty is seated on the white lotus of the heart of devotee
Sayana commenting on Rigveda (VI.16.13) says that earth itself like the lotus is the support of existence, and Vajasaneyi Samhita (XIII.2) identifies the lotus or pushkara with the earth extended on the back of the waters. Earth is thus variously equated with the lotus flower or its leaf (as in Satapatha Brahmana VII.41.7-13; VIII.3.1.11 and X.5.8 & 12).

Earth is doubtless a sustainer of humanity. She, on whom exist ocean, river and other waters, and all food and corn fields, has to be prayed for best of her yields.[4] The earth also lent its fragrance to the lotus. 'Make me fragrant with that fragrance of yours that entered the lotus and which the celestials brought at Surya's wedding'.[5] The bounty of earth is limitless as all things and creatures rest and thrive on it.

That brings us to lotus as a support or throne for divinities, semidivinities and others. The first inklings of lotus as a support can be traced to the Srutis, where Vasistha and Agni are supposed to signify the existence of all the beings and things. Perhaps the earliest representation of the Buddha seated on a lotus can be taken back to the second century AD, that is, in the Gandhara and late Andhra works, and the use of lotus for Brahma comes much later when lotus throne became popularly used for Buddha. The Buddhist legends can be thought of as mere extensions of popular Hindu conception. Buddha sitting on a lotus throne is so common that it is ordinarily taken for granted. In art and literature the lotus seat is a popular representation. There is practically no deity in India who is not shown as resting on

the lotus flower. The idea behind such representation seems to be that the whole world is a lotus (Epigraphica Indica, IX, p.252 ‘tribhuvana brahmanda mandalambuja... haricharane’ appearing on the Pathari inscription of Parabala).

Saraswati sveta padmasana, seated on while lotus and Laksmi sitting on the red lotus has the lotus pond for her home. Siva, Parvati, Yamuna, Harihara, Durga, Varaha, Natesa, Ganesa, Gajalaksmi, Narasimha, Tripurasundari, Arunachalesvvara and various Bodhisattvas including Manjusri, Prajnaparmita, Avalokitesvvara, Padmapani, Amida share the lotus seat to name a few. Lotus as a pedestal for divine figures speedily came into vogue. The transfer to Brahma of the lotus throne from Laksmi was but the first step in the long process of evolution. It is perhaps only in Ceylon that the Buddha images are unsupported by lotus. In most cases the use of lotus pedestal indicates their use in Mahayana worship. One of the most common representations of Buddha on the lotus is the Sravasti miracle wherein the central figure of Buddha is a huge one supported by a large lotus the stalk of which extends till the nether world (patala) where the Nagaraja dwells. The multiplicity of lotuses is at once a use of the Virupaksa, a multiform concept of Hinduism.

**Inverted lotus base of temple walls**

A large number of temples in South India have temple walls which at the base resemble lotus petals for example the one at Cholisvvara at Kilaiyur, Tiruchi dating ninth century AD. This is in the Avani Kandarpa Isvara temple. The inverted lotus base indicates that the lotus supports the universe where gods dwell.

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Lotus as a support or pedestal is not limited to being a seat alone. As a column or pillar it performs the same function. In many sculptural representations pillars or columns of temples or viharas have lotus petal bases or tops indicating that in essence they are lotus stalks. Early Buddhist art showed the Dharmachakra as supported by a pillar with bulbous capital, on which are perched four lions. According to Coomaraswami this is a lotus support while another point of view (that of A.K. Mitra and G.L. Fabri) is that lotus here stands for divine birth and fertility. The pillar is taken to be the stem, cable moulding is taken as the stamen and abacus to be the pericarp. The pillar then is that axis that binds the two words, the terrestrial and heavenly. It brings as it were, the heavenly visitors and enlightenment to be perched in this world, this universe. It is, in effect, the whole space.

The Vedic concept is that heaven and earth are kept apart or connected by a support or pillar. The two hemispheres are likened to cartwheels connected by an axle (R.V. X, 89,4) and He is supposed to divide heaven and earth by a pillar (RV. VIII,41,10). The lotus stalk is similarly the pillar, axle, or supporter of the world, worshipped as Skambha, the one elevated above darkness and evil (AV. X, 7). This Skambha was the golden embryo, it poured forth gold within the world (AV X, 7, 12). Lotus is like the first tree, the Tree of Life, 'rooted in the earth with the top in the heaven,' drawing as it were the life giving essence Soma from the netherworld and exuding the creative breath, Agni in the upper reaches of the universe. Agni itself, is likened to a pillar separating heaven and earth (RV I, 67,5;VI,8,3 and IV, 5,1) and its flames and smokes as in yajnas lead to the heavens. (RV III, 5, 10 and III,4,6). Since lotus stands at
the apex of the vegetative kingdom, it is filled with the qualities of the celestial tree which also encompasses the universe. It is so pervasive that the Brahman is contained in it — for 'that is the pure, that is Brahman; that indeed is called the immortal, therein all the worlds are at; beyond it none other goeth' (Katha Up VI, 1). Lotus like the Aswatha, reaches the far corners of the universe, drawing soma, the immortalising and life giving rasa from the base, and containing Agni at the top (AV, XIX, 32,3). In fact, heaven and earth are fashioned by the wood (RV, X,31,7 and X, 81,4), which is nothing but Brahman, the world supporter (Taitt. Br. II, 8,9,6). The Brahman, in his vegetative aspect, upholds the tree's crest, and it is meet to pray that the rays (or banners) of the tree may be implemented deep in us (RV, 1,24,7). He has one thousand heads (RV, X,90) or one thousand arms (AV, XIX, 6,1). The very knowledge of the divine tree is immortalising (Taitt. Ar I, 11,5). The Brahma tree is not only immortalising but life-giving; it rises from the unmanifested (avyakta), its trunk is buddhi, its cavities carry the senses from the leaves, its flowers are both good and evil (dharmadharman), and its fruits are pleasure and pain. This Brahmavrikṣa (or Brahma tree) is the source of life for all beings (Mbh.XIV, Anugita Parva). This tree of life represents existence, it is also the Tree of Knowledge, leading to the vision of Brahman (Maitr. Up VI, 4). As all plants are basically rooted in the rasa, they are cosmologically inter-changeable, and the qualities of one can be manifested and transferred in others. Thus the Indian mind transferred all the rasa-giving and pervading qualities to the lotus.

The lotus pond, which provided the setting for the Indian thinker, preacher and architect alike, often was taken
to be symbolic of the universe itself. It is the world ocean wherein the temple or the stupa are established, like life as it were. Thus in Borobudur, is a relief which shows a much diminished stupa with a lotus cushion. The stupa, thus embedded in the lotus, has the miraculous powers of long life, knowledge, fertility and protection in general. Even temples are eulogised as universal supports and thus likened both to the cosmic tree with its all supporting properties and the Mount Meru, the world bearer. The Deopara inscription (26th Strophe), dated at end 11th century praises the high temple of Pradyumneswaraya as the trunk of a tree of which branches are the quarters and connected the heaven and the oceans—a unique column of support (alamba stambha) of the tree worlds.

Lotus as a formula for space, sky or firmament is not altogether unknown. The Sravasti miracle representation shows Buddha seated on a large lotus indicating his all pervasiveness. The Nirukta calls the lotus the mid-space i.e. antariksam. The lotus fills the entire firmament, nay, it is the world itself, the universe itself. Lotus as a space occupying or space giving receptable is defined by such expressions as Padmagarbha (womb of lotus), padmakosa, and as the Chandogya Upanisad says (VIII.1.3) in the space of the heart are contained both heaven and earth. As a support lotus in sculptural representations appears beyond India too. In Egypt, the child Horus, son of Isis and Orisis, who symbolises youth and evergenerating life is shown as lotus-supported from about 900 BC onwards. A head of Tutankhamen supported by lotus is interpreted to mean sun god emerging from the primeval waters as creation replaced chaos; and similar lotus symbolism extends as far back as the second millennium B.C.
The earth is also conceived as being a lotus. In ancient Indian geography the earth was thought of as seven concentric islands. Another prevalent conception was that the earth is like lotus with four mahadvipas as its four petals and Mount Meru as its pericarp\[6] Appearance of two lotuses often has been interpreted as the two worlds, one the terrestrial and the other heavenly. The two lotuses appear as the support or seat and halo. This can also be thought of as this world being a shadow of the other. Just as the blooming of the lotus is in response to the rays of the sun, this world owes its existence and order to the other world being its mirror image or alter ego. This world being a counterpart of the other yonder world (Aitt. Br. VIII.2) where the universal manager plays his lila is no new idea. The lotus as a halo or nimbus can be also viewed as a reflection of the netherwaters stemming from the extensions of the stalk to the patala. Thus the nimbus or the prabha mandala serves a dual purpose as a reflection of the life-giving other world and as a shadow of the life-bearing netherworld.

Lotus being life itself, is a fit object of symbolism. Thus when a lotus appears in the hands of a divine being it can be thought of as a universal plaything wherein and wherewith the omniscient plays with his miracle. Life in its diverse aspects and forms is best illustrated in the tree of life and the multiple expression of various types of lotuses with creepers, stalk etc. The meandering creeper is but one way of representing the manifold shades and varieties of

[6] Visnudharmottara 45.7
Vayupurana 1,34,46-57; 1,44, 34-37
Brahmandapurana 34X1;
Visnupurana II,2,9 and
Brahmavaivarta purana 6.6
life. This is more or less like Visnu manifesting his various aspects in the Bhagavatgita in the Visvarupa darsana given by the Lord to Arjuna or the picture of the universe which Yasoda saw in the mouth of Krisna expecting to see mud.

Since lotus is life itself what supreme sacrifice can a devotee make to the Lord except to offer lotus which symbolises his body, life, or microcosm? Pictures of Bhiksú with a lotus as in Ajanta (cave II) only represent the ultimate offering of a devotee. Pandarika has often been read as the human body. In applying this metaphor to Narayana all parts of His body have been extolled. Visnu Narayana is Pandarikaksa or lotus eyed, his eyes are of the colour of red lotus and his form represents a fully bloomed lotus. The bands are also comparable to lotuses and arms and feet are like stalks (Cf. the Pathari inscription of Parabala).

In the hands of a devotee, lotus represents the supreme sacrifice. There are various instances of the devotee who contributes to the construction of a shrine appearing in the sculpure. In these representations the devotee is shown holding a lotus (as in the Bharhut stupa relief). In the Buddhist Jatakas, it is said that lotus is obtainable only to the virtuous and the devout. Padma Jataka relates a story in which three sons of a wealthy merchant expressed a desire to worship the Buddha with the lotus flower. The lotus pond was guarded by a man who had his nose cut. The two sons who had flattered the man could not get the lotuses whereas third who spoke the truth got the lotuses for worshipping the Buddha. Thus lotus confers on the devotee power to worship the divine and seek salvation. To offer the lotus is a token of emphasising one’s own dedication, surrender of lotus-heart of oneself in full and merging the psychic self
into that of the God. Praying with the rosary of lotus seeds gives the devotee siddhi or accomplishment. In the Rajasthani language the term kamala or lotus has a special meaning i.e. the head itself. In the context of Sakti Puja the term kamal means a great sacrifice as the devotee is ready to offer his head to the goddess. The goddess is pleased with the lotus flower but in its absence and as a substitute for lotus flower the head of the devotee is offered.[7]

Lotus as the ultimate offering is illustrated by the Hindu legend where lord Siva was offering lotuses to Visnu to whom this flower is dear. As the stock of flowers fell short, Siva instead offered his eyes as a substitute as these resembled the lotuses. The efficacy of lotus worship can be well imagined. Lotus is also a vehicle of life. In another Hindu legend, in a flood legend similar to Noah’s aarc, Vasistha, Varuna’s son found the flower of waters i.e. the lotus which is devayana (divine vehicle). In the Buddhist conception all life is a yana (vehicle) whether the lesser or the greater (Hina or Maha) though both are ultimately the same voyage (ekayana). The upama or comparison of the lotus flower to the various parts of the human body leaves no doubt that lotus may represent the body or existence as a whole or its separate parts and phases.

In close correspondence to Hindu myths the Buddhist legend also has cosmological processes akin to the birth of Brahma. Lotus is seen as a creative and potent energy which can catalyse to fruition spiritual and mundane efforts. Visnu is in His cosmic slumber on the milky ocean whereform

sprang forth the lotus. The Lalitavistara gives the description of the proportions which should befit the size of the world to be created. When the Bodhisattva condescended to materialise himself and enter mother’s womb, there sprang a lotus from the cosmic waters whereupon 68,000 yojanas of earth erupted to give way to the lotus in space. None but the Sasta had seen the lotus, few could even visualise it. A thousand fold multiplication of the size of the lotus could be likened to a tiny drop of honey on a lotus. This legend of Buddha’s descent on earth is engraved in Sravasti.

The role of lotus in cosmic explanations in also profound. Of the dreams that Bodhisattva had before leaving this world one is that a lotus was seen vegetating from the cosmic waters out of Bodhisattva’s navel-base. The stalk of the lotus was so high as to reach the abode of the gods in the kanistha i.e. lowest regions.

