

# **WOVEN MANTRA: A VISUAL EXPRESSION OF MEDITATION**

**CAROLE WILSON, DIP ART, GRAD DIP ED.**

Ph.D. (Visual Art)  
Partial Fulfilment of Requirements

School of Visual Art  
University of Ballarat  
P.O. Box 663  
Gear Avenue, Mount Helen,  
Ballarat, Victoria 3350  
Australia

March 2001

<b>Table of contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	i
<b>Statement of authorship</b>	ii
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	iii
<b>List of Illustrations</b>	iv
<b>List of Slides</b>	v
<b>Introduction</b>	1
Statement of purpose	1
Context	3
Sources	5
Spiritual	5
Visual	6
Textual	8
Woven mantra – the artworks	10
<b>Chapter One: The Inner Space</b>	12
Indian influences on western thought	13
Meditation and the Atman	15
Mantra	16
Yantra	22
Kundalini – serpent power	25
The path of Kundalini	27
Blue pearl	29
<b>Chapter Two: Offering</b>	33
Mother goddess	35
Lakshmi and the lotus	37
Paintings for the goddess	39

Durga, Kali and Saraswati	40
Fire, light and food	43
Cloth	46
<b>Chapter Three: Thread</b>	<b>49</b>
Historical background	50
Textile symbolism	55
Mantras and textiles	57
Textiles bestowing blessings and protection	60
Religious and ceremonial use of textiles	62
<b>Chapter Four: Woven mantra – the artworks</b>	<b>65</b>
Methodology	65
Spiritual practice	67
Sewing	69
Colour	71
Printmaking	72
History of the project	73
Woven mantra – the main body of works	75
Shal	76
Images of meditation	80
Images of offering	82
Images of contemplation	87
Heart Mat	93
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>103</b>

## Abstract

This research project examines the links between spiritual practice and visual art. More specifically, the research examines the relationship between the repetition of a mantra, the repetition of an image and the repetition of a stitch.

The primary source for the physical and theoretical manifestation of the thesis has been my own spiritual practice which is from the Indian path of Siddha Yoga as taught by Swami Muktananda and Swami Chidvilasanda. This path, which has its roots in Kashmir Shaivism and Hindu Tantra, teaches that divinity is inherently present in all of us in the form of the Atman or Inner Self. It also teaches that through awakening our Kundalini, or inner meditation energy, we can attain enlightenment in this body. Teachings such as these will be recognised by meditation practitioners and those who are familiar with eastern philosophical concepts. It is these concepts of Atman and Kundalini, as well as offering, ritual worship, yantras and the blue pearl, that are addressed in the research. I have focussed specifically on the way in which these mystical concepts and related notions of blessing and protection manifest in the textiles of India.

My visual images, which are expressed through the medium of textiles, printmaking and artist's books, utilise repeated shapes such as the circle, square, triangle, flower, star and spiral. These derive from the study of Indian yantras, textiles and ground painting, particularly the way these visual forms are used in worship and offering. Much of this imagery is remembered from travels in India and participation in ritual worship such as Vedic fire ceremonies.

I propose that using mantras in the artwork, either literally or symbolically, results in a visual expression of meditation. I further contend that the use of certain archetypal symbols that arise spontaneously in meditation, enhances this expression of meditation.

## Statement of Authorship

Except where explicit reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been relied upon or used without due acknowledgment in the main text and bibliography of the thesis.



.....  
Carole Wilson

27 March 2001

## Acknowledgements

This research project has been assisted by a number of students and staff at the University of Ballarat. I would like to thank my supervisors Loris Button, Helen Hayes and Sally Miller for their continuing support. The advice and assistance of Allan Mann, Pauline Williamson and Diane Clingin has also been very helpful. Many friends, family members and colleagues have provided love, moral support, gifts and loans of equipment. Of these, I would particularly like to thank Judy Bush, Maryanne Coutts, Claire Day, Dianne Jacono, Fiona Lawry, Barbara Miles, Jane Nicholls, Lee Papworth, Louise Saxton, Dianne Tanzer and Meryl Waugh. My gratitude to Annie Drum and Dawn and John Wilson is immense.

The illustrations are from slides of my own work, textiles in my collection and from books. Chakras and Nadis in the Subtle Body is plate 53 and Yogini with Serpent Energy is plate 39 from Philip Rawson's Tantra: the Indian Cult of Ecstasy (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973). Sri Yantra is plate 62 in Madhu Khanna's Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979). Kundalini and the Devi is from page 4 in Darshan Journal (no. 66, 1992). Durga with Mantras is plate 102 in Ajit Mookerjee's Ritual Art of India (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985). Woman Making Kolam is from page 7 in Nicholas Barnard's Arts and Crafts of India (London: Conran Octopus, 1993). Religious Teacher is from the catalogue A Stream of Stories: Indian Miniatures from the National Gallery of Australia (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1997). Hastakara Yantra is from page 121 in Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna The Tantric Way: Art, Science, Ritual (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977).

The artwork was photographed by Ben Wrigley, Barry Wemyss and myself. The artist's books were bound by Ristori Bookbindery and the laser printing was done by Pro Colour.

Finally, I must acknowledge my eternal gratitude to the path of Siddha Yoga and the teachings of Swami Chidvilasananda and Swami Muktananda.

## List of Illustrations

- Fig. 1        **Kali House II.** (detail) Carole Wilson, 1994, oil on wood, 9 x 9 cm
- Fig. 2        **Chakras and Nadis in the Subtle Body.** Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, c. 1820, gouache on paper
- Fig. 3        **Sri Yantra.** Rajasthan, c. 1700, gouache on paper
- Fig. 4        **Kundalini and the Devi.** Rajasthan, c. 19<sup>th</sup> century, manuscript page, gouache on paper
- Fig. 5        **Durga with Mantras.** Rajasthan, c. 18<sup>th</sup> century, gouache on cloth
- Fig. 6        **Yogini with Serpent Energy.** South India, c. 1800, carved wood
- Fig. 7        **Woman Making Kolam.**
- Fig. 8        **Mantra Shawl.**(gamcha) India, c. 1995, printed silk, 180 x 110 cm
- Fig. 9        **Ganesh Stapana.** India, c. 1986, embroidered cotton, 67 x 214 cm
- Fig.10       **Religious Teacher.** Himachal Pradesh, c. 1820, watercolour on paper
- Fig. 11       **Twenty Shawl Images.** (detail) Carole Wilson, 1996, laser transfer on canvas, embroidery, each piece 30 x 23 cm
- Fig. 12       **Hastakara Yantra.** Rajasthan, c. 18<sup>th</sup> century, gouache on paper
- Fig. 13       **Installing the Mantra.** Carole Wilson, 1997, laser transfer on canvas, embroidery, 23 x 23 cm

## List of Slides

1. **Woven Mantra Shawl 1** 1996  
acrylic paint, laser transfer and embroidered cotton on cotton canvas,  
240 x 120 cm shawl, 30 x 23 cm canvas (2 pieces)
2. **Woven Mantra Shawl 1** (detail)
3. **Woven Mantra Shawl 2** 1996  
acrylic paint on Belgian linen and laser transfer on cotton canvas,  
240 x 120 cm shawl, 30 x 23 cm canvas (2 pieces)
4. **Woven Mantra Shawl 2** (detail)
5. **Shawl Diagram Panels and Prayer Mats** 1996 (detail)  
oil paint on MDF, screenprinted cotton canvas,  
13 x 13 cm panels, 15 x 15 cm mats (14 pieces)
6. **Seed Mantra** 1996  
acrylic paint on Belgian linen,  
23 x 24 cm
7. **Hand** 1996  
acrylic paint on Belgian linen,  
23 x 24 cm
8. **Kali Flower** 1997  
laser transfer and embroidered cotton on cotton canvas,  
46 x 23 cm (2 pieces)
9. **Shiva Star** 1997  
laser transfer and embroidered wool on cotton canvas,  
46 x 23 cm (2 pieces)
10. **Mantra Spiral** 1997  
laser transfer and embroidered wool on cotton canvas,  
46 x 23 cm (2 pieces)



