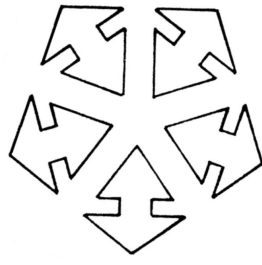


AN INTRODUCTION

TO

RAMA'S



DEDICATED TO

MILTON and MINNIE

WORTHY EXEMPLARS

OF

RAMA AND SITA

MARK OLIVER SMITH



This miniature painting shows Rama being worshipped by his trusted servant Hanuman, the monkey god, while Sita and Lakshmana (Rama's brother) look on.

HINDU METAPHYSICS

Introduction

Our starting point in the examination of the grandeur of Angkor has to begin with an exploration of the key elements of Hindu metaphysics. These elements are concerned with the nature of reality, the nature of time and space and causality. This leads seductively into the realms of Indian cosmology, mythology and finally into history. Only when the assumptions in these domains are laid bare can we begin to appreciate the location, orientation and design of these monumental temple structures.

The Nature of Reality

Indian thought is based on the premise that the division between matter and spirit is illusory and that the goal of world evolution is to arrive at an understanding of their essential unity. Matter is visible spirit and spirit is but attenuated matter. The material world is only one of appearances and the task of humanity is to bring the spiritual world into visibility and unite the so-called matterised earth with the so-called spiritual heaven.

According to Khmer thought there should be no split between heaven and earth. Earth must be designed and laid-out as a fitting home for the gods. This is the design assumption of Hindu and Khmer temples.

The Nature of Time

There are several aspects to the Hindu preoccupation with time that differ from the modern western view. In the west, time is almost synonymous with duration and it has a quantitative aspect that is concerned with 'how long will it take?' or 'when did you say it happened?' The Hindu faith proclaims the cyclical character of time as distinct from the western linear concept. Cyclical time is tyrannical in its nature and threatens the individual with endless repetition and a recycling of births known as *samsara*. The goal of Hindu piety is the liberation from **Samsara** by following the **dharm**a to perfection and achieving **moksha**.

Hindu thought also has a more qualitative aspect to it than is found in the west. Time may be auspicious or inauspicious. Hindus consult almanacs for days in which different cycles of

time co-incide and they have respect for astrological forecasting. Also, the lunar cycle features prominently in their calendrical system.

The Tyranny of Cyclical Time

The basis of the Hindu notion of cyclical time is contained in the doctrine of the **Yugas**. It is an aspect of Indian thought which also took root in Khmer Buddhist teaching. It rests on the premise that there are periodic creations and destructions. In this schema there are four successive yugas or ages:

Krita Yuga
Treta Yuga
Dvapara Yuga and
Kali Yuga

A complete cycle or Mahayuga is composed of these four ages.

The Four Yugas

Krita yuga means the 'perfect age' and symbolises totality, plenitude or perfection. It is the golden age where the moral order of the Universe, the dharma, is observed naturally and spontaneously in its entirety.

The Treta yuga succeeds the Krita yuga and in this period there is a regression from spontaneity of lawfulness into duty. Only three-quarters of the dharma is observed and man is now subject to work, suffering and death.

During the Dvapara yuga only half of the dharma is observed. Human life is shorter. The final yuga, the Kali yuga, is an age of darkness in which property confers status and wealth becomes the only motive for action. During Kali yuga sexuality is the sole means of gratification and ritualistic religion is confused with spirituality.

The Duration of the Yugas

The relative duration of the different yugas may be calculated in different ways. Mircea Eliade quotes Manu I, 69 et seq, Mahabharata III, 12, 826 to give one method of calculation.