The myth connected with the birth of Bodhisattva Manjusri in Nepal also stresses the creative aspect of the lotus. In the Nagavasa lake of Nepal wherein dwelt Karkotaka Naga, Vivasvara Buddha sprinkled some seeds, saying ‘on flowering of these seeds, the master of Agni stabhavana svayambhhus shall take birth, He will take the shape of a flame’. A lotus sprang forth from that land, the size of which was as big as that of a wheel of a bullock cart, studded with precious stones, which gave it a radiating glow to indicate the Bodhisattva.

The use of lotus symbolism in due course became so widespread that it came to be used to denote sovereignty, temporal power and prowess on this earth. The close association of lotus and the sun and its representative on
earth Agni made the lotus the descendant of the sun. Agni was born from the lotus (RV, VI,16,13). Kaisitaki Brahmana (VIII.1) has: 'Thee, O Agni from the lotus!'. Agni is also mothered by the lotus flower or leaf (Taittariiya Samhita V.1.3). Agni has as one of his epithets vanaspati i.e. the lord of the forests perhaps due to its close association with the forests or flora's dependence on the sun for its sustenance and is identified with Prajapati who has the svambhu or self generating characteristics. Satapatha Brahmana states that Agni was born out of the lotus. All the shining objects such as the sun, moon, and stars are but the forms of the lotus.

Agni bears close relationship to the principle of life or Hiranyagarbha, the golden germ. Both are said to be made of gold (RV II, 2.4; VII,3,6). Agni has a golden body (RV IV,3.1 and X, 20.9) and is the lord, father or maker of gold (Mbh. III.200.128 and XIII, 84,42). Agni is shown in Vedic sites by a golden symbol. Like the lotus, Agni sprang forth from the waters (RV X,91,6; AV I.33.1), in fact he is the germ or foetus of waters; 'apam garbhah' (RV III.1.12-13; III.5.3; I.70.3), and the son of the waters—'apam napat' (RV II.35; cf. Vaj S. VIII.24). Also when the 'waters filled the universe they become pregnant with a germ and bore fire' (RV X, 121.6). There is thus close correspondence between Agni, waters and the Hiranyagarbha or the principle of life.

The whole world is deemed to have been made of Agni and Soma, the purest essence of rasa, of the aquatic character (Mbh VIII. 34.49 hari. v.10660). In fact Mahadeva is half Agni (i.e. ghora or terrifying) and the other half is Soma (gentle, mild, resembling the water dharma and the moon).
According to the Taittariya Samhita (IV.1.3) Prajapati assuming the form of Vaju generated fire by friction with the lotus leaf. The idea of Agni born out of the lotus appears in Rgveda(VI.16.13)[8] and also Kausatali Brahmana (VIII.1). Lotus is ‘apam kulya’ related to the waters, where from fire also sprang.

Lotus is said to have been born of the shining radiance of the stars (Pancavimsa Brahmana) when Indra killed Vrtra the primordial darkness and the lotus shone by the light generated. Lotus was born in the mid-heaven regions after radiance destroyed darkness, and symbolised power and energy of Varuna (Maitrayani Samhita). The sun or surya has the capability of enhancing the beauty of the lotuses with his rays rather than taking it away by his dazzle. He is a royal personality of great splendour and sovereignty. Not only that Surya has some delicate relation to the lotus or padma. Himself a manifestation of Narayana, he has two lotuses in his two hands. Padmini is his beloved on the earth whom he wakes through the delicate caresses of his rays even as a lover caresses the forearms of the slumbering spouse to rouse her from slumber. The lotus reciprocates by unfolding herself and blooming at the dawn of each day and closing back to itself when the sun withdraws his rays. The white and red lotuses in fact welcome the touch of the sun by their bloom. As the lotus is awakened by the rays of the sun so is the universe animated after darkness is destroyed at dawn. The solar rays are none else than the feet of the sun which the lotus damsel caresses shampooing

[8] (Rgveda 10.129.3)
(Satapatha 6-4.4.2)
and Rgveda 7.33.11.
by its perfume and brightens by its splendour reminding of the association of Padma or Lakshmi with the feet of Vishnu,[9] even as the Hindu housewife presses the feet of the master of the house to relieve him from the breadwinning efforts of the day. Surya besides being a source of light is an upholder of Dharma and the symbol of timelessness. The sun is the wheel of time which keeps count of the kalpas and graduates the process of universal evolution and cosmic generation. The sun is linked to a many-spoked wheel, either as a discus or as a cart-wheel in the Rgveda (I.174.5; i.175.4; IV.16.12;VI.5.6.3 etc.). For this reason, sun is often represented as the lotus in the Navagraha slab of Gangaikonda Cholapuram. In another creation by Rajendra, Surya is shown as a large lotus medallion on top with rasis encircled by dikpalas or guardians of the eight quarters. Verily he is the keeper, the universal calendar heralding the cosmic events which the lotus signifies.

In some Surya worship rituals lotus is used as a surrogate for Surya. Instead of Surya the solar orb is represented by an eight petalled lotus with central seed vessel with a petal to represent each form of Surya starting clockwise from the east, i.e. Surya, Ravi, Vivasvan, Bhaga, Aruna, Martanda, Bharkara being in the centre. Sun is the beloved of the lotus pool('Pundarikavanabandhoh': stotra attributed to Yajnavalkya). He is also like a lotus with nectar fasted by Vedas settling like bees. (Sambapancasikha), and a lotus in the sky i.e. Kamalamandala and ambarendivara. He transverses across the skies in his chariot with the twin wheels which revolves as time does which has 5 or 12 or

360 spokes to represent seasons months or days, a nave or nabhi or axle. The sun or the wheel of life, lotus shaped, is revolving life (i.e. amrita) and undecaying (ajara) (RV I.155.6).

4 Eternal life

As the wheel of time, the sun is eternal, timeless or deathless. The wheel is also destructive power as when it is in the hands of Visnu as the chakra.

The timeless nature of the lotus is best illustrated in renditions like ‘Ha Hanta hanta nalnim Gaja Ujjahara’. The lotus as it responds to the sun also keeps time by opening and closing. Its repeated blooming in day and replacement by fresh flower represents as it were, rebirth and reincarnation. Even as the point on the felly of the wheel which turns touches the ground repeatedly, so also the lotus symbolises the repeated returns to the ground of the existence by man, a rebirth. Not only rebirth but reincarnation is what lotus symbolises. Its self generating characteristics (svambhu) have already been outlined. The deathless principles are supported by the axle of the wheels of sun’s chariot just as the stalk supports the lotus. So long as the wheel of the time revolves there is life or existence. The wheel has infinite dimensions, the radius connects the undimensioned bindu or the central point and immeasurable circumference: between these two lies the antariksha or the middle space, the universe or the heart of man, the space that connects the ‘I’ and the ‘not I’; that affords the opportunity for Pravritti and nivritti i.e. procession and recession, for yin and yang; defines good and evil, joy and sorrow, light and shade, birth and death. Beyond the wheel of existence is the non-rational, irrational or the
supermundane which is beyond human consciousness. Trapped as it were in the wheel of time and life man is consigned to movement within the wheel from the unchanging centre to the moving selly and back. A progressive enlightenment makes man go to the bindu which is fixed to dharma or principles. Ultimately all knowledge is microcosmic and the all-pervasive nature of Narayana and the essential unity of the multiformity, all lead to the one point through many paths. For the death rites, the chief official is clad in a robe or crimson and gold and wears a five-petalled hat of the Bodhisattva (Mantra p.24).

The comparison of the cosmic lotus with Mount Meru has already been mentioned. Lotus is thus the contrivance for the production of amrita, the elixir of immortality. Just as mount Meru draws amrita from the oceans, so does lotus extract rasa, the life-giving sap, from the waters. According to Tantu Panggelaran, the mountain itself is thought of as a reservoir of amrita. The identity of lotus stem and Mount Meru is clearly depicted in a Khmer relief showing the cosmic mountain which serves as a lotus stem. The two concepts appear fused here. Thus lotus is the eternal life, the timeless principle, the retreat of the dead soul, rebirth and reincarnation.

5. Knowledge or wisdom

If lotus is the wheel of time then it also gives the knowledge of the universal law or universal harmony which enables man to reach the nirvana or unity with the supreme being. Lotus is in this respect purity, detachment, liberation, superhuman knowledge, piety and religiousnesss.
Lotus is a metaphor for purity. Although it grows in the mud it is unstained and untainted by the grossness, nor is its leaf or a flower wetted by the water which is essential for its existence. A truly wise man, similarly, although living in this world is unattached and unaffected by it. Amayukta Nikaya (III.140) says: 'Just as brethren, a lotus born in the water, even so breathen, the Tatagatha, born in the world full grown in the world, and is unaffected by the world'. Also in Chandogya Upanished (IV.14.3) and Maitri Upanished (III.2) the self atman is compared to the drop of water that rests on the lotus leaf but does not cling to it. As the lotus blooms in the world so does the Boddhisattva and the Buddha take birth in the world to spread his enlightened wisdom, being himself supermundane. Budha's eightfold path is but the petals of the lotus which reach out to far corners of the space. The lotus stands for perfect neutrality, stable existence, in the muddy world, and at the same time, a piety or religiousness that is untainted, pure and enables the wise to reach the absolute though rooted in the nave this-worldly compulsions.

The transcendence of mind and wisdom over matter could not be better illustrated than by the lotus. The muddy water of ignorance, fortune, avarice, greed, passion, and samsara keep the man grounded to the worldly sordidness. A wise man is 'padma patram iva ambhasa' i.e. like the the lotus leaf untouched by water. His soul-flower rises above in the firmament of knowledge to higher and purer peaks, is asparsa i.e. untouched while his body may belong to the earth for its existence. The lotus is a pedagogic metaphor with meanings which remain ungrasped by the uninitiated by the enlightenment as the lotus blooms in response to the sun. Similarly the liberated souls or the enlightened men,
do not stand on this earth, but on the lotus which is enlightenment, wisdom itself. Water being the purifier, upholds the lotus, and one who stands on the lotus must surely be pure, like the eternal law. Liberation is reaching from the muddy roots to the lotus flower. However, water itself which supports the lotus, is dharma (Satapatha Brahmana XI.1.6.24) and lotus is the waters (Sat. Br. VII. 4.1.8).

f Divinity or God itself

One who stands on the lotus or has a lotus pedestal is but divinity itself. Since Gods do not have terrestrial births, their birth is on the lotus. A supreme example is that of Brahma and later the Buddha. Lotus connotes instantaneous and divine birth, and the celestial, other worldly existence.

Gautama’s birth took place when the great white elephant with a lotus flower in his trunk approached Maya, Gautama’s mother and entered her side while she was carried away in her dreams to the divine lake Anavattapa in the Himalayas. The white elephant is none other then the cloud who is rain-bearing or bearing the water of the life or the rasa (RV VII.101.3) which penetrated or grasped the mother, even as the rain clouds animate the earth (RV I. 164. 51). Vasantara Jataka relates this tale of the Buddha’s birth which is certainly not a human event. Divine birth does not mean non-human conception and birth, but also unnatural birth. The myth of Virgin birth is fairly common in Hindu, Biddhist and Christian faiths. The miracle of birth is that it is to a virgin mother and of a divine being. In the Indian tradition the virginity of the divine mother by whatever name called, Aditi, Anarva, Apravita, Kumari,
Mata, Yuvati, Kanya, or Yosa is quite frequently referred to. The divine birth appears to be a metaphysical necessity, for how can divine birth take place through acts and concepts essentially human and this worldly? Similarly in Christian mythology Adam has a divine birth and so has Eve from Adam's rib. In all these legends who is represented as taking birth is essentially a divine being, a universal Man, in fact Narayana himself in his various manifestations. It is not surprising to note that the Buddha's mother is called Maya (or magical, unknown by human cognition) and Buddha himself is Maya-maya (or magical-natured). Rgveda also gives instances of birth from the side (IV.18.1.2) and so does Jaiminiyopanishad Brahmana (I.29).

Lotus birth and lotus seat thus indicate divinity and some supermundaneness. We have already shown how almost any God came to acquire a lotus seat. Starting from its role as the pedestal of Brahma, the lotus in due course, acquired the meaning of support of all deities, big or small, indicating the highest transcendental essence. Slowly it invaded areas of religion and secular iconography strikingly remote or antagonistically to the sphere of the original goddess to whom it belonged i.e. Padma or Laksmi. Ultimately lotus ascribes to the person seated on it a divine aspect and a divine energy. Bhavisyapurana speaks of Utpalasanti i.e. the ultimate tranquility that comes with the knowledge of and unison with the divine. Such expression also occurs in Daivajnavallabha. Lotus standing at the peak of the vegetative world is but a form of the tree of knowledge, its roots a form of Brahma, its supporting trunk Visnu, and its top Siva—the Trinity who create, sustain, and destroy the universe.
In Greater India

The lotus motif which is basically Indian travelled to Java, Burma, Cambodia, Siam along the trade routes and brought Buddhism throughout South East Asia.

Even before Buddhism reached China, lotus had already carved out a prominent place in the life and society of China. Among the eight central and permanent fundamentals of Taoism lotus is one. Lotus symbolises large heartedness. Of all the seasons it blooms in the rainy season. It is a symbol of piety and purity because it is not affected by its material cause mud from where it grows. Many reeds in its flowering cups indicate its vegetative and fertility aspect. In the country-side even today in China incense is burnt to offer fumigatory pacification to the soul of the lotus which puts off inauspicious and calamitous affects. In the Chinese mythology when the Buddha desired to descend upon the earth in an incarnation he found none capable of tolerating the responsibility of bearing him except the lotus, so the choice fell on the lotus to effect a descent on the earth.

