



# THE SYMBOLISM OF THE DIVINE: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE DEITIES

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*Abstract:* The language of Symbols has a deep configuration behind the manifestations of ritual and worship in the Indian context. A symbol is particularly adopted in Indian art and culture concerning its religious significance but sometimes it has been adopted through indirect appearances. This kind of manipulation has been used through a particular shape, object, animal, and other related things. Numerous things are directly or indirectly associated with a particular folk or religious form. In this way, the artistic representations have been channelized through such kind of identity of a particular religious icon, as all artists are connected with the surroundings and beliefs of people. The symbols are so deeply rooted in the mind of creative genius and accepted universally by the followers. The present study deals with the symbolic assessment of deities through a critical analysis of some particular forms of deities. Some realistic and abstract forms have been taken as a medium to explore the multiple possibilities behind the depiction of the same.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The abstract forms of Gods and Goddesses have always been created with references to human and animal anatomy which are an immediate source of inspiration to the creators. The images which impart knowledge since Pre-historic times continue to attract and inspire the icon formation of modern times and contemporary art too. It shows that the universal understanding of forms and ideas remains constant over time. From the remote past, the combination of this universal approach and the infusion of contemporary understanding are the characteristics of the art forms. The icons of Gods have been conceived in a completely vacuumed space. It is quite obvious that the fundamentals that have been instrumental in the conception and formation of the icons reflect the emotions, ideas clearly, and aesthetically. The spontaneity and ease in the creation give the aesthetic beauty to these icons and make them a conceptual art form as well. The final demonstration represents the psyche of the artist who was engaged in the channelization of emotions and artistic impression.

The present study aims to explore the comprehensive approach of these icons and their narrations into physical embodiments of art pieces with different icons individually. In addition to this, the study also investigates the creativity, expression of the depicted/incarnated forms as a work of art through the exploration of fundamentals behind the iconological creations.

## II. SEMIOTICS OF SYMBOLISM

The symbolization is a process of individualism, and an individual uses it to explain the motive, the intentions of the mind. The word 'symbol' is derived from the Greek word 'symbolon.' Usually, the symbol is deemed as a 'mark' or 'sign' (Glücklich, 1990). The exertion of the symbol is different from the signs in human life. Therefore, it is important to understand the difference between them. The sign is a natural phenomenon, and the symbol is an unusual sensation. The sign is mostly represented as a direct gesture and the symbols define various indirect communications as a whole. The final showcase or exhibit form can be decoded as an icon.

To some extent, in the process of incarnation the symbol becomes a type of icon in it, it is a type invented exclusively from that symbol, which is not the ordinary one. This extraordinary symbol is associated with the form/icon permanently after its too many repetitions and adoptions.

This appearance emerges as a source of expectation for the onlookers/spectators/devotees to meet the desired form after bridging certain platform for the communication to the supernatural entity in particular.

On the contrary, when the symbol is being looked at, the nature of the symbol has been defined through the association of any kind of event.



**Fig. 1 Renuka Goddess**

Fig.1 Shri Renuka Mata, Maharashtra, source: Author

Fig.2 Lajja Gauri in Kamakhya Temple, Assam, India

Source: [https://lajjagauree.blogspot.com/2016/09/lajja-gauri\\_25.html](https://lajjagauree.blogspot.com/2016/09/lajja-gauri_25.html)



**Fig. 2 Lajja Gauri**

In this way, the thoughts of the human mind are being directed through those incident and these thoughts also take place in the actions i.e. the incarnation of deities through abstract and realistic forms. The symbol is also a way to exchange various thoughts, cultures, and traditions. (Mueller, 1938.) Additionally, a certain kind of visual communication has been reproduced through this process. After a certain period, this can become a universally acknowledged icon. After this accreditation, the meaning of ideas and association changes, now any additional idea or relation cannot be developed further, because the identity of the form has been created. After this identity, it is almost impossible to associate it with any other alien thought. Both the Signs and symbols are meaningful each of them having a particular identity. However, it is easy to create a meaning for man-made symbols but the natural symbols cannot be treated as changeable because of the power. Moreover, the man-made symbol has a lack of power for a concept. The concept gives us the ability to think of the new world, to stand in front of the heart among all.

Many different symbols reveal different human attitudes such as artistic, technical, religious, and moral.

Symbols are indicators of a particular emotional trend. In the deities, the particular association of appearance reflects their power, and human beings are attracted to those powers without knowing their origin or reasons of origin. These symbols are just a signpost, derived from the association of multiple ideas after so many manipulations. They feel attracted to the icon whether the attraction is intentional or unintentional, but it is powerful to drag the mind. (Marett, 1920.)