11. **Warm Chakras 1** 1997  
laser transfer and embroidered cotton on cotton canvas,  
23 x 23 cm
12. **Warm Chakras 2** 1997  
acrylic paint, laser transfer and embroidered wool on cotton canvas,  
23 x 23 cm
13. **Kundalini Blue** 1996/97  
acrylic paint and embroidered rayon on padded cotton canvas,  
installation size 120 cm diameter (8 pieces, sizes variable)
14. **Aspects of the Self** 1997  
acrylic paint, embroidered wool and cotton on padded cotton canvas on blue wall,  
installation size 220 x 270 cm (26 pieces, sizes variable)
15. **Aspects of the Self** (detail)
16. **Blue Pearl** 1997  
acrylic paint, embroidered cotton on padded cotton canvas,  
installation size 260 x 300 cm (40 pieces, sizes variable)
17. **Blue Pearl** (detail)
18. **Votive Site 1** 1998  
laser transfer, brass, embroidered cotton on padded cotton,  
installation size 260 x 260 cm (10 pieces)
19. **Votive Site 1** (detail)
20. **Moon Works** 1998 (detail),  
laser transfer, Chinese joss paper, Bohemian crystal beads, embroidered cotton on  
cotton canvas,  
installation 25 x 25 cm (7 pieces)

21. **Moon Works** (detail)
  
22. **Votive Site 2** 1998  
Shell & plastic buttons, pins, artificial flowers, embroidered cotton on padded Belgian linen,  
installation size 260 x 180 cm (7 words, 44 letters)
  
23. **Votive Site 2** (detail)
  
24. **Three Hands** 1998  
acrylic, artificial pearls and flowers, embroidered cotton on padded cotton,  
installation size 160 x 160 cm (36 pieces)
  
25. **Three Hands** (detail)
  
26. **Daily Meditations** 1999  
leather, glass and plastic buttons, buckles, laser transfer, artificial pearls and flowers on Belgian linen,  
installation size 30 x 55 cm (18 pieces)
  
27. **Book 1 – Mantra** 1997  
laser transfer on cotton, bound in Belgian linen,  
19 x 21 cm
  
28. **Book 2 – Stitch** 1997  
laser transfer on cotton, bound in embroidered cotton,  
19 x 21 cm
  
29. **Book 3 - Goddesses – Paper** 1997  
collagraphs on Arches 88, bound in black leather,  
17 x 19 cm

30. **Book 4 - Goddesses – Cloth** 1997  
collographs and embroidered cotton on cotton canvas, bound in embroidered cotton,  
17 x 19 cm
31. **Book 5 –Perfection** 1998  
collographs on Arches 88, bound in black leather,  
13 x 14 cm
32. **Book 6 – Blue Pearl** 1998  
laser prints on Whatmans HP, bound in blue linen,  
21 x 21 cm
33. **Book 7 – Aspects of the Self** 1998  
laser prints on Whatmans HP, bound in blue linen,  
21 x 21 cm
34. **Book 8 – White Sampler** and **Book 9 – Red Sampler** 1998  
laser transfer and cotton embroidery on cotton canvas,  
each 9 x 13 cm
35. **Book 10 – Fertility and Food** 2000  
laser prints on Whatmans HP, bound in cotton with artificial flowers stitched on  
surface,  
28 x 20 cm
36. **Book 11 – Prosperity and Abundance** 2000  
laser prints on Whatmans HP, concertina format,  
14 x 9 cm
37. **Heart Mat** 2001  
screenprinted tarlatan, plastic and shell buttons, Bohemian crystal beads, cotton  
embroidery and monoprints on a variety of papers,  
220 x 200 cm
38. **Heart Mat** (detail)

# Introduction

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this research project is to demonstrate the links between spiritual practice and visual art, in particular to examine the relationship between the repetition of a mantra, the repetition of an image and the repetition of a stitch. I propose that using mantras in the artwork, either literally or symbolically, results in a visual expression of meditation, and further that the use of certain archetypal symbols that arise spontaneously in meditation, enhances this expression of meditation. This research is about making art that is both an offering and a meditation, an expression of meditation and a meditation in itself.

In examining spiritual practice, repetition of mantras and visual art, I am focussing on a very specific area, my own personal practices. These are from the Indian tradition of Siddha Yoga as taught by Swami Chidvilasananda and Swami Muktananda. There is a wider frame of reference as these practices are part of a lengthy tradition with roots far back into ancient times.

I have endeavoured to express concepts through the visual works which will be more familiar to meditators or those who have an interest in eastern mysticism. These concepts, often recognised in other cultures and traditions but known by different names, include the mantra, the Inner Self or Atman, Kundalini, the Blue Pearl and the Goddess Principle. Underpinning these concepts are other notions such as yantras, textiles as offering, and cloth and thread as metaphors for the cosmos. Some of the artworks are directly inspired by an inner vision, sensation or state attained in meditation, whilst others make reference to aspects of worship and customs of homage and offering. All of these concepts interweave to form the basis of the theoretical research and the practical manifestation of this – the body of artworks.

The three main areas of study that provide the framework for this thesis are the inner space, offering and thread. These subjects are reflected in the chapter headings. As I am investigating the parallels between repetition of a mantra, repetition of an image and repetition of a stitch, my visual images are expressed through the medium of textiles and printmaking. Underpinning this body of thesis artworks is a celebration of women's textile work and more particularly the textile traditions of India.

As I am working with textiles in a western contemporary arts context, one might expect a feminist analysis of this position. I acknowledge that as a contemporary artist using textiles methodology in the twenty first century I am positioning myself in territory relatively recently reclaimed by feminists. My line of inquiry within this thesis, however, is perhaps more concerned with the feminine rather than the feminist. It is the underlying feminine creative impulse that I am concerned with. This is expressed in a variety of forms and known by a variety of names – Shakti, Kundalini, Durga, Kali and Lakshmi are but a few. Unlike much of Southeast Asia where the textile arts are the domain of women,<sup>1</sup> much of my source material comes from a culture where the textile arts are practised by both men and women, albeit often with clearly delineated tasks denoted by gender, caste and tribal affiliations.

There are a number of western artists who are influenced by, or refer to, Hindu, Taoist, Buddhist and Islamic concepts in their work. This has been documented and, as it is not my particular source of inspiration, it has not been a subject of in depth analysis within this exegesis.<sup>2</sup> I have, however, made reference to some artists and their work where it has direct links to mine. Ultimately, examining my personal spiritual path and creative processes has been of greater importance.

Many of the topic areas in this exegesis lend themselves to a comparative religions analysis. Scriptural text and talismanic symbols are woven into and printed onto textiles in a number of cultures but as the possibilities are vast and would require a separate exegesis I have not discussed them in any length. I have discussed practices and beliefs from other religions where relevant, and drawn from the work and life of Hildegard of Bingen, paying particular attention to her inner visions of the blue pearl, or blue being, as it relates directly to one of my topics. I have devoted some discussion to the inner meditation energy, or kundalini, as it occurs in other cultures and religious traditions.

The introduction provides a background context within which to view this research as well as addressing my major sources, spiritual, visual and textual.

---

<sup>1</sup> Maxwell, R. Textiles of Southeast Asia: Tradition, Trade and Transformation. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1990, p.55.

<sup>2</sup> The following section, however, does address these trends briefly and provides an overall context for the subject matter of this thesis.

# CONTEXT

In the western context, the notion of 'the spiritual in art' is one that has fallen in and out of vogue over the years. At the beginning of the twentieth century when Kandinsky published his "Concerning the Spiritual in Art" Theosophy was influencing a range of artists including Mondrian and Malevich but by the late 1930s 'spiritual' was a word that was considered dangerous to an artist's career, at least in America.<sup>3</sup> Within Australia there were a number of artists working in the period of 1930-1960 who were influenced by eastern philosophy and world views. These were Godfrey Miller, Ian Fairweather and Roger Kemp and there are now a number of artists in Australia who directly draw reference from Hindu and Buddhist philosophy.<sup>4</sup> These include Marianne Baillieu, Dominic De Clario, Marion Borgelt and Louise Rippert. There are a smaller number of artists, both within Australia and internationally, who are meditation practitioners and incorporate imagery and concepts from these traditions into their work.<sup>5</sup> The incorporation of mantras into visual imagery in a western contemporary arts context, however, is, as far as I can establish, quite unique.