The Buddha and the Buddhist monks are painted and sculptured as seated on a lotus. Lotus shown with the ribbon means the rays of the sun. Lotus is also a sign of Buddha’s feet. Harbingering the Buddha’s incarnation on the earth lotus appeared itself to facilitate Buddha’s descent.

Buddhism has a special contribution in popularising the lotus as a symbol of exotic beauty and esoteric significance. In the representation of the western heavens, lakes therein are painted as being with full-bloomed lotuses. All the souls reserve one lotus as their retiring retreat. The
lotus is an indication of the moral quality of actions performed by one in his material based body and life. All the flowers either bloom as a result of good actions or fade away as a result of damnable actions. Those souls whose lotuses are full-bloom have an access to divinity immediately. The concept of western heaven in its material representation is full of lotuses. Amitabha occupies a central seat prominently on a lotus and the other Bodhisattvas are around him in their proper seats. In Egypt also lotus is very popular. Sculptured lotus is pressed into service to suggest a symbolic meaning. The petals are not represented either as round or oval but as angular. Many scholars do not attach any great importance to lotus as a symbol but stress its significance only as a decorative motif. In later literature the lotus is shown as the seat of Horas. Lotus is also connected with Sins.

On an Assyrian seat, the lotus replica is imprinted. Impression on these seals represent worship of the lotus flower. Hercules had discovered the lotus on his ever-victorious marches. Being fascinated by the spell of its beauty and grace he managed to bring the gracious bloom to his own country where he successfully cultivated and propagated the lotus. Since then the lotus is known to the West. Lily is a close substitute for the lotus in Europe in art and symbolism.
5. LOTUS MYTHS OF THE HINDU PANTHEON

Lotus in its many manifestations as goddess and as conceptual necessity has enriched the legendary Hindu mythology. These are also beautifully illustrated in works of art and sculpture.

Perhaps the one godhead lotus is most closely associated with Visnu. He is the one with lotus eyes i.e. pundarikaksa (Visnusahasranama 9), lotus feet (pankajanghri) and lotus navel (pankajanabhi). Laksmi is his eternal consort with her duties of tending the Lord Narayana her seat being the lotus. The birth of Brahma was the major cosmic event. This aspect of Visnu, as the progenitor of Brahma was made possible through the instrumentality of the lotus. Here the lotus signifies the creative power conferred on Brahma by Visnu who passed on the task of creation of the world to him. Brahma is an aspect and part of Visnu himself—Brahma is a creator and Visnu being the protector he also protects Brahma who is a part of Himself. (Bhagvata Purana III, 20,14 and Mahabharata III 272, 44 & XII, 207,13). In the Deograh representation of Visnu Anantasayin as well as similar Padmanabha manifestations, Visnu is shown in deep slumber protected by Ananta the serpent who dwells in Patala and is like the lotus a product of the waters. On Visnu from his navel[10] sprouts a lotus which generates, by itself, Brahma the creative aspect of Trinity. Visnudharmottara Purana gives a version of the birth of Brahma as follows:

"There was once a dispute between the Visnu and Brahma, each contesting to be the master of the world. If

[10] Navel is the seat of life force, as explained in Satapathabrahmana(V VIII 1 9) It is also the centre of life breath Prana(Hiranyakesin Ghyasutra 1 6 24 1)
you do not recognize me’, said Visnu, ‘you enter my stomach and find out or else I shall enter your stomach. Every thing is contained in my stomach’.

Visnu entered Brahma’s stomach and emerged next moment and asked Brahma to enter into his stomach as he reclined on the great serpent. With no choice Brahma entered, as if bonded. There he saw the whole earth with mountains, jungles, oceans, rivers, netherlands and middlelands. Having seen these, Brahma wished to come out. He saw skies moving without any support. Having been tired by these movements, Brahma sought refuge into Him and found Visnu’s body without an outlet and having no power to come out therefrom, he sought Visnu’s refuge. Then Brahma saw a small aperture, minuter than the tip of a hair, out of which he came out. The medium of Brahma’s emergence was stalk of a lotus. That lotus was born out of the lake of navel of Lord Vishnu, wherein petals were wide open and and moss was also growing. Since then Brahma is reputed as ‘born of the lotus’, as he emerged out of the lotus that emanated from the navel of the Lord. This lotus is mahamandala, the great expanse of the universe and its bud is the Mount Meru (Visnudharmottara 79.19.28). Description of birth of Brahma also occurs in Mahabharata III, 272.44 and XII.297.13, Brhaddevata V.154.155., Matsyapurana 169. The earliest of the Padmanabha representations do not go beyond the 5th century AD. However the historical antecedents of this idea can be traced to Sanchi and Amravati sculpture of the pre-Christian era. These which survive even till the Gupta period show long and meandering lotus stalks issuing forth from the mouth and navel of the yaksas. The Yaksas were held in high esteem and stood for all creative, nourishing and
auspicious things associated with water like the treasures, the lotus, the conch, the tortoise, the mythical makara fish which is half fish and half crocodile. Normally the Yaksas are also shown with a pitcher of water and platters of food. The Anantasayin statue at once exudes the cosmic tranquility and Visnu’s total unconcern and detachedness also he plays with the existence through the Maya and Lila. The Slumber is but the result of this deep contemplation on the nature of his own existence and universal cosmic phenomenon and gives him no time to go into minor acts like creation which function he delegates to Brahma. Being predominantly a product of the Gupta art the statue shows features which these artists were familiar with in their own regal environs, like the well arranged wig-like and curled hair, various necklaces and torques and jewellery including ear rings, armlets and hairbands. Visnu, the original God as he is, required a support or protection as he himself is manifestly unaware of his surroundings. This purpose is served by Ananta the great serpent. About Ananta’s powers the Visnu Purana (II ch 5) says that at the bottom of Patala there is a base and Tamasic form of Visnu called Adi Sesa. Thus the serpent is yet another form of Visnu himself. The Ananta is perhaps the only symbol available to the artists to conceptualise the pervasiveness of Visnu (incidentally, the name Visnu signifies he whose habit is to pervade or vyapana). Ananta has roots in Patala which is over 30,000 yojanas in extent. The extent of his size and powers becomes all the more apparent when we notice that he bears the whole nether world as if it were a mustard (Devi Bhagavat 8). He also has 1000 heads resplendent with gems which illuminate all the regions. Brahma’s birth is described in the Devi Purana (Skandha1). When Visnu was contemplating
about his cosmic tasks and roles Mahadevi with four hands and the weapons of Sankha (conch) chakra (wheel), gada (club) and padma (lotus) accompanied by the saktis appeared before Visnu and reminded him of his sattvic qualities and that Brahma would be born from his navel and whose quality should be rajoguna (activity, passion and motion). Accordingly from the navel of Visnu grew up a lotus flower wherein Brahma took a form.

The slumber of Visnu gives us a hint of the divine conception of time which is by human standards timeless. From the Bhagavata Purana (3rd Skandha) we learn that even Brahma the Creator is subject to birth and death. The life of Brahma is one Mahakalpa and his one day is a kalpa. In each day of Brahma are 14 manavantras each one with 71 caturyugas the four yugas being Krita, Trata, Dvapara, and Kali. The life span of Brahma can be detailed as

360 days of gods one deva vatsara
12000 deva vatsaras one caturyuga or 36 lakh human years
17 caturyugas one manvantara or Manu’s life span
14 manavantraras one kalpa or Brahma’s day
2 kalpas one day and one night of Brahma
360 Brahma days one Brahma year

As Brahma enjoys 120 years of life span, in human years it works out to 30 crores 9 lakhs 17 thousand 376 years (Bhagvata ch.3). Half of Brahma’s life span is a padma. The
timeless quality of cosmic tasks is reimposed through the medium of lotus, which creates Brahma, counts his time and sets him on his creative endeavours.

Visnu, although the ultimate manager of creation was forced to take up incarnations to protect the world, due to the curse of Bhrigu which Visnu earned due to the sin of woman slaughter (Devi Bh. Ch. 4). One of his important incarnations is that of the boar. The boar aspect of Visnu is illustrated in cave 3, Badami (Bijapur) when the earth is rescued by the cosmic boar. In this Chalukyan version Varaha steps on the coils of Adisesa who is on a dwarf between the legs of the god with the king and the queen. Varaha's rear hands hold up his emblem disc and the conch. The left hand in front holds a lotus on which rests the goddesss earth rescued from the primordial waters. Hiranyaksa the wicked son of Kasyapa fought with the devas being as asura himself and picked up the earth in his hands as a ball and went under the water. The devas had to pray then to Vishnu to redeem the earth. The boar jumped out of Brahma's nose through his breath and began to grow. It is this element of size of Varaha that captures our attention in this piece of art. The growth was first like that of an elephant and later as big as the mountain. After folding his mane he dived into the primordial waters in search of the earth which he smelt out and brought on his tusk. En route this incarnation of Visnu killed with his club the trouble maker Hiranyaksa and after emerging on the surface placed the lotus embedded earth firmly over the water. This firmness of existence was sought nowhere else than on the lotus. The lotus support given to the earth indicates that it was now safe from the predations of the Asuras and its safety was
confirmed by Visnu's incarnation in the shape of the boar. The fact that goddess earth, Prithvi, was on a lotus makes it a fit object for divine attention, and brings forth Visnu from his slumber to intervene in protecting his creation.

The Gajesdramoksa episode is the epitome of artistic imagination. The Deogarh representation which can be dated about 525 AD shows an elephant floundering in a marshy lotus pond in distress as his legs are in the coil of a Naga (serpent) couple. On the prayer of Gajendra the elephant king, Visnu arrives on the scene seated on his vehicle Garuda who wears snakes in his neck. In a bid to save Gajendra Visnu flings his disc which gets embedded in the chest of the Naga king. The grateful elephant holds up a lotus flower as an offering while the subdued Naga king folds his hands in reverence. Of the eight diggajas or guardians of the zones of Universe, Airavata with three others resides in the puskara (where lotuses grow) (Ch 12, Bhisma Parva). Airavata is related in many ways to the life of cosmos for example the ira fluid and is supposed to have been generated along with the other things like lotus from the churning of the milky ocean (Maha. 1.17; Visnu Purana I.9 Matsya 249.13-38; all referred to by Zimmer). The curious fact about Airavata is that it is white like milk or the lotus bloom and is capable of producing clouds. In fact elephants had the power in days of yore to fly like the winged birds till they were cursed by Dirghatapas, whose meditation in the Himalayas they disturbed. They also lost the power of changing their form (Mantangalila I).

In the Gajendra representation the elephant in the lotus pond is the sign of all life-giving power. Elephant's leg being caught by the Nagas is the metaphorical threat to the
existence itself and the guardian thereof. The Naga or the
snake creeps in the netherworld reminding of the issuing
forth of the grave. In sum, it is the life force and life matter
with tenacious vitality rejuvenating itself by repeatedly
casting off of its skin. In contrast to the snake is the eagle
(and the eagle king Garuda) which freely roams about in
the sky like a higher spiritual principle. The conflict of the
eagle and the serpent is that of sunforce against life force. In
fact, Garuda is the one who kills Nagas or serpents (is
Nagantaka or Bhujagantaka) and the one who devours
serpents. As a token of his trophy he wears the serpent as
an ornament. The traditional conflict between the Garuda
and the serpent should not blind us to the fact that Visnu is
linked with both. It is his all pervasive nature and his lila
which causes things. The hurling of his disc is the destruction
of his base elements that bog down the existential or
nourishing forces. How come Visnu for whom space is no
constraint has to travel on his vehicle Garuda? It is to kill
the serpent that the eagle instrumentality is required. In the
Bhagvata (VIII. ch 2) it is stated that the elephant was the
king Indradyumna cursed by Agatsya to become so for a
thousand years. Near the pond where this elephant lived
was a sage named Devala cursed Huhu to become a
crocodile. The elephant was trapped by the crocodile till he
was rescued by Sri Mahavisnu.

Even Garuda the king of birds and the vehicle of Visnu
has to be supported on a lotus seat. This is shown in
sculptural representations. Garuda is closely related to the
snakes as we have already seen. In fact the Mahabharata
story is that Kasyapa granted a boon to Vinata and Kadru
having been pleased by their services. Kadru chose thousand
nagas as her children while Vinita chose to have two sons more powerful and heroic than the sons of Kadru. One of these was Garuda. The story how Garuda became Visnu's vehicle is also related in the epics. To secure the freedom of his mother Vinita from slavery to the serpents Garuda had to procure amrita which was guarded by poisonous snakes. In this effort surya, moon, elephant, tortoise all assisted him. Visnu, pleased with his efforts during which he blinded the snakes guarding amrita granted him the boons sought i.e. being his vehicle and becoming immortal without drinking the nectar. The lotus pedestal given to Garuda is as it were a symbol of his devotion to Visnu. Garuda has the white lotus for this pedestal (sveta pasmoparisthitam, Sesa Samhita, 49.8). He has refulgent and golden accoutrement and colour of lotus pollen (supranah padmaragabhabh, Isvara Samhita 8.43). Even his eyes are like lotus leaves (Isvara Samhita 10.245), which is due to vrtta vaipulya i.e. roundness (Isvara Samhita 27.227). His right ear is adorned with the padma and the left ear by the mahapadma (Aniruddha Samhita 20.42, Sri Prasna 33.13.4). Garuda is the representation of Visnu's power and prayer to Garuda is automatically directed to Visnu.