Accordingly, its context is also within. Naturally, by refusing all the references, the human mind brings a new invention from the power of intimacy. It seems that the symbols are the soul of deities and their purpose (that is, its total context) is included within it. This symbol of God/Goddess is as self-sufficient as an artwork. For example, the artist invites expressions, feelings, imagery, diagrams, colors, and sounds, etc. from the surroundings to create an unprecedented and innovative pattern by transforming himself/herself with his/her conceptual power. And the artwork takes it to the fullest extent. Similarly, in the folklore, the creation of symbols of God is easily made possible by the creators. Some Indian literary statistics indicate "folk art symbols are the collections of many signs." (Zimmer, 1946) These symbols are given names such as ornaments, marks, rituals, and collections. But the symbol of folk art is different from these ornamental symbols and their meaning is also different from the literal meaning.

Indian writers have used art symbols such as 'split' and 'quote' for its meaning. According to Susan Langer, there are two types of symbols; 1 Physical Symbol 2 commemorative symbols and both are related to 'reader' and 'expressions?' (Langer Susanne K, *year missing*)

The purpose of the real symbol is to edit the pure art of persistence. Here the pure language is used in art. In which the excess is emphasized more than the meaning of language. In this way, people try to take the viewer in such a logical position which is presented as a symbol of the world as a symbol more than a satire of language. That is, the value of art is not embedded in that artwork but its underlying symbolic symbolism becomes embedded. It is a symbol of mystery that is implied in it as a symbol.

Although symbols are used both in art and science, the above-discussed symbol is not the same. In the context of external objects, the explanation of its meaning is essential.

The expression of symbols in folk art is self-sufficient and is self-evident because its intentions are clearly explained through its self. The one who wants to be conveyed through it is inherent in it. Therefore, external objects are not needed for the explanation of the subject. (Srinivasan, Doris Meth. 2001)

It may be taken into consideration, that as per the study, there are three forms of God symbols; 1. Relationship 2. Religiousness 3 Creativity The action of the group is auspicious due to the artistic nature of the creation of ancestral creation. This happens because of a homogeneous life. The combination of rhythms, the uniformity of creativity of this consonant, can be seen in the devotional combination in all of these symbols. (Bhagvat.1975.)

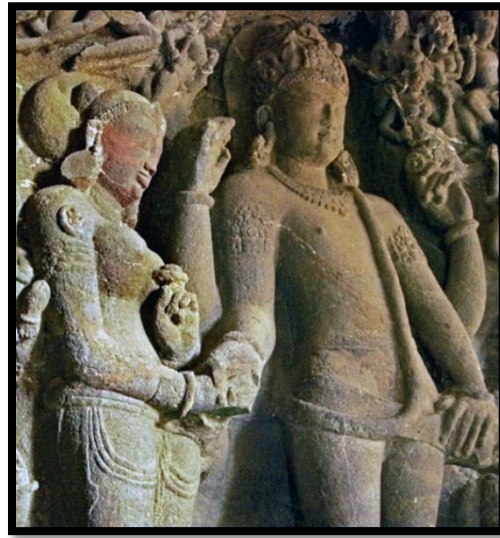
Usually, symbols have been made by *Bhagats* and devotees of deities. The purpose of their exhibition is to emphasize the presentation and on the artistic demonstration of a ritual. They take it as a boon of God who is giving them power and knowledge to attempt the ceremony of

such religious ideas very effectively. The immense popularity of this can be seen as these are depicted as the immortal ones, in the public for example 1. Shiva Shakti 2. Mother Goddess 3. Grama Deity etc.



**Fig. 3 Gram Devta (village deities)**

Fig. 3 Image of Gram Devta, Dongargarh, Chattisgarh, source: author



**Fig. 4 Shiv Shakti**

Fig.4 Shiv Shakti, Ellora Cave, Maharashtra, Source: author



**Fig. 5 Saptmatrika (seven Goddesses) with Shiva,**

Fig. 5 Seven Goddesses with Shiva, collection national museum, New Delhi

Source:

<https://hi.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E0%A4%B8%E0%A4%AA%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%A4%E0%A4%AE%E0%A4%BE%E0%A4%A4%E0%A5%83%E0%A4%95%E0%A4%BE>

The iconography of God is like an art form created by common people. The analysis of the icons of God has been done further, based on fundamentals of art like line, form, shape, colour and texture and the aspect of beauty that is reflected through the actual art forms. Based on these fundamentals, the human mind can conceive and create metaphysical imagery. The following examples have been studied in detail to witness the approach.