Despite these trends, which are not just recent, there still seems to be a belief that art which addresses 'the spiritual' is to be viewed with scepticism.

"The concept of feeding the spirit daily is alien in consumer societies where every other appetite is heavily over-catered. The very word spiritual is often viewed with suspicion, seen either as a hangover from an outmoded and irrelevant faith or the buzz word of a new order. It certainly does not sit naturally in the late twentieth century."<sup>6</sup>

Simeon Kronenberg in his catalogue essay 'The Sublime Imperative' from the exhibition of the same name states that the exhibition was conceived in order to assert a new position which had not yet been clearly articulated in Australian (specifically non-aboriginal) art history: that of the spiritual and the sublime. He suggested at the time that current orthodoxy did not allow for the pursuit of the transcendental, other than as parody, appropriation or pastiche and that art which led one to rest in a place of profound stillness was

---

<sup>3</sup> Tuchman, M. The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 – 1985. New York: Abbeville Press, 1993, p.18.

<sup>4</sup> A forthcoming publication by Craftsman House entitled Crosscurrents in Contemporary Australian Art, by Traudi Allen, devotes a chapter to this topic.

<sup>5</sup> These include Jackie Winsor, a New York sculptor and Siddha Yoga practitioner – one of her works about the blue pearl principle is discussed on p. 31 of this exegesis, Geoffrey Goldie, a Melbourne painter who has incorporated yantras into his imagery and Tim Johnson a painter who as a practising Buddhist incorporates images of Buddhas into his work.

<sup>6</sup> Nick Waterlow "Numinous Worlds" in Waterlow, N. & R. Mellick. Spirit + Place: Art in Australia 1861 - 1996. Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996, p.35.

"liable to attract criticism, particularly in the prevailing climate of postmodernist theory where the very notion of the transcendental is denied." <sup>7</sup>

Although these views are still espoused by certain theorists,<sup>8</sup> there has certainly been a shift as we enter the new millennium. This is perhaps best evidenced by the major exhibition Spirit + Place: Art in Australia 1861-1996 held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney which brought together an extensive range of Australian artists from both aboriginal and non-aboriginal backgrounds. It also included the work of a number of international artists and designers who had some connection with Australia, or had worked here at some time, Marie Mahony Griffin, Marina Abramovic and Joseph Beuys. A substantial catalogue, with a number of critical essays, accompanied the exhibition and the above mentioned arguments were alluded to in a number of the essays. Bernice Murphy, in her preface, acknowledges the fact that,

"While artists' discussion of these tendencies is well documented, an increasingly secular Western society has been inclined to disparage any systematic attempt, through exhibitions or publications, to address the spiritual (or the *numinous*) in recent years."<sup>9</sup>

Spirit + Place was perhaps the beginning of a change in attitudes. The following year, 1997, Australia's main arts publishers, Craftsman House, produced a substantial text Fire and Shadow: Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art which included interviews with fifteen established and mid career artists from both aboriginal and non aboriginal backgrounds who clearly acknowledged the spiritual element in their work. Then in 1998, Artlink journal devoted their entire March edition to 'art & the spirit'. Traudi Allen's forthcoming publication by Craftsman House, Crosscurrents in Contemporary Australian Art, devotes a chapter to Australian artists who are significantly influenced by Asian religions and philosophy. So whilst these claims concerning the unpopularity of art addressing matters spiritual still surface from time to time there is, and has been, a significant group of contemporary artists doing widely varied work who claim spirituality or the spiritual as their major source or influence. My work is certainly part of this group.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> The Sublime Imperative exhibition held at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 21 Nov - 22 Dec 1991. Included the work of Marianne Baillieu, Peter Booth, Paul Boston, Brent Harris, Roger Kemp and Ross Moore.

<sup>8</sup> See for example Jenny Zimmer's article "The Wonderful Resilience of the Non-objective Ideal" in Art Monthly, May 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Waterlow, N. & R. Mellick, *ibid*, p.6

<sup>10</sup> An earlier painting of mine entitled Kali House (1994) is reproduced and discussed by Traudi Allen in the aforementioned chapter in Crosscurrents in Contemporary Australian Art.

# SOURCES

## SPIRITUAL

The primary source for this research and body of images has been my own sadhana, or spiritual journey. My understanding and experience of mantras and meditation comes to me through the vehicle of Siddha Yoga, as taught by Swami Muktananda and Swami Chidvilasanda. This path of yoga has its antecedents in the ancient traditions of Kashmir Shaivism and Hindu Tantra<sup>11</sup> but is now taught internationally and made readily available to westerners.

Spiritual practice, by its very nature, is repetitive. Certain rituals and prayers are repeated morning and evening, day after day and the mantra, as I will explain throughout this exegesis, is repeated continually. Over the past twelve years my daily practices of meditation, chanting and japa have led to mantras becoming interwoven through my life and more particularly through my artwork. Meditation and spiritual practice are the foundations of my existence and my art practice. This research project has provided the opportunity for me to delve more deeply into the inner worlds and to visually express these experiences.

Inevitably, there are inherent problems in a research topic which examines spiritual, cultural and historical material which is not mine - by birth at least, and I am well aware that certain areas have been examined almost in isolation from the entire philosophy or world view from which they originate. I am particularly conscious of this as I know how long it has taken me, and it is still by no means complete, to come to a broader understanding of a philosophical world view that is not my own culturally. The Indian and eastern world view is one that sees time, not as linear, but as cyclical and each lifetime is a mere speck in the universe. The predominant view of the female principle, or Shakti, as the creative and active principle is also one that western Christians are not generally familiar with. Additionally, the broader concept of offering and detaching oneself from the fruits of one's actions is particularly Eastern and, to some extent, contradictory to the belief systems we are brought up with. We are taught to strive for success and that our efforts will be rewarded in this lifetime. There is no real concept of future incarnations or the cause and effect principle (karma) being played out many lifetimes ahead.

---

<sup>11</sup> Kashmir Shaivism is a nondual philosophy that recognises the entire universe as a manifestation of Shakti, the divine conscious energy and explains how the formless, unmanifest Supreme Principle manifests as the universe. Tantra is an esoteric spiritual discipline which also worships Shakti, the female principle, as the divine creator of the universe through rituals, mantras and yantras. The goal of tantra is awakening the Kundalini in order to attain Self-realization.



These concerns notwithstanding, I have approached this project with respect and sensitivity confining myself largely to concepts with which I have some experience. This focusses particularly on experiences of Kundalini awakening, offering and meditation visions such as the blue pearl. I have also confined myself to mantras that I use in my own practice although I have researched a wider body of material.

## VISUAL

Eastern religious practices are rich in visual imagery and the sources for this research project have been extensive and varied. An important visual source for this work has been the inner visions I have experienced whilst performing spiritual practices. This is supported and enhanced by 'outer' visions of practices of offering and worship, or puja, performed by myself and others within the framework of Siddha Yoga. These 'outer' visions add to a mental storehouse of remembered experiences from time spent in an Indian ashram over ten years ago. During that stay I was fortunate to be present at a yajna, an ancient Vedic fire ceremony, which took place within the ashram over a period of seven days continuously.<sup>12</sup> I also visited the Shaivite temple caves carved into rock on Elephanta Island, just off the coast of Bombay, and the second century Buddhist Karle and Bhaja caves near Poona in the western state of Maharashtra. These experiences and others like them have continued to exert an influence in my life and, as I will discuss in chapter five, my fascination with things Indian, both textiles and meditation paths, has been evident since early adolescence and has had a lasting effect on my artwork.