In a Pandyan sculpture (cave no. 3 Badami) of Vinadhara Dakshinamurti, Narasimha is also shown wearing a lotus crown and resting his foot on a lotus pedestal. Narasimha represents the half man half-lion manifestation of Visnu. Narasimha appeared for the explicit purpose of protecting theism and people's faith in his supreme powers. In this he represents the ferocity that tatters godlessness and atheism in a trice and is endowed with the power of a lion but with the intellect and reasoning of a man. The legend concerns
Hiranyakasipu having obtained the boon that none except Visnu could kill him went on with the job of ridiculing Visnu’s devotees and torturing them. Unable to convert his devout son Prahlada into a Visnu-hater he tortured the young child by throwing him before mad elephants, poisonous snakes and even in the fire. Each time Visnu protected the child. At last Hiranyakasipsu kicked a pillar asking “where is your Visnu?” Before the child could reply Visnu appeared in the shape of Narasimha (Bhagwata Skandha VII Ch 8, 20 -22), opened the heart of the king of asuras with his fierce claws, tore open the stomach and wore a garland of his intestines. Being a savour, an upholder of godness, piety and godliness and to indicate a divine birth, Narasimha has a lotus pedestal. Not only that, he has a crown like a lotus bud, which assigns his temporal and spiritual power to accomplish the great task ahead of him as also his godhead nature.

Laksmi the consort of Visnu and the lotus goddess is characteristically shown seated on a lotus. Synonymns of Lakshmi are: Sri, Varada, Visnupatni, Vasuprada, Hiranyaprada, Swarnaprarakasa, Padmavasini, Padmahasta, Padmapriya, Muktalankara, Chandra, Surya, Bilvapriya, Isvari, Bhakti, Mukti, Vibhuti, Sridhi, samrddhi, Krsti, Prsti, Dhanada, Dhaneshwari, Sraddha, Bhogini, Bhogada, Savitri, Dhatri, Vidharti, Padma, Kamala among others. Perhaps one of the most expressive representations of Lakshmi is at Sanchi where all her characteristics of creativity, fertility, prosperity and abundance are revealed. She herself is on a full-blossomed lotus and lotuses in various stages of bloom are around her. The diggajas or guardian elephants of the directions are showering water on her with their trunks.
Holding a lotus in her right hand, she is also heavy hipped. The left foot which is supported by a lotus allows knees to swing exposing the lotus of her potent element. Right above this the medallion shows the purnaghata or the vessel of abundance. The Bharhut medallion is similar to this showing the lotus goddess standing on a full blown lotus. Two elephants on either side are showering water in an expression of joy and satisfaction. The goddess herself in a serene expression is pressing her breasts assuring plenty of milk of nourishment in an auspicious gesture. The whole medallion has lotus flowers emanating on all the sides. Lotus is predominantly her flower, maternal personification of all possibilities of existence, source and support of life. Ironically these aniconic representations of the universal mother goddess occur in Buddhist sculpture i.e. Sanchu, Bharhut, Mathura around second century, indicating her pervasiveness as an auspicious symbol. It has often been interpreted as of Buddhist nativity, but seems to be no more than a contamination of strong pre Buddhist sway and association. At once she represents the earth lotus and mother earth, the substance of existence fertilised by heavenly showers, heavenly as they come from elephants, once dwellers in the skies with clouds and vehicles of Indra. The Junagarh inscription opens with an invocation to Visnu who is the permanent home of lotus dwelling Laksmi. It goes on to compare Laksmi’s place on Vishnu’s chest as that of the moon on the Hara’s head. Laksmi and Sri are used equally. Laksmi Mahidhara Bhasya traces the origin of the word Laksmi and gives at least 30 synonyms of Laksmi. Laksmitantra gives over 50 equivalent of Laksmi. In Visnu’s thousand names 17 of them have Sri conjoints. Sri as the
consort of Visnu is eternal and the mother of earth. Although Sri appears in the Vedas as wealth or fame or prosperity as a goddess she appears only in the Puranas. In the Taittariya Samhita Sri and Laksmi are called Aditya’s consorts. According to the Satapatha Brahmana she is the daughter of Prajapati and the mother of Kama. In the Mahabharata (II.7.28) Sri is the stated to be living with Laksmi in Indra’s palace. According to Gonda, Sri is merely an auspicious symbol to be procured and retained by all divine and sovereign powers especially in the post-Vedic period. Patanjali in his Mahabhasya (I.4.3) makes many references to Laksmi and it appears that by the first century she had established her separate divine identity. Brahmajala Sutta gives the ritual for Laksmi worship. The origins of Sri are also traced to the churning of the milky ocean. Laksmi as the goddess of wealth is also a consort of Kubera. Gajalakshmi a variant of lotus goddess is also shown on a lotus. Thus the lotus seat is so popular that even Yamuna whose vehicle is the tortoise, is shown on a lotus.

In the iconographic representation of Visnu in His various manifestations which can be dated earliest to the start of the Christian era, we find him four armed with discus in the upper left hand in the coins of the Pancala king Visnumaitra (1st century BC). A second century Balarama icon shows a plough in the right hand and prodding stick or club in the left hand. Visnu can be worshipped in the abstract or concrete forms. Manifestations of his various attributes has been conceptualised with different symbols in different hands. The twenty four images of Visnu have attributes as hereunder. Lotus is a predominant attribute.
Visnu’s twenty four images

(as mentioned in the ancient texts showing the different objects held in the hands and their arrangements)

The objects held in the hand are identified as under:

S Sankha (conch), G Gada (mace), P Padma (lotus), C Chakra (discus or wheel).

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The texts represented in various columns:

column 1: Agni Purana
2: Pādma Purana
3: Chaturvarga Purana
4: Dharmindhu
5: Vriddingapita Smriti
6: Abhilasitartha Chintamani
7: Padma Purana
8: Rupa Mandana
9: Sidhartha Samhita

The association of lotus with Visnu is well known. However it also finds close association with Siva and his
various murtis. The Harihara aspect of Siva is shown in the temple of Osian at Jodhpur. The image which shows Siva standing on a lotus can be put at later eight century and belongs to the Pratihara period. This aspect stresses the fundamental unity of God. People may call God by various names like Brahma, Visnu and Siva but in essence they are all one. To deprecate narrow sectarian quarrels this syncretic god came into being. The right half of the image is that of Visnu. Invariably a lotus is shown in the upper left hand of such images (for instance at the Sangameswara temple at Mahakuta Mysore and the image at cave no. 3 at Badami). Siva himself is shown either holding a lotus bud or flower or as seated on the lotus. He is associated with the Vedic Rudra being most probably of pre-Aryan nativity and is a terrible god to be pacified. He is the god of medicine and has beneficial effects on propitiation. Siva incidentally means auspicious. Till sixth century BC (i.e. roughly the period of Smritis) the terrible aspect of Siva was emphasised. Ultimately he became an Aryan God, however with the destructive function. Siva appears more often than not in his phallic form. The Rgveda mentions people who had a god in the phallus (Sisna -devah). The Svetavatara Upanishad speaks of god Isana as a deity presiding over yoni i.e. every creative cause. The phallic symbol is sometimes supported by the lotus which also sometimes appears at the union. The lotus is here the symbol of ultimate union of the male and female elements and principles, and the cause of earthly existence. A lintel relief found at Vat En Khna Cambodia shows a Sivalinga, the yoni of which is shaped like a lotus, as though the linga is the root. This emphasises the vegetal nature of both. The usual explanation of the linga is that it
is shown penetrating the yoni in a copulative symbolism, but iconographically the linga with its head upwards is contradictory as the linga is jutting away. This is more akin to the vegetal nature, which like the lotus, grows away from the base and not towards it. Even where Siva does not appear in a phallic form he is seen supported by lotus seat as in the ninth century Pallava sculpture of Daksinamurty as Virattanesvara at Tiruttani, Chinglepet. It is in his multifarious aspects with Parvati that Siva normally is shown in his image form. The Siva sakti images as they are called show the couple sitting in close embrace regarding each other with intense emotion, gazing with deep and everlasting rapture they are imbued with the secret knowledge that though seemingly two they are fundamentally one. All the qualities and contracts of life have been created for the sake of the universe or its creations. In other images of Siva and Parvati also a lotus pedestal is shown. In one sculpture Parvati appears with a lotus bud offering it as a token of her affection to Siva. Here it may be considered as the offering of all the aspects of Sri or Lakshmi which Parvati possesses, the energising or the active element to Siva. Another interesting image is that of Parvati worshipping the Siva linga and carrying the image of Siva and Ganesa. This is from Baijanth Almora on the Sarju river bank and dated from the ninth century. When Siva apppears as Lingodbhavamurti, Siva rises from the depths and penetrates into the sky and through the sky into the highest heaven. This reminds us of the primeval tree which extends into the farthest quarters of the universe and the lotus stalk to which it can be likened. Some of the Siva images are those of Nataraja or the Nagesa aspect. These are also supported by
the lotus or have lotus flower or bud in hand. Some bronze tridents in Bengal have been shown to have lotus buds at the extremity of the prongs. The trident is one of the important weapons of Siva.

The various Nataraja bronzes at the Government museum Madras are all lotus supported. Siva is Nataraja i.e. the Lord of Dances and is supposed to have danced in all the 108 modes mentioned in the Bharata’s Nrittyasastra. Dancing transforms the whole being of Siva which becomes magically endowed and makes it a creative art; by making the dancer assume the thought, being and action of the desired image or role. Since Siva is a cosmic dancer his dynamic and rhythmic motion generates forces which create, maintain and dissolve the world. In all the Nataraja images there is the little drum that keeps time and produces the rhythm needed for the dance. Sound from the drum is the conveyer of divine, mystic knowledge and represents the first thing of creation i.e. ether. In the upper left hand is carried flame, another natural element which is capable of destruction of the worlds. The two upper hands are well balanced in the ruthless contradiction of creation and destruction. The other right hand makes a fear not (abhaya) gesture while the other left hand points to the foot wherein lies salvation of the devotee. The dwarfish demon of ignorance lies under his foot being destroyed by Siva’s dance. The lotus pedestal is an appropriate background to the intense cosmic symbolism, the five energy consuming activities of creation, maintenance, destruction, concealment of the True Being behind the apparition, and anugraha acknowledgement of the favour of the devotee. Lotus symbolises the cosmic processes of
creation, maintenance and destruction. It also shows concealment i.e. the outer frail being does not reveal the self-generating power. Lotus giving itself away to the honeycollecting bee is amendable to grant its boons to anyone desiring them. Siva’s dance is not necessarily benign. It can also be terrific or wrathful in the Tandava form.

The Daksinamurti form of Siva has a vina in his hand. One image of Siva as Vinadhara is from Alampur, Mahbubnagar, which belongs to the mid-seventh century. The Vyakhana Daksinamurti holds a lotus in the left hand and emphasises the role of Siva as a master of music, dance and other sciences. As Arunaclesvara Siva is also entitled to the lotus seat. An image as dweller of Kadambavana at Embur, South Arcot belonging to the Chola period i.e. about 935 AD shows a lotus seat. The benign form of Siva in sitting postures shows lotus in the hands of either Siva or Uma with whom he sits. In his Mahesa form as in Elephanta, Siva has Sakti on his side and she holds among other things a blue lotus. While as Nrittamurti or Nataraja he is not associated with lotus except in its use as a pedestal, in Daksina murti forms he has the lotus in his hand. In Ardhanarishvara poses Uma holds a blue lotus. As Sarabhasa he has a lotus in one of the 16 left-sided hands. Siva has no lotus in the hand in his Panca Brahma or Five Aspects, nor in his Rudra or Bhairava forms. Subrahmanya or Skanda has a lotus in his hands and in some representations he sits on the lotus.

Parvati or Siva’s consort in her various forms and manifestations as Durga, Chandi, Tripurasundari also has a
lotus seat. All these are aspects of Devi whose origins are unexplained. But she is the aggressive aspect of the Universal Mother or the Mother of the World. When Mahisasura, the king of Asuras who had obtained a boon from Brahma that he would be killed by no man, drove out the Devas, the gods assembled to discuss how he should be destroyed. Thus was Durga or Mahisasuramardini (destroyer of Mahisa demon) born. This was a combination of all forces which emanated from all gods like Visnu, Siva, Kubera, Varuna and others and she had eighteen arms endowed with all types of weapons (Markandeya Purana). Acoording to another source, She is described as being born of the union of three goddesses. Durga, Chandi and the benign aspect of Devi i.e. Tripurasundari all of them have the lotus throne indicating the divine birth and all temporal and divine powers with which to destroy evil and protect the law abiding and good forces on earth. While Durga has the lotus throne, Chandi show a lotus springing from the feet, and Tripurasundari has lotus in her hand.

Sarasvati the goddess who though her Vak created name and form has a lotus seat, in other words is the source from Vak was generated or emitted. Sarasvati the consort of Prajapati after her task retreated into her cosmic aquatic abode where lotus also dwells.