**Fig.6 Kal Bhairav**

Fig.6 The Kal Bhairav near Durbar Square in Kathmandu, Nepal in Asia

Source: <https://www.dreamstime.com/stock-photo-kal-bhairav-kathmandu-stature-durbar-square-nepal-image64979661>



**Fig.7 Bhairav in the form of Stone**

Fig.7 Bhairav Statue in Junagarh, Maharashtra, Source: Author

### III. THE VISUAL NARRATIVES AND AESTHETICS

The forms of deities have been incarnated through different aspects and the beauty or aesthetic approach is one among them. For an artist, it is impossible to avoid the beauty in every form, whether it is intentional or unintentional. Artist often tries to fill the gap between the ideology and beauty in respect to created form. ( Havell, 1909.) The most significant example of it can be seen in the image of Kal Bhairav (fig.6), a God which has much significance in religious text and rituals. He is being worshipped before so many major Gods and Goddesses, in fact, in numerous religious *arts* (a song which has been sung in the last of the worship). The Shakti or Goddess Durga cannot be worshipped without visiting the temple of Bhairav. Except from this, Bhairav has a particular kind of identity, which separates him from all other Gods. He is known for his fearsome attributes and much similar to Goddess Kali.

The appearance of Kal Bhairav is quite significant and goes directly to the differentiation of form or *Rupa Bheda* as the form of Bhairav has been created to showcase the fearsome imagery of Lord Shiva so the image is fulfilling the same purpose. The *shadnaga* or six limbs of Indian art are known to form the ancient times, the references can be found in the mythological text. These six canons most of the times used to create or to judge a perfect piece of art. Thus, after going into the frame of six limbs, first of all, the images justify the differentiation of forms, as the form of Bhairav has been showcased to create his identity. The identity which he holds in the mind of the devotee has been successfully incarnated by the creator of the image.

The symbols of fear have been used to give it life. The line between the divine and the earthly or folk God has been appropriately shown by the artist. The *Pramana* or proportion in the artwork is also going with the concept as we can see a visual balance in the image. The limb of the body has been placed as spreading towards the surface, which also reflects the symbolism through the posture of God. The stiffness of the body is representing his attentiveness and alertness in front of devotees. The *Bhava* or emotions are representing the horrifying nature of Kal Bhairava and after seeing the image onlookers or devotees can taste the fearsome personality of Kal Bhairava. The *Bahav* has been projected to invoke the fear towards God.

The *bhava* of total submission is automatically generating in the mind of onlookers because they are terrified and protected in a single glance. The powerful location of the eye, which is representing the same fear, is again a symbolic manipulation of the artist. The application of all the aspects is creating grace in the entire paintings through the balance of colour application and body posture. The selection of colours is also very symbolic as the bright colours have been used where red stands for anger, blue stands for coolness, and also balancing the fire of the red. At the same time, it is also satisfying the purpose to portray a God who is aggressive but kind too, if he is being worshipped.

As per the similitude or *sadarshiya* (another aspect of six limbs), the imagery has the same resemblance with the imagery of Kal Bhairava which has been created through religious myths and fables. In folk culture, the earthly approach in colour can be seen. The same approach can be seen here as well. The dominance of red creates a ritualistic ambiance through the imagery. The yellow is balancing the red colour and giving a symbolic representation of purity and energy and force. *Varnika Bhang* or the way of applying or selection of colours is also indicating the process of ritual performance, in this performance, which is quite related to the folk culture of the place. So, the colour applied here is very basic and giving a compliment to each other.

On the contrary, the colours have a symbolic language to mark the presence of the deity in his absence, as they are provoking the emotions in the mind of the viewer. After that, the way of the placement of *roli* or red pigment is also creating a visual pleasure to the eyes of the onlookers. The red colour is quite often used as a colour of worship and also very close to the birth and death of the human being and the uttermost truth of life under the sun. So it is the symbolic significance of the red, which gave the subject a more earthen or folk look.

As per the evaluation of Rasa Dhawani theory, the painting has Rudra Rasa in its form as the image has been created to show the fearsome form of Kala Bhairava, so the artist has kept the horrifying face with powerful gesture as wide opening eye, which is a form of anger.

The painting also generates a feeling of pity and fear, or the feeling of Catharsis (of Aristotle). In this way, the language of a symbol is meeting towards the expectations of the devotee as he wants to tremble in front of God. If it is not happening, then what is the meaning of the existence of this God, who is known as the form of Lord Shiva, the destroyer? In this way, Bhairav is having all characteristics of a terrifying God with all his symbolic arrangements.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be said that the icons are not merely spiritual embodiments but are rather the art creations, as the production of creative genius with the semiotics of spirituality and religion. These icons are fulfilled with utmost element and beauty and aesthetic pleasure. They are highlighted with appropriate balance, rhythm, and passion as per the demand of the form. These icons are an essential part of the individual and community life, they are inseparable from the human psyche and have a specific role in the contemporary living; Of course, the icons give an experience of beauty because the elements have been created to add pleasure and beautiful experience: the pure intentions, passion and drive to construct a whole shape or form through these symbols. The balance and rhythm in composition make the icons even more glorious and impactful. The narrative of symbols are being derived from the part of traditions or rituals, they are adopted from the religious fables too. The selection of symbols is entirely related to the popularity of the symbol as per the icon. In the image of Kal Bhairav, these symbols weave a story in which the viewers want to listen through visual communication, which is also the reason behind the acceptance of this form.

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