Original artworks have provided another valuable visual source and I have welcomed the opportunity to examine objects and artefacts included in Australian collections or exhibited here during the period of my candidature. Within Australia, the Art Gallery of South Australia and the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) both hold significant collections of Indian and southeast Asian textiles, art and some manuscripts. The NGA also holds a rare example of a spectacular Kashmir shawl known as 'the Godfrey Shawl', after its benefactor. This large woven and embroidered shawl depicts the walled kingdom of Srinagar, complete with waterways and detailed images of hunting and court scenes within the landscape. It is one of a pair of map shawls commissioned by the Rajput ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, Maharaja Ranbir Singh in 1870. Only four of these shawls are known to have existed and this

---

<sup>12</sup> This experience, and the significance of Yajnas, are further discussed in chapters two and four.

one is said to have taken its many embroiderers three years to complete.<sup>13</sup> The NGA also holds some exquisite examples of Balinese inscribed palm leaf manuscripts and Jain manuscript pages dating back to the fifteenth century. In addition to this I have had access to Indian shawls and artefacts in private collections.

During 1995 to 1999 there have been a number of significant exhibitions in Australia of Indian art and textiles. These include The Vision of Kings - Art and Experience in India at the National Gallery of Australia in 1995, the Jasleen Dhamija residency<sup>14</sup> and associated exhibition at Canberra School of Art and the University of Wollongong in 1996 and Woven Magic - Indian Textiles and their Influence in Southeast Asia at Monash University Gallery in 1997<sup>15</sup>. Rapt in Colour – Korean Textiles of the Choson Dynasty held at the Melbourne Immigration Museum provided useful cross cultural references to the textile traditions of Korea, particularly the use of ‘wrapping cloths’ which were imbued with properties of protection and blessing. I have also had the opportunity to watch visiting Buddhist monks from Gyoto monastery in Tibet create sacred and elaborate sand mandalas here in Australia on a number of occasions. These are Buddhist yantras or mandalas, and, as such, have a close relationship to the Hindu yantras that I have drawn on in my imagery and research.

In addition to these there have been other major exhibitions which, whilst not as directly concerned with my specific area of interest as the above mentioned exhibitions, have provided important insights. These include Lit from Within - Amish Quilts at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), which had a deeply mystical aura and alerted me to the unique possibilities of the simple running stitch, also used in a particular Indian tradition of quilt making known as kanthas. Another exhibition at the NGV during 1997 entitled I Had a Dream - Australian Art of the 1960's drew my attention to Australian artists such as Godfrey Miller, Ian Fairweather and Roger Kemp who, in fairly recent decades, were very drawn to, and influenced by, Buddhist and Hindu cosmology, mandalas and yantras. It has been suggested that Godfrey Miller was the first Australian artist to deliberately study and incorporate elements of Hinduism in his work.<sup>16</sup> Treasures of Asian Art - Selections from the Rockefeller Collection, exhibited at the NGV in 1999, was timely as it highlighted the fact

---

<sup>13</sup> Brand, M. (ed) Traditions of Asian Art – Traced Through the Collection of the National Gallery of Australia. Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1995, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> Jasleen Dhamija, who has been described as ‘the mother of Indian textiles’, is an internationally renowned expert in the field. She visits Australia frequently, due to family connections, and gives lectures and workshops.

<sup>15</sup> This was a touring exhibition from the Art Gallery of South Australia co-curated by Robyn Maxwell from the National Gallery of Australia. Robyn is renowned scholar in the field of Southeast Asian and Indian textiles and I attended a guest lecture she delivered during the exhibition.

<sup>16</sup> Lecture given by Traudi Allen on the influences of Asian religions on Australian artists as part of the Fine Arts Degree course at Monash University – May 19 1997.

that worship of Durga, a major Indian Goddess, and significant to my work, extended beyond the boundaries of India and as far as Cambodia, a point which was not immediately evident in the available literature.

## TEXTUAL

The text references for a work of this size are understandably numerous and this research has spanned a number of areas. The primary textual sources have come from the ancient scriptural treatises of India and have included the Rig Veda, the Upanishads, the Puranas, the Yoga Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita. Of particular relevance to this research has been the Devi Mahatmya from the Markandeya Purana and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. For these sources I have relied on Coburn's Encountering the Goddess: A Translation of the Devi Mahatmya and a Study of Its Interpretation and Prabhavananda and Isherwood's How to Know God: the Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali.

The publications of the Siddha Yoga Foundation (SYDA) have provided clear insights in the field of meditation, Kundalini awakening, ritual offering and the contemporary applications of scriptural teachings. In particular the Darshan series of journals and The Nectar of Chanting have provided important source material. Many of the chants in this book come directly from the Puranas and some of the mantras and the invocations used in my artist's books are from this source. The spiritual autobiography of Swami Muktananda, The Play of Consciousness, and the various books of essays by Swami Chidvilasananda have proved invaluable. Additionally, the publications by Swami Kripananda, The Sacred Power: A Seeker's Guide to Kundalini and Swami Muktananda's Kundalini: The Secret of Life, have deepened my understanding of this mysterious process. In the broader field of the study of mantras I have relied on Understanding Mantras, a selection of essays edited by Harvey Alper, and the works of John Woodroffe, in particular The Garland of Letters: Studies in the Mantra-Sastra.

Ajit Mookerjee and Philip Rawson, through their numerous publications on Tantric art are largely responsible for introducing this artform to western audiences.<sup>17</sup> I have drawn particularly from Rawson's The Art of Tantra, and Mookerjee's Kali: The Feminine Force in this research. The study of yantras, which are an integral part of Tantric art, has informed part

---

<sup>17</sup> Mookerjee was primarily responsible for the exhibition Fifty Tantric Mystical Diagrams held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1969. His publications Tantra Art (1971), Yoga Art (1975) and Tantra Magic (1978) reproduced many of these images. Philip Rawson wrote The Art of Tantra (1971) to accompany an exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London and eight years later published Tantra: the Indian Cult of Ecstasy.

of my work and for this, Madhu Khanna's Yantra: the Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity has been an important source.

For the broader areas of ritual, offering, worship and the goddess principle, I have drawn on a number of sources. These include Coburn's abovementioned Encountering the Goddess, Kinsley's Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Traditions, Jayakar's The Earthen Drum: An Introduction to the Ritual Arts of Rural India and Johnson's Lady of the Beasts: Ancient Images of the Goddess and Her Sacred Animals.

The catalogue of essays from the exhibition Spirit + Place: Art in Australia 1861 - 1996, held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, has provided valuable information, particularly about the early influences of Theosophy, Transcendentalism and Occultism on Australian artists. Maurice Tuchman's ground breaking exhibition in Los Angeles and the accompanying book The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 - 1985, provided relevant material concerning American artists working in 'abstract film and colour music' during the 1950s and 60s who had studied yoga and meditation. Drury and Voigt's Fire and Shadow: Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art has also proved useful.

Within the broader field of the study of Indian textiles, there are a much smaller number of publications that examine the spiritual, religious and protective aspects of cloth. Of these, I have found the following to be particularly useful; Dhamija and Jain's Handwoven Fabrics of India, Hacker and Turnbull's Courtyard, Bazaar, Temple: Traditions of Textile Expression in India, Askari and Arthur's Uncut Cloth: Saris, Shawls and Sashes and Lynton's The Sari – Styles, Patterns, History, Techniques. Maxwell has written extensively on the spiritual, magical and protective aspects of cloth in Southeast Asia as well as the influence of Indian textile weaves, dyeing and design techniques. Her book Textiles of Southeast Asia: Tradition, Trade and Transformation, and that of Pastor Roces Sinaunang Habi – Philippine Ancestral Weave, have both provided important cross cultural analyses of textile practices in other parts of Asia.

For an historical perspective, particularly on shawls and the Indian textile industry, I have found Irwin's The Kashmir Shawl to be useful. Diagrams from the glossary in this publication have been utilised as the basis of the painted panels in the thesis artwork entitled Shawl Diagrams and Prayer Mats.

Serendipity inevitably plays its part in research and a chance encounter with Joyce Burnard at a textiles conference in Brisbane in 1999 led to a greater awareness on my part of the role of Indian textiles in Australia's past. Her book Chintz and Cotton: India's Textile Gift to the

World proved very useful especially as it elucidated for me one of the reasons why Indian textiles were very much in vogue in the era of my adolescence, a factor that seems to have been of lasting significance and plays its part in this research.