It is not the gods and major divinities alone that are entitled to lotus in sculptural representations, Lotus throne can also be found for minor deities, lokapalas, apsaras, dancers, yaksas and nymphs. Apsara are shown on lotus leaves on the porches of Badoli, Chitorgarh in a late ninth century sculpture. An elegant Makara torana arch leads to
the porch. Two and four large apsaras appear below the pillar standing on lotus leaves. Lotus borne Yaksas are fairly common especially in Sanchi and Amravati carvings. The association of Yaksas with water treasures and the life power was then quite strong. Yaksas are the guardians of the quarters and Kubera the chief of the Yaksas guards the northern quarters. Furthermore the lotus is an appropriate vehicle for Kubera and a befitting representation of the quarters as it represents the earth itself in its expanse. A lovely deva-attendant is shown standing on a lotus plant pedestal in a Rajsthan image around tenth century AD. Along the ambulatory in the Visvanath temple built by the king Dharga in 1002 on a lotus is a lovely nymph painting the sole of her foot. Even dancers are shown on lotuses. In all these cases lotus or its leaf serves as a pedestal indicating the earthly or semiearthly existence of these beings.

The lotus motif is used as a seat and as a power to be held in the hand. Almost all the gods are shown as lotus seated. Lotus in hand is a powerful way of indicating spiritual or temporal power. Padmahasta and Padmapani names and attributes of some divinities stress this aspect. In Visnu iconography, each image has a different hand which holds the lotus. The Silparatana has recommended that Naravaraha should be shown with a lotus, and Agnipurana goes further to specify that the left hand should hold the lotus. A Narasimha image must carry a lotus in hand and when represented as Ayudhapurusa, the idol should be standing and close to the right foot of the lotus goddess Laksmi who bestows power. Visnudharmottara Purana says that the Trivikrama image of Visnu must carry a lotus. Lotus mark appears on the palm and sole of the Buddha. Lotus is
invariably carved out in Hindu goddesses like Ksemakari, Durga, Bhadrakali, Mahakali, Amba, Sarva Mangala and Parvati. In case of Laksmi (Lotus goddess) lotus appears as the seat, in the hands, and round the neck as a garland. Mother Earth (Bhudevi) has a lotus in her hand and a lotus seat. Vaisnavi Devi, Indrani and Kumari have lotuses in hand. Daksinamurti, Brahma and Varuna must have lotus seats too. Lotus in hand is thus an auspicious symbol communicating limitless powers and prosperity. The powers of lotus are transmitted to the holder also. Gayatri with two lotuses in hands shows wealth-bestowing powers. Varuna is four handed holding the lotus and fetter pasa in his right hand, conch and ratna patra (jewel-vessel) in his left hand. His wife Gouri or Varuni has a blue lotus in hand and stands on a makara (Visnu Dharmottara II.52).
6 LOTUS IN BUDDHIST THOUGHT AND LEGEND

Before going into the role of lotus in Buddhist philosophy it would be apt to stress that the Buddhist conceptualisation can be viewed as an extension of the prevailing Hindu ideas. In fact the Buddha himself has been assimilated into Hinduism as an incarnation of Visnu. There is therefore an ontological equivalence in Hindu and Buddhist legends. Just as the primeval water (which is the abode of Narayana, of the waters) brings forth the Creator Brahma who invokes the universe so the essence of the enlightenment bursts within the shape of the Buddha who as Tathagatha (meaning thus manifest) is the saviour of people trapped in existence. Buddha’s birth is anticipated in the Rgveda (IV. 18.1-2). Buddha’s ‘I will go forth traversly from the side’. Lateral procession is also mentioned in other places (IV.10.4; X,129.5) and Jaiminiyopanished Brahmana (I.29). In Buddhism a trinity of images is shown with the Buddha in the middle and two Bodhisattvas on either side seated on lotuses, rising from a common stem. The Buddha triad reminds one of the Hindu trinity, as also the representation of the unity of the primordial Agni through the several angels. Buddha preaching Bodhisattvas on Mount Gradrakuta represented at Karli (500 AD) is seated on the lion throne with Avalokitesvara on the left and Maitesrya on the right. All have lotus supports. This conjures an image of the Hindu Brahma-Visnu-Mahesa trinity. The stem of the Buddha lotus gives a hint of the lotus supporting Brahma and the Naga support to the same reminds one of the Ananta couch of Visnu. The Padmagarbha of Amitabha reminds one of the Garbhah Matuh of the Rgveda (VI.16.35). Where lotus symbolises divine knowledge in Hindu imagery for Buddha
it stands for enlightenment. The existence of the lotus nymbus or halo in many Buddha images merely symbolises the two worlds upper and nether, as in Hinduism where they represent Agni as lotus of this earth and sun as the lotus of the yonder sky.

Some Buddha images show lotus support extending down to the Nagas, and this represents an essentially Hindu visualisation. The birth of Buddha which is divine, unnatural and supramundane is nothing new. The Virgin Mother exists in Christianity as well as in Hinduism. Buddha as the Universal Man and Maya as the Universal Mother appear to be familiar concepts. Buddha is Adityabandhu and Suryavamsin (i.e. kinsman of the supernal sun and ‘of the solar race’). It is also noteworthy that Buddha’s mother was Mayadevi (Lady Maya) and her sister was Prajapati. Buddha has many things in common with Agni, while Buddha is Angirasa ‘descendant of the gleed’, Agni is Angirastama ‘best of the gleeds’. The Buddhist conception of the wheel as dharma appears to have evolved from the Hindu concept of Sun or time as the upholder of Dharma. The acceptance of Buddha as a Hindu avatar is apparent from the panel in cave no. 90 at Ellora, which illustrates the visit of Sakra (or Indra) to the Buddha. Indra, together with Vajra, his symbol, Panchasikha the divine harpist and a female cymbalist are seated at the feet of Buddha, who, as usual, occupies a lotus seat and holds his hands in a teaching gesture. The stem of the lotus extends till the Patala (netherworld) and two nagas and naganis hold the bottom of the stem in an idea, obviously old by the time the image was carved. According to Brhat Samhita, Buddha, like the father of the world, deserves a lotus seat. Buddha representation at Amaravati and
Nagarjunakonda (i.e. as a pillar of fire resting on a pair of feet and surmounted by a lotus and a wheel over which is the tiratna) remind of the lotus emblem of Brahma and the Trivikrama strides of Visnu.

In Buddhism lotus symbolism is diverse. It is at once a symbol of Buddha himself or the Dharma which revolves like a wheel. Religiosity and the other-worldliness or an attempt to escape the terrestrial cycle of birth and death is symbolised in the budding of lotuses. Whenever a Bodhisattva is born, a lotus flower blooms. Each Buddhist god is seated on a lotus otherwise how could he forestall the cycle of the world?

Lotus as an indicator of reincarnative deity has already been hinted at. The repeated blooming of lotus captures the cosmological dynamism as well as the flow the universe is undergoing. The lotus plant carries the flowers, the leaf as well as the fruit of the past actions. The lotus rhizome is often depicted in a wave like manner, the wave being nothing else than reincarnation and a chord as it were of the world wheel typifying the universal law.

As lotus represents the beauty and perfection rising from the muddy waters, so does the Buddha appear as a receptacle of wisdom and enlightenment, with highest human attainment. At the same time, he is rooted in this world on an earthly plane. The two elements i.e. earthly existence and transcendental plane are simultaneously shown in the milling of lotus as a pedestal. The lotus pedestal for the Buddha occurs in the beginning around the 2nd or 3rd century A.D. when it replaced the lion throne (in the
Amaravati pillar for instance) perhaps indicating the spread of Mahayana Buddhism.

Earlier Buddha was shown on a simple throne or on a lion or under a Mahabodhi tree. In the Margharsana images, after the 2nd century A.D. he appears with a lotus throne or lotus and lion throne or a lotus pedestal. The lotus also replaces wheel as an anthropomorphic symbol on the feet and on the palms of the hand. Almost from the beginning of the Buddhist iconography Buddha is shown seated in Padmasana or Kamalasana. Not only the Buddha but Bodhisattvas or the future Buddhas are to be lotus-seated, seated in the cup of the lotus or lion throne in paradise (SP 419). Amitabha is seated on the glistening cup of a lotus in paradise where sons of the conqueror come into existence, seated in the pure cups of lotuses’ (SP XXIV.31.32, Mahasukhavati Vyuha 16.40.41).

The being in the lotus of Buddha is upapadika appearing than anupattika i.e. coming into existence, in other words his birth is divine. Buddha is thus grounded in existence or water. It may be added that padmasana or even vajrasana the pose of Buddha and Bodhisattvas is superior to sukhana or the seat of the ease. The lotus throne may be a lotus cushion or supported by an axis reaching into the depths of the netherworld. In a sense from the Karli representation earlier mentioned we may say that this axis leads to later pillars. And since this axis is nothing else but Mount Meru on which the earth rests the pillar can be seen as supports of the universe. In the double lotus support, the lower lotus is meant to indicate the nirmanakaya level of
manifestations while the upper lotus is to indicate the heavenly sambhogakaya level of manifestation. The triple lotus support shows three levels of support i.e. the nether waters, the upper waters and the primordial waters. The lotus cushion lends to Buddha will power and relentlessness determination especially when coupled with the lion throne.

It is only in the Ceylonese images of Buddha that we find absence of lotus at the base. Lotus support in Mahayana Buddhism has the additional functions of not only the fact that after having reached enlightenment he and other Bodhisattvas refused to pass into nirvana but sacrificed their own nirvana to remain eternally manifest i.e. on a lotus to rescue the human souls from every sphere of universe with their enlightening principles and symbolic existence. The Mahayana influence was so great that a lotus seat or pedestal later became a general optional element. In Tibet where Mahayana predominates the lotus pedestal was extended to all types of saviours and minor tutelary deities representing highest spiritual essence.

Buddhists in their worship find three objects worthy of venerations: i. saririka (physical remains), ii. parabhogika (objects of use), and iii. uddesika (symbols). Since i. and ii. are rare, the Buddhists naturally turned to symbolic representations of the Buddha and his principles found in lotus a handy instrument therefor.

In the Buddhist legend, closely corresponding to the Hindu conception Bodhisattva’s navel replaces the life bearing waters. In the night of the Great Departure, the
Bodhisattva had five dreams, the second of which showed him how from his navel a lotus rose right up to the heaven of Akanistha gods.

The founding of Nepal is also explained in lotus terminology. The valley in Nepal which is now fertile and populous, in older times was so full of water that it became the lake Nagavasa, abode of the holy serpent Karkotaka. The lake bore various plants, but not lotus. The Buddha Vivasvin threw a grain of seed in the lake which was later to produce a flower bearing svayambhū, lord of Agnistanbhuvana. From the seed sprang a magic lotus of the size of a cart wheel, with ten thousand stamens, diamonds at the top, pearls below and thousand rubies in the middle. From its calyx rose a flame more radiant than the sun—none other than the Adi Buddha. Bodhisattva Manjisiri who came later wanted to see the lotus completely and caused the lake to dry up. The lotus rose from the fertile soil bearing svayambhu, with a well near its root, revealing Guhyeswari, the Lady of the Mysteries.

In another Buddhist legend, lotus serves the same function as the Hindu concept of the Tree of Life. Thus Lalitavistara (64,11) describes: In the same night when the Bodhisattva descended into his mother’s womb, a lotus sprang up rising from the waters below cleaving the earth over sixty eight times hundred thousand yojanas up to the Brahma’s heaven. All the essence of power immanent in the primordial matter of the three times thousands of worlds, all this lay like a drop of honey on this huge lotus. This cosmic lotus is central to Buddhist motifs as is represented say in the great miracle of Sravati. The Sravasti miracle
highlights the manifestations of one thousand Buddhas who are supposed to bloom in Bhadrakalpa in the shape of lotuses, heralding the coming spirituality. Pure and pious lotus alone can produce Buddhas. The expanse of the lotus is linked to growth of the Buddhist doctrine. The lotus as a metaphor for universal expanse or space has already been indicated. Lotus is also a source of religion. Lotus is the universe, any understanding of which is can be achieved by concentrating on the lotus of existence. The lotus is a symbol of life-bestowal from the regions unknown and unseen by the human eye (but of course to be sought by the eye of the mind). At any point a lotus or Buddha signifying enlightenment can be born. The life force that pervades the entire lotus plant and reaches the most distant corners of the lotus petals is nothing but the self-sustaining force of Buddhism and the Buddhist nirvana. The individualising form and inherent quality of every worldly object including man is derived out of the lotus which is the source of all life force. The greatness of Buddhism lies in the profundity of religion or excellence of its founder who sought not didactic skills or eloquence of communication but in identification and relationship with the lotus.

Lotus is primarily a symbol of creation and a surrogate for the divine power with which to promote godly designs. In Buddhism lotus has a role as i. a seat ii. an instrument of power to be held and iii. the hymnal formula ‘om mani padme hum’ the jewel of the lotus which the bestower of all the positions and the attainments desirable.