	Dawn	Duration	Twilight
Krita	400 years	4000 years	400 years
Treta	300	3000	300
Dvapara	200	2000	200
Kali	100	1000	100

A complete cycle, a Mahayuga, ends in a dissolution or '**pralaya**'. A Mahapralaya is the completion of 1000 cycles. The 12000 years of a Mahayuga may be regarded as one divine year of 360 days or 4,320,000 years of a cosmic cycle. A thousand Mahayugas constitute one '**Kalpa**'; 14 'Kalpas' make one Manvantara which is one day in the life of Brahma. A hundred of these years is equal to 311 thousand billion years of human time.

The tyrannical nature of cyclical time is imaged in the doctrines associated with reincarnation. Reincarnation can only be avoided by achieving moksha or perfection which few attain.

Lunar Soteriology

The periodicities of the moon, i.e. creation (new moon), growth (full moon) and death (the three moonless nights) play an important role in the elaboration of calendrical time. However the religious usage of this cycle of life, death and resurrection penetrated the collective unconscious even more powerfully than calendrical time and gave rise to many mystical doctrines and practices, which offered deliverance from the frightening tyranny of infinite transmigrations.

Co-incidental Time

The ritual calendar of the Hindu faith is concerned with the location of auspicious days for planting, harvesting and the performance of rites. Their almanac also incorporated astrological information and great store was placed on the conjunction of sun, lunar and planetary rhythms. The intersection of such rhythms yielded 'auspiciousness' or days of significance. The Asiatic mind is very much concerned with luck, chance, co-incidence and synchronous phenomena. This pre-occupation is expressed in the adoption of haruspicy and the manifold forms of divination, fortune-telling, the use of amulets, talismans and so on.

Sacred Space

Hinduism not only makes qualitative pronouncements about time, it also sacralises space. In the western world view space may be locational, directional or rotational. Locational space can be described by using three co-ordinates of length, width and height. Directional space utilises the points of the compass while rotational space is characterised by spin and angular momentum. This is elementary western physics but in Hinduism space is made sacred. Mount Meru is located at the centre of the world, at the cosmic navel. Spatial direction is defined by one's orientation to the mount and not by compass directions. In this scheme of things a value is given to upper – lower, inner – outer, centre – circumference, point – plane. Thus spiritual geometry is applied to spiritual geography. The value assigned to these spiritual polar co-ordinates is not simply positive and negative. Each pole is positive and negative. The relationship is very much akin to the polarities of point and plane in modern synthetic projective geometry. Modern physics is only reluctantly acknowledging the logical necessity of both matter and anti-matter, of space and counterspace. The Hindu world-view has known about these concepts for millennia and has applied them to social, cultural and metaphysical reality for millennia!

The Nature of Causality

The classical western view of causality is predicated on the establishment of a linkage between an event and its necessary antecedents. The Hindu view, however, seems to resemble the view put forward by the quantum physicist, David Bohm. According to Bohm, when dealing with the sub-atomic level, it is necessary to invoke non-causality, non-continuity and non-locality. Furthermore, the observer is implicated in what he observes.

In Hindu metaphysics the meaning and significance of events is induced from the assumed patten of history whereas for the western historian the pattern of history and the significance of an event is deduced from events after they have occurred. Indeed, the Hindu mind finds it perfectly legitimate to identify the cause of an event in a subsequent event rather than an antecedent one. Teleology is as acceptable as causality.

The Law of Identity

In Aristotelian logic the Law of Identity asserts that an entity cannot be A and not-A at the same time. This law is not assumed by the Hindu mind.

Thus there can be more than one centre. **In the one there are many.** A point may be defined as the intersection of a number of planes. Indeed, the point is of infinite content.

Some Aspects of Hindu Cosmology and Religion

Cosmology is concerned with articulating a framework of meaning within which the gods, man and the whole of creation find their destiny. There are many elements to the Hindu cosmology and many of these are expressed in their religion.

THE HINDU PANTHEON

The Hindu religion is polytheistic with many of the gods arranged in a hierarchy. The gods often have consorts and a means of communication. Gods, such as Vishnu, may incarnate many times as avatars (see below).