## WOVEN MANTRA – THE ARTWORKS

The methodology of this thesis is cross disciplinary as my examination of the subject areas encompasses anthropological, theological and archeological approaches. The research is multi-layered including an investigation of spiritual practices, ritual offering and the textile traditions of India. Essentially, the artworks which comprise Woven Mantra are an expression of my meditation visions, experiences and memories.

The processes I have used throughout the production of the thesis artworks are firmly grounded in textile techniques, the stitch being the basis of all the thesis artworks, including those which employ printmaking, painting or laser printing as all have the stitched cloth as their starting point. Prior to commencing the research in 1996 I had been using Sanskrit mantras in my paintings. (See fig. 1) This body of work incorporated three main elements: mantras, lotuses and boats - all metaphors for transformation. My intention at the commencement of this project was to investigate, in greater depth, Hindu and Buddhist culture, art and artefacts. This investigation led into the current body of research with a slightly shifted and more specific focus on my spiritual practice, mantras, offering and cloth.

Stitching is the primary means of expression and the simple repetition of the stitch is linked with the repetition of the mantra. I worked with a limited range of fabrics, generally simple, unrefined cloth as it has a direct reference to Indian textile history and western traditions of domestic sewing, painting, printmaking and bookbinding. I used two types of coarse fabric: canvas and Belgian linen and two types of fine fabric; tarlatan and 'Shapewell'. Tarlatan is traditionally used in bookbinding and for wiping etching plates, and 'Shapewell' is a dressmaking interfacing. The work is both hand and machine sewn using relatively simple stitch types. I have used a limited range of stitches in the embroidery including running stitch, chain stitch and satin stitch. These stitches are common to both western and eastern textile traditions. A large portion of the artwork is padded with dacron, a quilting material, and some of the smaller works are stretched over canvas stretcher frames. The frayed edge has been consciously used in a number of the works.

My investigation has resulted in four distinct, but interrelated bodies of work which comprise Woven Mantra. These are *Shal*, *Images of Meditation*, *Images of Offering* and *Images of*

Fig. 1

**Kali House II.** (detail) Carole Wilson, 1994, oil on wood





*Contemplation.* There are six major pieces, all multi-pieced wall installations comprising padded canvas forms and sheets of paper which have been painted, printed, stitched, and embellished with haberdashery components. There is a body of smaller wall panels employing similar techniques and embroidery, and a series of eleven artist's books. Of the books, four of them relate directly to three of the larger wall installations, referencing and extending them. The remaining seven are independent of any particular work but integral to the research project as a whole. The books have been produced using a number of printmaking and stitching techniques including collographs and laser printing.

The following three chapters will examine the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis artworks. These chapters are *The Inner Space*, *Offering and Thread*. Chapter four will investigate, in detail, the thesis artworks, *Woven Mantra*, including a brief history of the project, the methodology and the techniques used in the physical construction of the work.



# Chapter One

## THE INNER SPACE

The inner space is of primary importance in all aspects of my day to day life including my visual arts practice. Meditation has been an integral part of my life since early adolescence when I developed a keen interest in Indian mysticism and learnt meditation at the local Transcendental Meditation Centre in Canberra.<sup>18</sup> Over the past few years the inner space has been the focus of sustained artistic interest for the purposes of this research project. It is the place which has provided the inspiration, the material and the imagery for these works as well as the patience and the courage to keep going. It is not going too far to equate my research practice with sadhana, or spiritual practice. Both paths are largely walked alone, albeit with expert help and guidance, and the pitfalls and distractions of other tracks are many. Daily discipline, faith and commitment are the necessary requirements to follow both paths successfully.

In this chapter I will discuss the concept of the inner space and how it has informed my work, from the point of view of yoga and meditation. As mentioned previously, my understanding comes primarily from the teachings of Siddha Yoga, which is a Hindu path with roots in Kashmir Shaivism. Whilst I will focus primarily on Hindu concepts such as the Atman, mantras, yantras, Kundalini and the subtle body<sup>19</sup>, there are many close links with Buddhist concepts to which I will also refer. Relevant cross references to Christian and other spiritual traditions will be made where appropriate. In order to examine this multi-faceted topic I have created sub topics which may give a false impression of separateness. This is in fact not the case as mantras are inextricably linked with Kundalini and yantras, and the Atman with the Blue Pearl. Nevertheless, as the topic is so complex, some teasing out of concepts should prove helpful.

The inner space is where we go, either consciously or unconsciously, for replenishment, nourishment and rest. It is a place of deep healing and deep knowing. All cultures and

---

<sup>18</sup> There was a growth of meditation centres and ashrams around Australia during the 1970's. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi is the spiritual leader of the Transcendental Meditation movement and gained notoriety in the west as he provided spiritual guidance and meditation lessons to the Beatles during their tour to the US. Swami Muktananda, of the Siddha Yoga lineage, made his first visit to Australia in 1972, and then again in 1974, conducting lecture tours and Meditation Intensives.

<sup>19</sup> Atman, mantra and Kundalini are all Sanskrit terms pertaining to various aspects of meditation and the inner worlds. They are each explained in greater depth within this chapter.

spiritual traditions do seem to recognise the concept of an inner space; some describe it as the place where God dwells whilst others describe it as the seat of the Self or Higher Power. Christians know it as the Soul, for Buddhists it is Sunyata, and for Hindus it is the Atman. For many artists, it is also the place from which creativity arises. As an artist, I understand the importance of visiting this place for my ideas and sustenance; it is also the place I go to in meditation, contemplation and prayer.

## INDIAN INFLUENCES ON WESTERN THOUGHT

Western interest in Indian philosophy has been evident since at least the nineteenth century and western fascination with eastern exotica has been evident for far longer than that. One need look no further than the spice and textile trade routes throughout the ancient world. As early as the first century AD, Pliny recorded that the highly lucrative pepper trade between Rome and India had led to a trade deficit with the east. The Roman senate blamed the vanity of Roman women for this through their desire for fine Indian printed cottons. They were highly prized as the technology for printing patterned cloth was not yet known in the Roman world.<sup>20</sup>

The Rig Veda, the most ancient of four scriptures from the Indian subcontinent regarded as divinely revealed<sup>21</sup>, was translated into French in 1848, English in 1850 and German in 1876.<sup>22</sup> Fifty of the Upanishads, another group of spiritual treatises, were translated into Latin and published in Paris in 1802. This publication was read by Schopenhauer who said of the Upanishads: their reading

“has been the consolation of my life, and will be of my death”<sup>23</sup>

while in America in 1854, Thoreau, in the final chapter of Walden entitled ‘The Pond in Winter’ says,

---

<sup>20</sup> Dhamija, J. & J. Jain. Handwoven Fabrics of India. New York: Mapin Publishing, 1989. p.17.

<sup>21</sup> Dating of the Vedas is extremely difficult as they were passed down orally before being written somewhere between 1500 – 1200 BC. The four major Vedas are the Rig (sometimes expressed as Rik or Rg), Sama, Yajur and Atharva.

<sup>22</sup> O’Flaherty, Wendy D. The Rig Veda: An Anthology. London: Penguin, 1981, p. 303.

<sup>23</sup> The Upanishads are a group of spiritual texts the oldest of which were composed between 800 and 400 BC. Some were written as late as the fifteenth century AD. Mascaro, J. (trans) The Upanishads. London: Penguin, 1965, p.8.