The Buddhist formula ‘om mani padme hum’ which may be rendered as ‘Hail the jewel in the lotus’ is pregnant
with meaning. It symbolises the lotus base of Buddha with all the meanings assigned to it in the Buddhist philosophy. According to Getty Alice\textsuperscript{[11]} it has six syllables to the six regions of beings which the lotus can penetrate and bring about final liberation from the wheel of life. Each syllable of the hymn is also identified with a colour i.e. om while, ma blue, ni yellow, pad green, me red and hum black, to represent the spectrum of colours available in the world. To each of these colours is also associated a finger and string of qualities and sounds. Om is not new to a student of Hindu culture. It signifies the original sound the combination of three sounds AU and M and the trinity of Brahma (M), Visnu (A) and Mahesa (U). In Buddhism also it stands for the Buddhist trinity of the Buddha, Dhamma his doctrine, and the Sangha the community. In the great void, the sound AUM or OM was the first creation, like the Adi Buddha. Om is also identified with the Brahman, the Veda and the Isvara of the Yoga system. Hum is the sound to rid the world of the demons of evil and ignorance and the remaining words Mani Padme confirm the fact that the jewel that is Buddha has appeared in the lotus that is the world. There is also the lotus of the Good Law, i.e. the Saddharma Pundarika, which is one of the most sacred and authoritative writings of Mahayanism. Lotus is therefore identical with the Good Law of Buddhism. The lotus referred to here is not the manifest one which grows in the waters but the cosmic lotus which gave birth to the cosmic tree which on its pillar bears Dharma. The lotus of the good law contains not only the body of the historical Buddhas but the bodies

of all the past and future Buddhas whom it causes 'to ripen on it'. The lotus of the good law contains the pre-existing Dharma which gave rise to the Buddha and is the origin of the Tathagatas. Since all Buddha manifestations are the product of the lotus of the good law, they are essentially one and coeval with the Dharma. As envisaged in the Srasvati miracle, Buddhas arise as fruits of the tree of Dharma and draw sustenance from the same root—i.e. the lotus of the Good Law which is the origin and support of all existence.

Lotus as an instrument of power to be held in the hand derived directly from the mudra specifications from the Buddha statues. In the Buddhist iconography mudra is used to identify the Bodhisattva as also to invoke a specific legend or episode. Buddha and Bodhisattva are sometimes shown with lotus in hand signifying power and knowledge.

Lotus as Buddha's identity is a well-developed subject of inquiry. The Dhyani Buddhas sit on the lotus in deep meditation with legs crossed. The eyes are either closed or half-closed concentrating on the tip of the nose.

Amitabha is the oldest of the meditating Buddhas in the Sukhavati heaven. He is presiding over the present age of Bhadrakalpa and is the embodiment of the cosmic element Samjna the vital fluid and the summer season and is identified with the red colour. In iconographic representations he has a lotus symbol, hands are in dhyana mudra and he has a bowl of lotus and a cup of lotus full of nectar in the left hand. Another emanating goddess Tarodbhava Kurukula holds a red lotus in her right hand.
The Astabhuja Kurukula has lotus in one of his left hands. Amitabha is praying in the western paradise where any person who prays to Amitabha or utters the lotus formula will be born as a lotus calyx. Such is Amitabha’s vow. On reaching the western paradise or the pure land he can listen to the enlightening teaching and seek release. All reborn in Amitabha’s paradise are entitled to the lotus throne symbolising beatitude and omniscience. Unlike other Buddhas who passed away after reaching Amitabha continues to rescue creatures from the worldly cycle, his effectiveness being adequate to cater to the increasing number to be rescued. This blissful paradise is a vast lotus pond of creative energies which confers on the devotees power to be reborn to reach fulfilment through the compassion in his heart. Amitabha is the only dhyani Buddha to have a lotus symbol in hand.

Avalokiteswara or Padampani is the most popular of the Buddhist Bodhisattvas. As his name signifies, the lotus is his symbol and he holds a lotus in his left hand. His colour is white, and he resides in the patalaka (located somewhere near Amaravati). Avalokitesvara is the son of Dhyani Buddha Amitabha and his sakti Pandara is emerging as a ray of light from Amitabha’s right eye. His rule is to last till Maitreya is born in this world five thousand years later. Avalokitesvara as a Bodhisattva can be said to have arisen in the Asokan period around 1000 AD. His duty is to look around (Avalokana) and instruct people. His mantra is ‘om mani padme hum’, which is his hrdaya (the deepest recess of his heart), and the essence of all knowledge. Becoming popular from 3rd century onwards, by the 7th century he had gained immense popularity. One of the finest.
sculptural representations of Avalokitesvara (Padmapani) occurs in the litany at cave no.9 at Ellora, Aurangabad. Here he stands on a lotus pedestal wherefrom also grows a lotus creeper with flower growing as high as his shoulders. Above him sits Buddha also on a lotus seat. Like Amitabha he is selfless and does not seek nirvana in the interest of men. He is the saviour who sheds tears for the sufferers. He is the compassionate Bodhisattva who takes the devotees to nirvana.

Various forms of Avalokitesvara also have lotus attributes. Sadaskari Lokesvara has the same rosary and lotus symbols. Simhananada has the symbols of sword on lotus and trident entwined by snake. Khasarpana and Lokanatha also have the lotus symbols. Halahala has lotus in one of his left hands and has on his right side skull cap on lotus. The Padmanartesvara form of Avalokitesvara has double lotus in all his 18 hands. The Raktalokesvara has in his left hand a red lotus and opens its petals with the right. Red lotus is also in the left hand of Mayajala Krama. Vajradharma has in his left hand a lotus with sixteen petals and a lotus flower blossoms in his right hand lagainst his chest. Avalokitesvara as the Bodhisattva of compassion has images in many South Asian countries.

The other Bodhsattvas are also lotus related. Manjusri was born from a lotus and has a book on a lotus in the left hand. Vajrapani carried vajra the thunderbolt but that is on a lotus; and he is always shown with Buddha Amita or Padmapani.

The Buddhist Saktis are the development of the
Vajrayana and entered the dhyani Buddhas capable of raising akula with the help of his sakti. Amitabha belongs to the lotus family. His sakti Pandara and his Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara have lotus symbols. With the rise of Tantrism and esoteric Buddhism and adoration of the female principle came goddess Tara who by the 7th century A.D. had two forms white and blue. White Tara was acknowledged as the sakti of Avalotitesvara. The belief that prayers are more efficacious when god and his sakti are worshipped together spread leading to the twin images of Buddha and his sakti as in Yak-yum.

Tara helps the devotees to cross the ocean of existence and the Tibetan of her name reads ‘saviouress’. One of the types of Taras the white Tara has a full blown lotus as symbol and Green Tara has utpala (water lily) with closed petals, the former representing day and the latter night. White Tara is the consort of Avalokitesvara. Interestingly in Hindu literature Tara stands for sea-goddess. Of the six saktis, only Pandara, Tara and Lochana have lotuses in hands. Dhyani Buddha Aksobhya holds lotus in one of his left hands. He is angry and terrible and is shown in sculpture trampling Siva, Indra, Indrani, Sri among others. Terrible goddess Mahacina Tara and emanation of Aksobhya has lotus and skull cap in her left hand and has the corpse for her vehicle. But his Prajanaparmita forms have lotus and book as symbols. The only aspect of Buddha Virocana who have lotus in the upper left hand are Gunda and Drahamatraka. All Tara emanations of Amoghasidhi Buddha have the lotus association. The Paramitas were created to satisfy the zeal for iconic worship of the Vajrayanists. Of the twelve Paramitas who signify virtues men must cultivate, Prajnaparamita is the most
popular and is symbolised by a manuscript on lotus. All the ten Buddhist guardians of the gates have lotus in their hands.

Apart from the lotus, the Buddhists attach great importance to the wheel and the mandala. Of the Buddha's acceptance of the gift of the flowers it is said that he converted the flowers into wheels which floated in mid-air forming into a canopy over his head. The wheel at once symbolises the earthly life or existence and the cycle of regeneration and rebirth. We have already hinted at this aspect of the wheel. When the lotus blooms, its petals form a circle, cakra or wheel and symbolises the universal perfect law. For the wheel by definition is round and ever represents knowledge of the highest order.

Dharma is cakra or wheel. Buddha is the one who sets the wheel of Dharma rolling and then it gathers momentum and takes the Vehicles of the lives of the devotees on the path of Nirvana and birthlessness. Wheel or cakra is used as the symbol of Buddha when inscribed on his footprints (for instance Buddha paduka at Amravati dated about 100 BC). The famous Sarnath lion of Asoka now accepted by India as official emblem has a wheel. Wheel is a tide of all things that exist (Aitaraya Brahmana II.17). Visnu sets in motion the rounded wheel with ninety steeds (days in quarter) (RV I.155.6). If the wheel stands for the flow of time then wheel is also the symbol of the sun. The sun would not be able to mobilise his chariot except with the help of wheel—the Konark sun temple shows wheel marvellously carved out as if the whole structure is being carved by them. Savitri or the sun is 'vartamanah' or revolving (RV I. 155.6). Wheel is the roundness of the world, the totality of all existences and

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possibilities, and in three dimensions almost a perfection of a figure. Kalacakra, the wheel of time is used in a destructive sense and the wheel of fortune is a popular English phrase. The wheel shows how a consciousness could move from the undimensioned point to the indefinite circumference. Enlightenment seems to consist in reaching the centre of the wheel by progressive self-extinction to the point where real knowledge lies. The centripetal forces force men to the circumference but knowledge beckons him to the bindu or the point in the middle. Sitting on the lotus Buddha is in fact sitting on the nave or hub of the wheel as a director of existence. Bhaskara speaks of Garbhodvara and the original Buddhist caves had entrances shaped like a lotus flower. The nave of the wheel contains the essential principles: ‘on the chariot’s axle point depends the deathless (principle)’ (RV I.35.6) and in His ‘all creative utterances (kavya) inhere as does the nave or centre, the Buddha himself does not move’; ‘on whom the parts stand fast; as it were spokes on the nave of the wheel Him I deem the person to be known’ (Prasna Upa .VI.6). Buddha is the cakravati one who turns the wheel analogous to the terrestrial ‘universal ruler’. The revolution of the wheel depends on the conjoint principles which are also antagonistic like purusa and pakriti, sattva and tamas, I and ‘not I’, subject and matter etc. The two opposite principles are in essence one, with dual phenomenal appearance. Nirvana and samsara are but contrary aspects of the self, whose reality is beyond both. The accomplished teacher or philosopher realises the importance of not getting caught in the opposite principles of ignorance and enlightenment. The wheel is the dynamic force which itself is supported by the lotus. Such a representation appears in
Buddhist art and sculpture. Early Buddhist art also shows the dharmacakra supported by a pillar on which are the lions. Buddha sits on the navel of the world wheel (Buddha Carita XIII.68). His throne is thus is the centre of the universe, the navel actually is the navel of immortality. The centre of the wheel is the consciousness which can be reached by many paths (spokes). This wheel is the lotus, the lotus of the heart. Buddha therefore dwells ‘antarbhasya’ i.e. within you. The circle in its perfection is the perfect wisdom of the Buddha.

The lotus is also shown as supporting the conch, as in Ajanta. This can be seen as a representation of the two worlds, the lotus representing the nether world and the conch signifying the ether and through it the other upper world.

Tantrism was also influenced by the lotus symbolism. Asanga first conceived of a mystic doctrine based on yoga practices and Mahayanist ideas. The Tantras spread his doctrine which consisted of the exaltation of the Goddess. A large part of the Tantric practices were secret and sought to achieve identification with the supreme. Lotus in Tantrism is a symbol of womanhood which is also confirmed by Satapatha Brahmana which says that lotus is the womb. The diamond placed on the lotus in the Buddhist Tantra then represents the phallus. The coalescing of the two in a symphysical articulation is the symbol of male-female combination or unity of wisdom with practice. The Tantric worshipper is supposed to imagine himself as having purified his body by suffusing all the lotuses with the awakened sakti.
Tantric worship includes dhyana (concentration), mantra (phoenimical formula), nyasa (conjugation of limbs into various symbolic postures), yantra (geometrical symbolism) and mudra (formation of limbs analogous to various shape). All these elements are necessary to achieve the supreme unity which is the end of Tantra.

Lotus is always shown in the mandala at the centre as well as on the ends of the pericarps. The mandala is a magico-symbolic structure which contains three mysteries of thought, word and act, inseparable aspects of the great unity which is the fundamental esoteric doctrine (samata). The mandala is a geometric disposition of symbolic attributes, syllables and images with magical powers. Just as the lotus signifies knowledge and ultimate unity of the petals to the central stalk, so the mandala is supposed to direct the devotee along the mystical path to union with the supreme deity.

Mudra literature is also influenced by lotus symbolism. Padmasana is the most popular asana found on the deities Hindu and Buddhist. It gives fixity and firmness. There are four types of hand clasps linked with the lotus. The lotus also called the womb fist (renge kenin in Japanese) is taken as the mother sign of the mandala. Fingers are folded into a fist with the thumb against the side of the index finger. The whole image is that of an impounded lotus. The outer bond clasp leaves some space between the hands. The gesture is related to the lotus indicating the moon on the lotus the eight fingers being lotus leaves. Visnudharmottara Purana mentions the mudra named pankaja(III.33.75), padma (III.33.12) padmakosa (II.26.2. and 12) which is made be
bending the finger ends and thumbs together with the nails opening outwards (III.26.34).