Major Deities and their Consorts

The major deities of the Hindu pantheon are Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu. Brahma's consort is Sarasvati. Shiva's consort is Parvati. She manifests as Uma, San and Gauri in her benign aspect. In her destructive aspects she manifests as Kali and Durga. Vishnu's consort is Lakshmi.

The Trimurti and its Powers

Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu form the central Hindu triad known as the Trimurti. The powers of this trinity are creation (Brahma), destruction / regeneration (Shiva) and sustenance (Vishnu).

Brahma

Brahma is generally recognised as the god of creation. He is depicted with four faces which symbolise his dominance over the four directions of space. Joseph Campbell refers to Brahma as 'the creator of the world illusion'. One myth refers to Brahma as an instrument of Vishnu, the supreme god. Another myth proclaims Shiva was responsible for the birth of both Brahma and Vishnu.

Shiva

Shiva has the dual powers of destruction and regeneration. He unites birth, death and rebirth. He is best known as Mahadev (the greatest of gods) or Maheshvara (Great Lord). Shiva has many epithets, such as Sadashiva, Shankara and Shambhu. His ambivalent personality manifests the extremes of asceticism and eroticism. Shiva and his consort Parvati represent the union of the masculine and the feminine. One of the representations of Shiva is that of Natarajah, Lord of the Dance.

Vishnu

Vishnu is one of the most popular Hindu deities. While Shiva has many aspects Vishnu has many different avatars (incarnations). This is because his main function is to preserve universal order. This obliges him to descend to earth to defeat evil and restore harmony so that humankind can be saved from its own wickedness. His ten re-incarnations are listed below.

The Powers of the Consorts

The consorts or companions are venerated for the complementary powers:

Sarasvati	–	goddess of learning/ wisdom and the arts
Parvati	–	goddess of fertility (female aspect) contributes to the divine energy. She is associated with goodness, benevolence and fidelity.
Laksmi	–	goddess of wealth and good fortune.

Means of Communication/ Travel

Brahma	–	Goose
Shiva	–	Nandi (Bull)
Vishnu	–	Garuda

Incarnations of Vishnu

No.	Name	Avatar
1	Matsya	A fish
2	Kurma	A tortoise
3	Varaha	A boar
4	Narasimha	A man-lion
5	Vamana	A dwarf
6	Parashurama	Martial hero
7	Rama	The ideal man
8	Krishna	God-man
9	The Buddha	A saviour
10	Kalki	Herald on a white horse (yet to appear)



This 18th-century painting from the Jaipur area of India shows Vishnu in the centre of his ten avatars: Clockwise from top left: Matsya (the fish), Kurma (the tortoise), Varaha (the boar), Vamana (the dwarf), Krishna, Kalki (the future avatar), the Buddha, Parashurama, Rama and Narishma (the man-lion). All are primarily known from works of mythology, except for the Buddha, who is considered to be the ninth avatar. The cult of the Buddha was probably absorbed into Vaishnavite theology in response to the Buddha's profound influence as a preacher of a harmonious middle way. The ten descents of Vishnu are part of the Vaishnava theological canon, but just as Vishnu is understood to be infinite, so the possibility of his incarnations is infinite as well.

Rama and Sita

Rama is the seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu. He is portrayed in the Hindu epic, 'The Ramayana as the ideal man'. His wife, Sita, is the paragon of womanhood. As a perfect man, Rama is an obedient son, a conscientious ruler and a loving husband. He is also an heroic warrior who defeats the demon Ravana with the assistance of his monkey general, Hanuman. Rama and Sita embody the virtues of conjugal love, morality and goodness.

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By Way of Explanation

I did not keep notes on my sources for the material in this brief monograph. In fact I did not include this material in my introductory remarks to my *In Search of the Cosmic Mountain*. I believe that I drew on the following sources even though I have not acknowledged my sources in the text.

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