“In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat-Geeta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial...”<sup>24</sup>

In 1893, Swami Vivekananda travelled from India to lecture at the Chicago World Fair and subsequently conducted a lecture tour of America. These lectures, which appeared as a book in Russia during 1906, and the Yoga philosophy expounded by Vivekananda, generated considerable interest in Europe and was thought to be one of the major influences on artists of the Cubo-Futurist movement in Russia just prior to World War 1.<sup>25</sup> Indian cosmological views, both Vedic and Buddhist, were also a great source of inspiration for the Theosophy movement. Helena Blavatsky, who founded the Theosophical Society in 1875, and her successor Annie Besant, were clearly influenced by Indian philosophical systems as well as the Jewish Cabala and European occultism.<sup>26</sup> Within German theosophical circles attention was being given to another important Indian spiritual treatise, the Bhagavad Gita, which was being systematically collated with the writings of western mystics such as Meister Eckhart.<sup>27</sup> Nobel prize winning author Herman Hesse published his novel ‘Siddhartha’ in 1922 which chronicled the quest of a young Brahmin boy for enlightenment. This work was clearly inspired by Hesse’s profound regard for Indian philosophy. Carl Jung looked to the Upanishads and Yoga philosophies of India as early as 1912 and devoted considerable effort to establishing the links between psychoanalysis and Kundalini Yoga in his seminars and publications during the 1930s and 40s.<sup>28</sup>

Although much of the British interest in Indian matters was coloured by a colonial mentality, Sir John Woodroffe, an Oxford barrister posted to India during the British Raj, was responsible for translating and commenting on many of the more esoteric Tantra texts. He was a pioneer in Indic studies upon his return to Oxford in 1923 after serving as a magistrate and a law professor in Calcutta. Woodroffe was largely responsible for introducing and

---

<sup>24</sup> Atkinson, B. (ed) Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau. New York: The Modern Library, 1965, p.266. Walden, first published in 1854, is Thoreau’s account of the two years (1845 – 1847) he spent living in a simple hut which he built beside Walden Pond near Concord in New England.

<sup>25</sup> Tuchman, M. The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 –1985. New York: Abbeville Press & Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1986. Pp. 186, 187.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p. 174.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* pp. 134 – 136.

<sup>28</sup> Jung’s published writings specifically on Indian philosophy are “Yoga and the West” (1936) and “The Psychology of Eastern Meditation” (1948). His most extensive work was presented in seminars during the 1930s on western parallels with Kundalini and commentaries on Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras. For further information see Shamdasani, S (ed). The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes on the Seminar Given in 1932 by C.G. Jung. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

explaining much of Indian philosophy to British audiences and published over fifteen books including titles such as “The Serpent Power”, “Hymns to the Goddess” and “Greatness of Shiva”.<sup>29</sup>

Yoga philosophy and the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Prabhavananda influenced the Californian ‘colour music’ artists of the post war period,<sup>30</sup> and the exhibitions of tantric art held in London and California during the 1970s were an inspiration to many artists at the time. I will now discuss in detail particular concepts relating to the inner space and meditation.

## MEDITATION AND THE ATMAN

The Self, or Atman, is a concept which must be understood in order to make sense of much Hindu philosophy. The Indian perception of Self is quite different from the common western perception of self, which is largely a personal one inextricably tied with the emotions, the mind and the physical body. The Atman, or Self, is a silent and unchangeable energy within us which is referred to as the ‘witness’ or the ‘witness state’ – a force which is standing slightly aside, watching yet unattached. The Katha Upanishad says,

“Above the senses is the mind. Above the mind is the intellect. Above the intellect is the ego. Above the ego is the unmanifested seed, the Primal Cause. And verily beyond the unmanifested seed is the Self, the unconditioned, knowing whom one attains to freedom and achieves immortality.”<sup>31</sup>

Yoga philosophy teaches that the Atman is present in all beings, animate as well as inanimate, and that the purpose of meditation and spiritual practice is to connect with that pure consciousness. This philosophy states that God is already known and present within us but that we have forgotten our own true godlike state and have to rediscover it through meditation and awakening our Kundalini. The basis of this belief is that God, the Self and the Guru are all one and the same and that God is closer than we think; closer than our own breath. When asked to define god, the sage of the Upanishads said ‘neti neti’ ‘not this, not this’. When pressed further, the sage said ‘Tat Tvam Asi’, ‘Thou Art That’.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> These texts are published by Ganesh and Company Publishers in Madras. I have referred to The Garland of Letters: Studies in the Mantra-Sastra in chapter five.

<sup>30</sup> See p. 31 of this chapter for discussion of colour music.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Prabhavananda, S. The Spiritual Heritage of India. Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1979, p.52.

<sup>32</sup> Mascaro, J. op.cit, p.12.

Patanjali<sup>33</sup>, in his Yoga Sutras, describes how the processes of Yoga are designed to take us beyond the thoughts and trappings of the mind where we habitually dwell. Commentators<sup>34</sup> on Patanjali's Sutras use the analogy of a lake to describe the action of thought waves; if wind blows the surface of a lake into waves, the water becomes clouded and muddy and the bottom cannot be seen. The lake represents the mind and the still bottom of the lake the Self or Atman.

It is also important to look at the word 'yoga' itself. Essentially yoga means union and it is the Sanskrit predecessor of the English word 'yoke'. The union that yoga refers to is union with the Atman or one's own god; it can be applied to any deity or belief system but is firmly rooted in Indian philosophy. The physical version of yoga that we are more accustomed to in the west is 'Hatha Yoga', which is but one of the many branches of yoga. One of the main purposes of Hatha Yoga is to still the mind and strengthen the body for meditation; it is not an end in itself.

The Atman is a concept that I have given specific consideration to in a number of my artworks. One of the works completed during the thesis, Aspects of the Self, gives expression to a state of meditation where partially formed thoughts and mantras float softly above and through the inner blue space of the mind. (See slides 14 and 15)

## MANTRA

Closely linked with the Atman, yoga and meditation is the concept of mantra. Put simply, a mantra is a sacred word or sound, or collection of words and sounds, invested with the power to transform, redeem and protect one who recites it. A mantra is 'chaitanya' or enlivened with divine energy when passed on from an enlightened master to a student. Mantras can be repeated silently, or spoken and chanted aloud. The practice of continuous repetition is known as 'japa'. When used as an adjunct to meditation, the mantra can be linked to the incoming and outgoing breath, the prana and apana.

---

<sup>33</sup> Patanjali's Yoga Sutras are significant because they restate yoga philosophy from the Vedas in a concise form. A sutra (from the Sanskrit word for thread) is the bare thread of an idea which was passed down orally then expounded on by a teacher or commentator for their students. Little is known about Patanjali or his period and dating of his 'Yoga Sutras' varies widely, ranging from the fourth century BC to the fourth century AD.

<sup>34</sup> For example Prabhavananda, S. & C. Isherwood, How to Know God: the Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali. Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1981.

"There is a kind of speech that is of infinite benefit, that uplifts all who speak it and all who hear it. This is the enlivened mantra. By repeating the mantra, which is full of *prana*, you energise and strengthen yourself. The mantra burns away the impurities in your speech and makes it luminous. It injects the nectarean rays of the Truth into every syllable. It inspires immortal words, words that come straight from the heart. Therefore, chanting the mantra is said to be the highest freedom, the culmination of the faculty of speech. The mantra makes you soar. It generates a greater and greater sense of affinity among people. It unites the hearts of all."<sup>35</sup>

Mantra is a Sanskrit term originally appearing in the Rig Veda, the most ancient of four scriptures from the Indian subcontinent which are regarded as divinely revealed. Mantras are peculiarly Hindu in origin although they have since been absorbed into Buddhism and Taoism and thus transported from India to other parts of Asia and more recently to the west. It is important to realise that mantric utterance is not an isolated activity but firmly rooted in a yogic tradition which is passed down orally from enlightened master to disciple. It is also worth noting that there is no real parallel from the Judeo-Christian world which would help to clarify the concept for the westerner. The closest practice is the repetition of prayers using the rosary as both Hindu and Buddhist traditions also repeat mantras with the aid of beads or rosaries. There is, however, a fundamental difference as a mantra cannot be directly equated with a prayer. Alper has suggested that prayer and story are the paradigmatic form of religious utterance in the west, and the most common form of prayer is prayer as petition. Neither of these is the major form in India – it is mantra.<sup>36</sup>

Despite this, an interesting east - west parallel can be found concerning the significance of the spoken word.