Lotus in yoga

Yoga elevates our body to raise progressively by culturing it favourably to spiritual discipline. A very easy method found is altering or agitating the wheels or lotus in our body. There are six such lotuses in our body. It resembles a flower in form and interposed on the spinal chord by sushumna nerves. The names of these lotuses are: muladhara, svadhistana, anahata, visudhi and ajna. The sum total of being is regulated by the interaction of these calyxes in the body. The lotus on them indicts an elevated state of life in the spiritual domain. Scholars have tried to identify these lotuses in our body with some of the nerves and arteries when the altered power comes into contact with these lotuses a new spiritual energy is produced. This energy when released progresses upward and flows from the wheel or lotuses in contact. The petals of these lotuses are identified with the alphabet.

A thousand petalled lotus is situated on and over the susumna. This thousand petalled lotus is the ultimate and seventh lotus. According to the yoga philosophy the kundalini energy is always flowing in our body but when this energy overflows the kundalini gets awakened and gets stimulated. In this provoked state the powers of the organs are increased many times the sense objects with their attributes such as: earth and fragrance, liquid and taste, light and vision, wind and touch, space and sound. The whole human physiology can be established as an analogy.
2 desire and emotions, 3 mind, 4 ethical conduct 5 will power
and 6 power of discrimination can be classified into two:
lower lotuses related to the physical world (1, 2 and 3) and
higher (4, 5 and 6) which are related to the inner mind.

Ajna cakra is situated in the middle of the eyebrows.
This lotus is a two-petalled one. This is the situation of pa
and ka letters, and operates as the sixth organ. It is stated to
reside in the moon-zone and is proclaimed as the fountain
of nectar. Because of this nectar flow the potency of organs
is expanded inexhaustibly. It is also named Taraka. Yogic
operations are of two categories: Visible and Invisible. Murta
or visible yogic operation is incessant flow in all the veins of
the body; but the amurta or the invisible is beyond the
comprehension as it is expanded in inexhaustibly. It emanates
an inner light elevating to the celestial regions where Indra
reigns. The sound of Guru is heard here. The seed-letter of
this cakra or lotus is the pranava.

The anahata cakra resides in the heart—the central spot
of our entity. This is of the golden hue. Some scholars opine
that the colour is of the rose tinge. The ka and ca of the
alphabet and the first two letters of the ta classes constitute
their base. It is compared to a deer which is very popular
for its graceful and swift motion. It is also co-terminous
with the heart beats. This is hexagonal, is the repository of
the wind and has an azure shade. The seed letter is yam. In
this cakra the being wanders like a spider in the cobweb till
the highest wisdom is achieved. Through this lotus or cakra
the human divinises himself. It is the divine state where
God effects a descent to bestow grace upon His devitees.
All sound is generated out of the contact of two objects but
the sound that fills the air here is the sound without friction of any nature. This sound is om. This does find an utterance through lips but this om is the basic operative element at the earliest stage of creation. This can be heard or auditorily experienced in the heartlotus alone. The lotus seeds when transformed into beads of rosary gain undue efficacy to yield immediate favourable results.\(^{[12]}\)

In Jain literature and legend also lotus appears significantly. There are 24 Jain tirthankaras who have achieved the highest ideals of asceticism and self-denial. As a recognisable emblem lotus is associated with Padmaprabha the sixth Tirthankara. Blue lotus is also associated with Neminath. However the attendant yaksas/yaksinis of the following tirthankaras have lotus vehicles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Tirthankara</th>
<th>Name of Trithankara</th>
<th>Name of Yaksa/Yaksini</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Abhinandanathana</td>
<td>Kali or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vajrasarirakhala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Sumatinatha</td>
<td>Mahakali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>Sitalanatha</td>
<td>Brahma</td>
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<td>Asokamanavi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thirteen</td>
<td>Vimalanatha</td>
<td>Vairoti</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fourteen</td>
<td>Anantanatha</td>
<td>Anantamati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixteen</td>
<td>Santinatha</td>
<td>Nirvani</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eighteen</td>
<td>Anantanatha</td>
<td>Vijayadevi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nineteen</td>
<td>Mallinatha</td>
<td>Dharmapriya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aparajita</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In case of five yaksas i.e. Patala, Kinnara, Garuda,

\(^{[12]}\) Bhartiya Pratika Vidya p 262
Kubera, and Varuna lotus appears as an attribute in the hand. All these appear to be Hindu gods, relegated to the yaksa position. Seven of the Yaksinis (digambara) have lotus as an object in hand i.e. Gauri (Manavi), Chanda or Gandhari, Kandarpa (Manasi), Nirvani (Mahamanasi), Bala (Vijaya), Dharani (Tara) and Padmavati. However nine of the yaksinis all of the svetambera sect also have the lotus vehicle.
7. LOTUS IN FINE ARTS

Lotus is an effective medium to portray rightly the feelings of the artist, who etches them on stones, colours and other material, drawing inspiration from the role of lotus in lyrics, legends and poetic imagination. Poetic contours are captured by the artist to impress upon the viewer’s visual senses the emotional ecstacies of mental imagination. The veiled portion of the lotus stalk does not possess any place in literature but the suggestive sculptured lines disclose the charm of ripe perfection, sublimity of grandeur, the capacity to spring forth the lotus flower, which had already attracted many a poetic heart by its grace and elegance. The mysterious nature of creation is made perspicaciously expressive through lotus.

The taciturn furtivity of the hidden part of the lotus is in reality the fecundatory base of this world. The half open lotus bud is the example of this enigma. The creative totality of emergence of the generative process is activated through the lotus root or padmamula. The lotus root is the prime cause of all visible creation just as the primeval waters are the basic ingredient of all creation. Satapatha Brahmana calls the waters as Dharma. The primordial waters and the lotus are identified. Dharma is that which regulates and that which nourishes. Dharma is the base of everything in space—the form, colour and all the visible attributes. Thus identification of the lotus with dharma magnifies its proficiency in the art of creation.

In art, architecture and sculpture, the lotus motif is a dominant one. In achieving delicacy of expression, lotus or the various parts of the lotus plants can be used. In some
cases, lotus flowers are themselves seen as generating new lotus flowers. The lotus, its root, the node, the creeping ends, individualisation of the sprouting buds and leaves at various stages of growth are used to indicate specific meanings in a scale of growth and development. The lotus plant in whatever image and detail construed is growth in action or manifestation of the primordial matter into distinguishable forms. The flower itself has been used in three of its distinct stages of bloom:

a) half open lotus petals hanging downward and the upper petals still in bud form

b) full bloom lotus wide open in the shape of a ball with petals hanging loosely down.

c) half bud and half open stage wherein the lower petals hang downward and upper petals are still in shape.

The three forms are used in four symbolic signs:

i) one part of lotus used as symbolic of both parts,

ii) a combination of both symbols so as to appear as one,

iii) only the lower part used, as in case of seat, and

iv) upper part alone is used, leaving out the lower, as when held in hand.

As already stated, even parts of the lotus plants can be used. In central Java (Candy Mendut) there is a
representation of the lotus root. A full-bloom lotus is carved and a bird is shown perching nearby. Two roots from the sides are again sprouting into lotuses and further creepers with a continuing such formation. In the Khmer temple (Prabha), lotuses appear as sources of themselves. Each motif has a lotus root as its base, and in one of the upper motifs creepers are sprouting from the lotus itself.

In Indian visual art, substitution of one object by another to achieve symbolic or artistic symbiosis is found. Also one part is used to substitute the whole. At Bharhut, for example, a five headed cobra is transplanted in a background of lotus flowers and buds. The lotus stalk is replaced by many similar looking and identical elements like serpent (as in Roya Copuram, Mamallapuram), arm, leg, tusk arrow etc. In a peculiar sculpture the head of the statue is replaced by the lotus bud.

When using the lotus plant or any of its parts, the artists have given due consideration to its decorative, ornamental aspects as also the structural designs and meanings. It is not surprising to see such adaptations, as when showing a repetition of leaf motif each supporting the same god or divinity. When a Naga has to be shown as enveloping the cosmic water, then only the lotus root is clearly carved, and when a landscape has to be shown, only the flower is shown. In many such instances, all the parts of the lotus plant are integrated to serve the purpose of decoration, structural design, eventuality and meaning.

The lotus motif in sculpture gives enormous diversity of form and symbolism. The petals, filament, seed vessel,
colour, fragrance and bloom give unlimited forms. The petal itself is amenable to endless forms of artistic imagery and structural formation. The lotus medallions at Amravati and other places exude sheer grace, variety and imagination. In the moonstone doorsteps (as in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka) the disposition of petals and the meandering lotus stalk lend additional charm. Besides being used as seat, lotus also appears as a halo or nimbus as has already been noted. Lotus ceilings are fairly common in temples and mandapas. The variety of lotus ceilings at Dilwara, Mount Abu is mindbaffling with its ornate, elaborate and stylised carving. In the Ajanta paintings, lotus motif has been used in all possible ways along the whole length of the panels and add beauty to the total scene. Lotuses appear in doorways, jambs and friezes also. A doorway beautified with conch and lotus on either side has been described by Kalidasa (dvaropante likhitvapusau sankhpadmu ca drtva, Megh II.20). Lotus oozing coins and conch has been used with some third and fourth century yaksas figures to indicate treasures, as also in Chalukyan temples. The door mouldings of the Rajivalocana temple at Rajim at Raipur district have scroll work of foliage and fruits and lotus petals leading upto makaras, and interplaced nagas leading upto the lintel nagas. At Bharhut, Bodhgaya and other sanctuaries the railing is decorated like a wave of lotus stalk along the whole length of the frieze, sometime misleading to fruits, jewels and even goddesses from the tendrils. Ceiling in porches as at Badoli (Chittorgarh) contain two superimposed squares decorated with lotus flowers and cusps with lotus pendants.

The use of inverted lotus can be seen at the lion capital
at Bakhira, Sankisa, Rampurva, Lauriya Nandangarh and Sarnath. The inverted lotus is said to be an adaptation from Achaemenid architecture. Lotus umbrellas and inverted lotuses on the statues of divinities are quite a common feature (for instance, the Adinatha Jina shrine at Khajuraho, dated about 950 AD). Perhaps the inverted lotus umbrellas represent dominion, being taken from the regal umbrella.

The use of the lotus motif, the lotus creeper or petals have been used as continuous simple line with curves to suit the overall pattern or design. This simple technique has been interestingly used as rhythmic band on friezes etc. or as a mechanism to interlock the patterns into a single overall design. Merlons, Crestings and rows of antefixes are border designs where lotus creepers are used. The curve may be used alone or repeated in rows and combined with other motifs into a total pattern. In arabesque and naturalistic designs lotus motifs afford unlimited flexibility. Also by its ability to cover the entire area lotus gives an unlimitedness to the designs in the sense that it has no definite conclusion, in the space it covers.

Lotus can be classed into three categories according to the clour as red, blue and white. The petals of the red lotus are circular, that of the blue lotus angular, and the white lotus is also angular-petalled. The red lotus is often shown in full bloom. The central portion of the flower is also shown full of seeds. The blue lotus is shown either as all the petals in erect and upright posture and the outer line in loose and hanging posture towards the exterior. The inner part cupping and the seed containing the central part is made
invisible. The lotus shown in the hands of divinities is mostly in a bud form. In paintings also, there are three techniques in which lotus is used; dhyana, jnana and karuna or concentration, meditation, knowledge and compassion respectively. The panca khanda is represented as the five knowledges. The open lotus is generally eight-petalled symbolising the eightfold path. The wheel of dharma enjoys the same relationship with its eight petals which is enjoyed by the eight spokes in the wheel of dharma. Both of them with eight petals (i.e. the lotus and the wheel) represent excellence over all the worldly things.

Lotus in sculpture appears either like a throne with the idol sitting on it or as a footrest. The Tun Huan portrayals of the Buddha show flowers on which stepped the Buddha in propogation of Dharma. At the rockpillar at Rumandai, Asoka is carved on a horse standing on an upside down lotus in a bell shape.

The term padma in sculpture is used in the sense of a mould, a cyma recta, a site, a plan, a pavilion, a village etc. In a symbolic sense the meaning conveyed by these words is that of a base. As a base of this creative process lotus is used. The moulding called padma or abja is a figure partly, concave partly convex meeting at the bisecting point of line between the points of recess and projection. This mould forms a principal ornament in Indian architecture. It is generally employed in detached pairs in bases and cornices facing each other in opposite directions. This resembles in shape the petals of the lotus. Padma is also a base or pedestal which is used as a foundation on which the building is
constructed. This serves as a seed over which the same species of building, the same form, is developed. Padma is also a kind of village\[13\], a kind of refractory or a kitchen of gods, a kind of pillar and a type of building. Padmakanta is a kind of pillar which is erected on a base which resembles the lotus. The corners are enshrined with budding lotuses.

If in the process of constructing a mansion auspicious dreams are seen then lotuses are to be draped on the dug-out space. The place or part of the building where cooking is performed is called padma mandapa. Padmasana is a pedestal for seating an idol or a torso. Padmakampa is a kind of mould. The ritualistic significance of different forms of pillars is given in the Manasara Silpa Sastra. A square shafted one is associated with Brahma worship, an octagonal one with that of Visnu, and a circular or sixteen sided one with that of Siva. In Buddhist terminology, they stand for the Buddha, Sangha and Dharma respectively. The Mahanirvana Tantra gives the symbolism of the pillar in terms of the various lotuses of the worlds. The first lotus is the Brahma with four petals turned downward the fruit of which is the beautiful circle of the earth. The second is the Bhuma lotus with six petals and an inner circle having four openings, the fruits of which accrue to the region of the air. The third lotus is Mahapadma with ten petals within which dwells the fire element. This lotus is the transparent one of ether with sixteen petals, the abode of Vayu, wind force. The fifth also with sixteen petals is jnanaloka, the abode of pure knowledge. The sixth, ultimate is the ajna with two

[13] Pancha Prasadaprasadhara 2.4
Manasara 34, 173, 180.
petals within which is the Chintamani, the jewel of thought, and here dwell Siva and Brahma as the mystic swan Hamsa, whose words when transposed yield ‘soham’ i.e. I am He. The crowning glory of this all is the thousand petalled lotus containing the germs of thousands or worlds as yet unborn, the abode of Parabrahma, the formless and motionless.

According to Silpa Prakasa pankaja is a rectangular place in the mansion which is erected to raise lotus flowers. Padmagandha is a semicircular curve shown in the building. The makaratorana is a decorative device adopted by the Indian architects. Though it is called the makara torana, in reality it is the lotus. in the iconographic art also this makara torana is represented all round the idol in a circular, semicircular oval or even square shape as a border which establishes or frames the idol inside this border. This makara torana aspect curves on both the sides left and right and the plasticity of the curves gives way to roots to sprout but with an order alternating to the right and left. The opening sprouts once again round themselves in circles and meet in the main creeper. This meeting symbolises the meeting of the individual soul with the Brahman. Never cut off and segregated it possesses an individuality and ultimately surrenders once again to the same base.

On the gates of the Borobodur temple a crocodile with open mouth is carved. Above it is an elephant trunk in a semicircular form and in the tip of the trunk a lotus stalk is shown as being handled. A garland of pearls is hanging down a lotus thus suggesting the treasure bestowing power of the lotus. Not only the lotus has a potency to produce a
pearl necklace but also to produce all other treasures. Lotus is also seen in vegetative meander springing from a vase, conch, makara jaw, or yaksa's mouth.

In the Indo-Java style of architecture not only the lotus leaf is shown sprouting on the lotus tendrils but leaves of all varieties are shown as emerging out of it suggesting a power to produce anything beyond the physical order. Each stalk has many a node and each node has a potency to produce a lotus and so on.

On the pillars the crocodile or elephant are sculptured and the face or tail is represented to conceal or guard strongly. This instrument, to portray a suggestive sense, purports to show the main body in a very diminutive form and comparatively the body seems devoid of any importance in proportion to the stature of either the trunk or the tail. But the intuitive vision makes it possible to see no difference between the zoomorphic and the botanical forms which are blended exquisitely to give the animal physiology an accommodation which suits only the tender saplings. Literature also draws extensively on lotus but no distinct correlation between the part of human anatomy and parts of the lotus plant is available. All the organs of the human body are said to be lotus like. This gives a clue to the name kalpalata at the wish-granting creeper which has the power to be visualised in any of these forms.

In Bharhut carvings an elephant is seen holding a lotus bunch. The weight of the treasure is suggested by carving many more trunks as a support to the lotus and the semi-
Circular leaves are shown as full of treasures, precious stones, rich draperies being distributed. Once again the whole motif is joined within a circular form and the motif is repeated. Thus the lotus is shown as a symbol of infinite wealth.
8. OTHER ASPECTS

a. an object of sensual delight

Lotus is also an object giving sensual delight. The sweet fragrance is entrancing, the form of lotus is pleasing to the eye, and its sweet and pervasive freshness is captivating. The honey produced in the caryx is sweet and so maddening that the bee forgets to get out of it and prefers to remain veiled inside the lotus through the night. Lotus is used in symbolic and suggestive sense in literature and the arts. It is ominous when bedecked, nourishing when eaten, energising as a medicine and a symbol of sheer beauty. Lotus relieves the pangs of separation from the beloved as no medicine can. It dilutes the wrath of demons and is a cover for the gifts presented to the dead.

Kumud is a synonym for the lotus and means pleasure-giving[14] As a synonym for sheer beauty and sensual delight, lotus is personified in the nude goddess who is the headless and whose head is replaced by and transformed into a lotus flower. Her two hands are holding two lotuses. The lotus seems to signify that by itself the flame of love is short and the burden of separation is unbearable as the lotus cannot survive long outside the waters. In the Kamasutra, Padmini has been defined as one who will have the following

[14] The word ‘Kumud’ is used twice in Visnu Sahasranamam. According to the Sankara’s explanation of Visnu Sahasranamam (name no. 807) The verb is intransitive, meaning lotus by its inherent nature does good and does not depend on the recieving end. Similar explanation is offered for name no.589
characteristics: face pleasing as the full moon, body well clothed with flesh, soft as the mustard flower, skin tender and fair as the yellow lotus, eyes bright and beautiful as the orbs of fawn, well cut with reddish corners. Her bosom is hard, full and high; she has a good neck, her nose is straight and lovely and three folds or wrinkles cross her middle about the umbilical region. Her yoni resembles the opening lotus bud and her kama-salila or love seed is perfumed like the lily that has never burst. She walks with a swan like gait and her voice is low and musical...delights in fresh raiments...eats little, sleeps lightly...as respectful and religious as she is clever...ever anxious to worship the gods and to enjoy the conversation of Brahmanas. Such then is Padmini.

Lotus is a great beautifier itself. It can adorn the head. The stamen of white and blue lotus mixed with the dried and powdered Nagakesara as well as honey and ghee is supposed to be good for the complexion.

b. in literature

References to lotus in literature are profuse. Lotus has served as an upamana for pithy and moral teachings as also as an upamana for the various parts of the body. Textbooks in poetics recommend to describe lotus wherever water is depicted even running. In Pali literature even in the Himalayas a description of lotus is included.

Face is compared to a lotus (vikaca jalaja lilitanana candra) and Krisna is described as Radha mukha aravinda
madhopa. Gitagovinda talks of the nail on the lotus hands: tava kamalakare nakham adbhuta (1.4). Eyes are comparable to lotus: amala kamala dala locana (Gita Govinda 1.5). The whole body is Nila nalinamiva or like a blue lotus (GG 11.3). The couch can be as cool as a collection of lotuses on water—sajala nalini dala sitala sayane (GG 9.5). Lotus is also an armour for the heart: sva hrdaya mearmani varma karoti sa dala nalini dala jalam(GG 4.3). Lord Krisna is ‘Yadu kula nalina dinesa’ or the king of the lotus of the Yadava clan (GG 1.3). Maids have lotuses in hands ‘haste lila kamalam’ says Kalidasa in Meghaduta. He also uses 35 equivalents for lotus. Lotus comparisons are stressed even to the line of hair above the navel and the navel itself. Feet are, of course, also lotus-like. A king who does not have lotus pond is no king. Padma is such a treasure that even Visnu is tempted to steal it. When the moon approaches lotuses blush wondering what they can offer. Lotus is beloved to the sun and lives in him ‘svayam nivasati tvati’.

Even the swan is fond of lotuses as it born in clear water, dwells in the hands of Hari and is Hari himself, captures the hearts of gods what to talk of the common man and many other reasons. Also in charm and delicacy, swan is said to resemble lotus, both being affected by the snow (Raghuvamsa 8.45), the wintry winter, lotuses drop in the waters, as the swans flee to the Manasa lake (Kuvalayananda, p.13). Lakshmi resides in the lotus which is not lazy, has sweet face, is a great friend, is a source of all qualities and has enenmy with the moon. This gives an
illustration of the pervasive use of lotus in literature.

Even while describing the great mountain Himalaya Kalidasa uses the lotus image. The snow-clad soaring peaks are white like lotus Kumuda visdai occupy the span of the sky itself (Megh.1.61). Lotus gets every item of beauty from Kalpavriksha (Megh.2.12).

In Tamil literature it is said that lotuses are meant not only for embellishment but as a weapon. In the Sirupanatrupadi it is said that the enemies marched upon the king Nellikodan. He prayed to Lord Muruga who advised him to pluck a lotus flower and throw on the enemies and the king Nellikodan did as advised. The lotus turned into a cakra, the divine discus. The present town of Vellore is since then known by this name. Murugan is also lotus-born. The red lotus is the seat of Tirumagal (Lakshmi) and white lotus is the seat of Kalaimagal. Lakshmi in Tamil literature is compared to the vaingai tree which is full bloom and flanked by the mountain range on the sides and the stream from mountain tops falling on the tree. It is also compared to Gajalaksmi.

3. In Ayurveda

Rajanighantu describes the attributes of lotus as cool, tasty, bile confining, fragrant and pleasing. Lotus (padma) is sometimes used as synonym for leprosy. Bhava Prakasa says that the lotus cures phlegm formation and bile disorders, quenches thirst and cures poison of the serpants.
Attributes of red, white and blue lotuses are separately enumerated. Padma is the name of a medicine and Padmakastha is a cure for itches. Each part of the lotus is used in pharmaceutical preparation. The medicinal use of lotus was also known in China and Malaya.

4. In Vaisnava Agamas

In the Agamic literature lotus has a prominent place. In the seventh chapter of Sriprasna Samhita Garbhanyasakrama or foundation laying of the sanctum sanctorum is given. For gluing the idol and obtaining fixity many ingredients are detailed and lotus is also included. The Paramasamhita makes a distinction between Brahmasri and Ksatrasri. Those desirous of Brahmasri should worship the Lord with white lotuses and those desire the Ksatrasri should worship the Lord with red lotuses.

Of the ten efficacious flowers lotus is one according to the Vaikhanasa Agama. In the Marici Vimana, Arcana Kalpa, it is recommended that the idol be sculptured on white lotus only.

5. Concluding Remarks

Having traversed the path of lotus through Indian thought, legend and culture, we notice the distinct place it has come to occupy. Through the millenia it has been a fabled flower, affecting the imagination with its pervasiveness, usefulness and as a synonym for beauty and
perfection. The Indian legend is steeped in the lotus lore or account of its widespread use and associated qualities. Lotus was taken as life itself and a model to be emulated, by the humans.

In most Sanskrit lexicons, lotus finds a place in the very first chapter which is often marked for heaven, space and time class which excludes earth and related divisions. For example, in Amer Singh’s dictionary, lotus had established a supra-earthly position for itself. Lotus also came to be included in the vari or waters calls in due course. The meaning of Padma is attested as root of the species nelumbium speciosum, and Monier Williams finds usage for the word for a particular mark or mole on the human body, red or coloured marks on the face or trunk of an elephant, an elephant itself, serpent, serpent, two serpent demons, particular part of a column or pillar, a kind of temple, an army arrayed in the form of a lotus, one of the nine treasures of Kubera, a particular constellation, a fragrant substance, one of the attendants of Skandha, a mythical Buddha, name of the ninth chakravartin in Bharata, and one of the nine which Balas, name of a prince of Kashmir who founded Padmapusa and a temple. Pundarika to Monier Williams cannотes a white lotus flower, a species of rice, a kind of mango, a variety of sugar cane, a bird, an expression of beauty, one of the Buddhas, a white umbrella, a kind of drug, a mark on the forehead, fever in an elephant, a river in Kraunchadispa. It is also one of the fourteen prominent Parama Bhagavatas. Padma has served as an etymological
base for expressions such as Padma Kasa (Sun), padmakarmika (central part of relatively arranged), padmakastha (the wood of Cerasus Pudum), Padmakita (species of a venomous insect), Padmakunda (a particular mystic figure), Padmakasa (a particular position of the fingers resembling lotus), Padmaksetra (four sacred districts of Orissa), Padmakhanda (quantity of lotuses, also name of a chapter in Brahmandapurana), Padmagarbha (Brahma, Visnu, introduction to Rigveda Pratisadhyya, Kavyadarsa, name of a Bodhisattva, name of Siva, a name of the sun, of a lake Hitopa, name of a Brahman changed into a swan), Padmagrha (Laksmi), Padmacarini (Hibiscus mutabilis a particular personification), Padmaja (Brahma), Padmanabha (lotus navelled-a name of Visnu, name of the eleventh month reckoned from Margasirsa, a magical formula spoken over weapons, name of a serpent demon, son of Dhrtarasstra, of the first Arhat of the future Utsarpini), Padmanabha-dvadas: (name of the eleventh day in the light, Padmabandha (an artificial arrangement of words of a verse in a figure representing lotus), Padmaraga (ruby), Padmaraji (Agni, one of the tongues of Agni), Padmarekha (line in the palm of the hand indicating the acquisition of great wealth), Padmalanchana (Brahma, Sun, Kubera, Sri Tasa, Sarasvati), Padma vyakasa (a crevice shaped like a lotus bud made by a thief in a wall), Padmavyuba (name of a samadhi), Padmasambhara (name of a Buddhist teacher who founded the red sect in Tibet), Padmasnusa (Ganga, Durga, Sri), Padmasvastika (a svastika mark consisting of lotus flowers), Padmasvamin (name of sacred edifice built by Padma),
Padma hasta (a particular measure of length).

It is clear that lotus has permeated Indian thinking from days of yore. No doubt it continues to be a pervasive influence in Indian culture even today.
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