"In the beginning was the Word", says the Gospel according to St. John, and "the Word was with God, and the Word was God". This statement echoes, almost exactly, a verse from the Rik Veda: "In the beginning was Brahman, with whom was the Word; and the Word was truly the supreme Brahman."<sup>37</sup>

In the Rig Veda, Vac is the Word and the mother of the Vedas. She is literally the voice, the word it utters as well as the sound of inanimate objects. She enters the Rishis (sages of the Vedas) and makes Herself known to humans through them.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Chidvilasananda, S. Enthusiasm. New York: SYDA Foundation, 1997. p. 63.

<sup>36</sup> Alper, H. (ed) Understanding Mantras. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989. p.3.

<sup>37</sup> Prabhavananda & Isherwood, How to Know God: the Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali. Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1981, p.56.

<sup>38</sup> Woodroffe, J. G. The Garland of Letters: Studies in the Mantra-Sastra. Madras: Ganesh & Co, 1969 (5<sup>th</sup> ed), pp. 1-9.

Western scholars specialising in the study of mantras strongly assert that mantras predate language and are in fact the predecessors of language in the process of human evolution. They also suggest that mantra and ritual, closely linked, are two of the earliest forms of human expression. Frits Staal has drawn comparisons between the structure of birdsong, mantras and language.<sup>39</sup>

Mantras, recited for various purposes and to unleash power, primarily function as a vehicle to reach the mystical state. The mystical state is often described as 'beyond language' or 'ineffable' and is indeed a prelinguistic state of mind. Staal concurs with traditional Indian teachings when he states that

"mantras do not transform a person or lead to a new existence; on the contrary, they give access to a state or condition that at all times was already there....No one attains release; everyone is already released, only he or she does not know it."<sup>40</sup>

Each mantra creates its own particular resonance or subtle vibration and serves to direct one's awareness inward to a state of meditation. Mantras can be short or very long; often the number of syllables is of paramount importance; thus a particular mantra might be referred to as the five syllabled mantra.<sup>41</sup> The simple single syllabled mantra OM, or more correctly AUM as it is phonetically produced, is said to be the primordial sound and the essential vibration of the universe. These words from the Chandogya Upanishad explain this:

"Prajapati, the Creator of all, rested in life-giving meditation over the worlds of his creation: and from them came the three Vedas. He rested in meditation and from those came the three sounds: BHUR, BHUVAS, SVAR, earth, air, and sky. He rested in meditation and from the three sounds came the sound OM. Even as all leaves come from a stem, all words come from the sound OM. OM is the whole universe. OM is in truth the whole universe."<sup>42</sup>

This mantra commonly occurs in longer mantras of both Hindu and Buddhist origin. To produce the sound correctly Swami Vivekananda says,

---

<sup>39</sup> See for example Staal, F. "Vedic Mantras" and Wheelock, W.T. "The Mantra in Vedic and Tantric Ritual" in Alper, H. (ed) Understanding Mantras. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

<sup>40</sup> Staal, F. "Vedic Mantras" in Alper, H. op.cit. p.81

<sup>41</sup> 'Om namah shivaya' to be discussed presently, is considered a five syllabled mantra. 'Om', as the primordial sound, is not counted as a syllable.

<sup>42</sup> Verse 2. 23.2. quoted in Mascaro, J. op.cit, p.113.

“The first letter, A, is the root sound, the key, pronounced without touching any part of the tongue or palate: M represents the last sound in the series, being produced by the closed lips, and the U rolls from the very root to the end of the sounding-board of the mouth. Thus, OM represents the whole phenomena of sound-producing.”<sup>43</sup>

OM, also known as a seed, or bhija, mantra is associated with the ajna chakra<sup>44</sup> in the region of the third eye, a site of particular significance in meditation. Seed mantras, or bija mantras, contain the potentiality or quintessence of a particular deity. An entire treatise or doctrine can be contained in a seed mantra just as the genetic imprint of an oak tree is contained in its seed. Each of the chakras has a seed mantra associated with it, as do particular deities. The bija mantra creates a strong vibration whose power continues even after the repetition has ceased. They are composed of single syllables and each sound or letter is representative of an attribute. Krim, the seed mantra of the goddess Kali, represents the power of creation and dissolution and is composed of: K = Kali, R = absolute, I = transcendent power of illusion, M = primal sound.<sup>45</sup>

The names of the various deities in the Hindu pantheon have an additional specific quality in that they actually function as mantras and may be repeated as such. Kripananda, in her study of Kundalini,<sup>46</sup> or meditation energy, relates that the sages discovered that particular Sanskrit syllables, and combinations of syllables, including Rama, Krishna and Namah Shivaya, when chanted or recited, would create powerful vibrations within the sushumna nadi. The sushumna nadi is the central channel running along the spinal region in the subtle body.<sup>47</sup> These vibrations were capable of awakening Kundalini, which eventually leads to God realisation, and because of this awakening these mantric syllables came to be called 'the Names of God'.<sup>48</sup>

As well as the single syllabled mantras there are also quite lengthy mantras such as the seven hundred verses to the goddess Durga – The Devi Mahatmya. These lengthy texts would have been, and indeed still are, committed to memory and recited on certain religious occasions. The Devi Mahatmya functions as one long mantra whose power lies in hearing, speaking and

---

<sup>43</sup> Prabhavananda & Isherwood, op.cit. p.57.

<sup>44</sup> Chakras, from the Sanskrit word meaning wheel or disc, are energy centres which occur throughout the body. There are seven main ones corresponding with the spinal column; the ajna chakra is in the centre of the forehead.

<sup>45</sup> Varada Tantra in Mookerjee, A. The Tantric Way. London:Thames & Hudson, 1977. p.134.

<sup>46</sup> Kripananda, Swami. The Sacred Power: A Seeker's Guide to Kundalini. New York: SYDA Foundation, 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Indian philosophy states that we are equipped with four different bodies; the subtle body is one of these. See page 27 for further discussion.

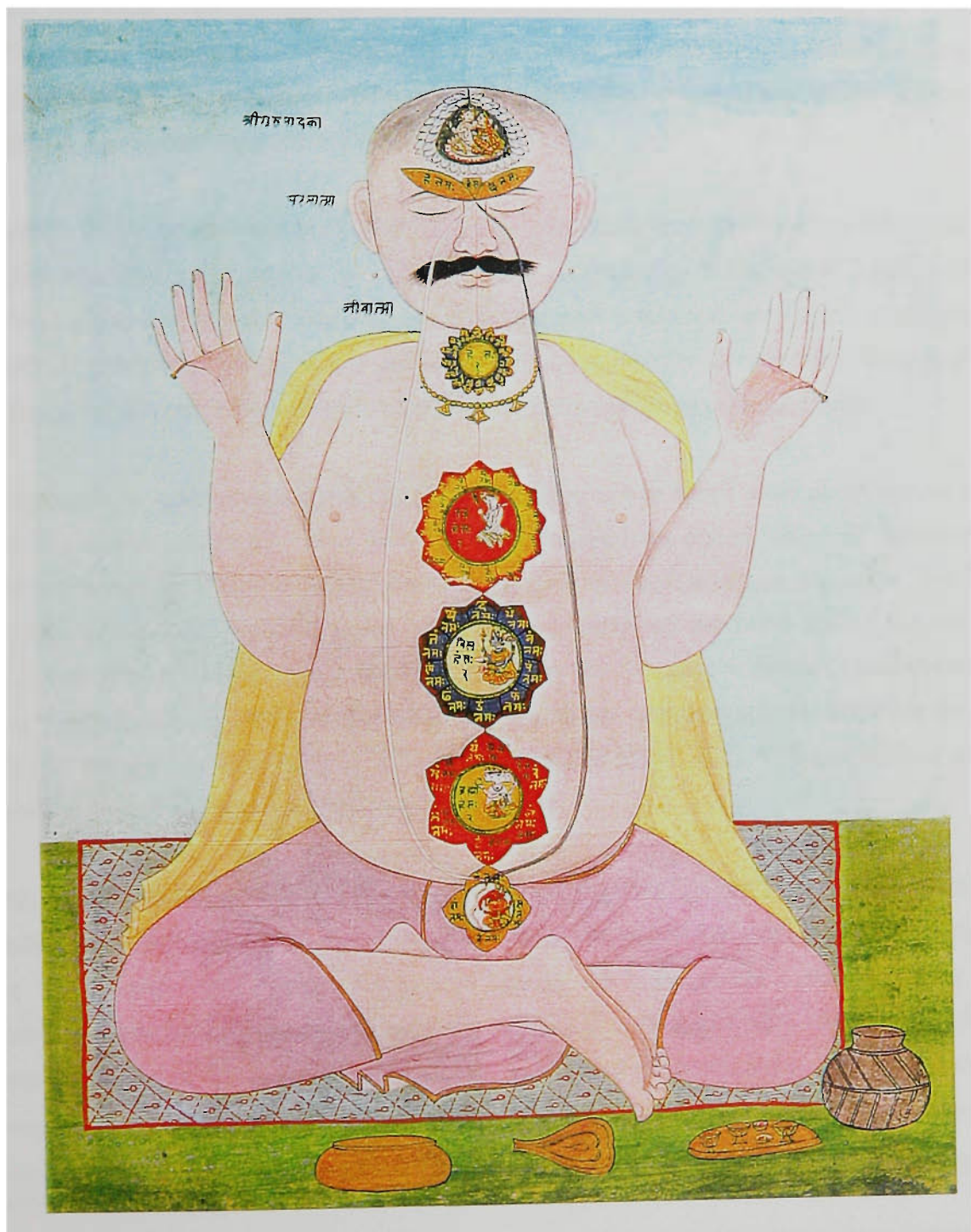
<sup>48</sup> See Swami Vishnu Tirtha Maharaj, “Devatma Shakti” quoted in Kripananda, S. op.cit p.84 & 108.



Fig. 2

**Chakras and Nadis in the Subtle Body.** Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, c. 1820, gouache on paper





chanting it. Whilst some mantras are repeated silently and the power lies in this, others are meant to be heard and said aloud and there is greater power in that.

“It is a good thing to *recite* the words; it is also a good thing to *hear* them; but it is also beneficial to *cause others to hear* them, presumably by sponsoring public recitation, where we may imagine the reciter to be someone who knows the text by heart.”<sup>49</sup>

Within this long Puranic<sup>50</sup> text describing the goddess’s battle to overcome the forces of evil and negativity which were threatening to take over the world, is a telling example of the power of mantra. At one point in the lengthy battle Durga reduces one of the demons to ashes through a supersonic utterance of the mantra ‘hum’.

Although mantras are primarily utilised in an oral/aural manner they are also used visually. Written mantras may appear on objects used for puja, or worship, or upon walls, above doorways and on wayside shrines. Mantras are also inscribed on yantras and cosmological diagrams, jewellery, vehicles and calendars. When painted onto everyday objects, such as the bodies of trucks and buses, they are utilised as a protective good luck charm.

The process of japa, or continual mantra repetition, is one that I have given visual expression to in the thesis artworks. This process has produced an entire range of accoutrements in Buddhist and Hindu culture which have had a profound influence on my work. The Buddhists use prayer flags and prayer wheels which are activated by the wind and/or the human hand. Hand held prayer wheels contain written mantras which rotate within a closed cylinder whilst being twirled. Small cotton prayer flags, on which are printed mantras, flutter in the breeze in multiple strands outside houses, temples and sacred sites. Both of these actions achieve the desired effect of continual repetition of a mantra.

Hindu shawls, printed with mantras and repeated invocations, are worn during meditation and worship and there are many varieties of prayer beads which are used when repeating mantras. (See fig. 8 and 10)<sup>51</sup> These beads are known as ‘japa malas’, japa meaning continual repetition, and mala meaning garland or necklace. It is thought that the use of beads to count prayers originated in India and sandstone sculptures dating from 185 BC portray sages

---

<sup>49</sup> Coburn, T. Encountering the Goddess: a Translation of the Devi Mahatmya and a Study of Its Interpretation, Albany: SUNY Press, 1991, p. 104.

<sup>50</sup> The Puranas are a group of eighteen texts containing sacred legends and devotional chants written over a period of time from the third to the thirteenth century. This story comes from the Devi Mahatmya which is part of the Markandeya Purana.

<sup>51</sup> The illustration figures generally occur chronologically and are placed appropriately in the text. Occasionally they appear out of sequence due to cross referencing.

holding malas. The Shaivite tradition of using seeds from the Rudraksha tree (*Elaeocarpus ganitrus*) is perhaps even more ancient.<sup>52</sup> The various deities have particular plants, flowers, trees and minerals associated with them and this in turn affects the choice of material for the mala.

Longer mantric texts are inscribed and illustrated in manuscript form using diverse materials such as palm leaf, birch bark, cloth and metals. There is a long and rich tradition of book and manuscript making in India and Indianised Southeast Asia which will be discussed more fully in Chapter five.

Mantra, a major component of my work, is one of the most common tools used in meditation to return one to the calmness at the bottom of the lake. Repetition, which is the essence of meditation and mantra recitation, is also the essence of my imagery and arts practice. (See slides 1 and 3) I have used two particular mantras in the artworks which have personal significance: 'Om Namah Shivaya' and 'Kali Durge Namoh Namah'. Both of these mantras come from the Siddha Yoga lineage but also occur in other traditions. As previously mentioned, mantras often contain different names of God; Shiva, Kali and Durga are all such names. Whilst there are no precise English translations, we can nevertheless describe the meaning or essence of these mantras. 'Om Namah Shivaya' essentially means – 'I bow to the Inner Self', or 'I bow to the Divine Presence within'. 'Om' is the primordial vibration, 'Namah' means salutations and 'Shivaya' is one of the names of God – Shiva. This mantra is from an early Shaivite tradition - a tradition where Shiva is recognised as the supreme godhead, and is somewhat different to the Shiva of the later Hindu trinity of Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva. Shiva is one of the most ancient of Indian gods, thought to perhaps pre-date the Aryan era.<sup>53</sup> The earliest depictions of the buffalo horned Shiva seated in meditation pose, or 'yoga padmasana', appear on seals from the Indus Valley civilizations of the third millennium BC. These show a male figure surrounded by beasts of the jungle – a tiger, buffalo and elephant, and are thought to be the earliest representations of Shiva as Pashupati - lord of the animals.<sup>54</sup> 'Om Namah Shivaya' is the main mantra that I use in my daily practices of meditation and japa.

---

<sup>52</sup> Dubin, L. S. The History of Beads: From 30,000 B.C. to the Present, London: Thames and Hudson, 1995, p.31.

<sup>53</sup> Between about 1700 to 700 BC the matriarchal Indus Valley civilizations with their earth goddesses were invaded by the Aryan tribes from the north who brought with them sky gods of a different nature associated with more abstract concepts such as the sun, wind and fire. The Aryans were culturally similar to the tribes who were invading Europe at about the same time and the Sanskrit language of their texts, the Vedas, is related to a number of European languages such as Greek and Latin.

<sup>54</sup> Jayakar, P. The Earthen Drum: an Introduction to the Ritual Arts of Rural India, New Delhi: National Museum, (n.d) p. 50.

‘Kali Durge Namō Namah’ is the other main mantra I have used in the artworks as well as a Kali seed, or bhija mantra in some of the earlier works. (See slides 6 and 7) ‘Kali’ and ‘Durga’ are two goddesses, or two different aspects of the goddess, depending on one’s inclination.<sup>55</sup> The words ‘Namō Namah’ mean salutations again and again. Durga and Kali are also particularly ancient goddesses, with a complex history and iconography. The earliest images of Durga appear on similar seals from Mohenjo-Daro<sup>56</sup> of the third millennium BC depicting her as an earth goddess communing with trees and tigers or as part of the tree and tiger. In the Puranas of the medieval period, with their emphasis on epic battles, Durga and Kali were reinvented as magnificent warrior goddesses. Kali and Durga have come to signify the power of triumph over adversity, particularly over the negative tendencies of the mind.

There are other mantras which I have used textually in the artist’s books. (See slides 31 and 36) These are longer mantras which are not generally recited as japa. One of these, the Sri Mahalakshmyastakam, is an invocation to the goddess Lakshmi who represents abundance and good fortune, both spiritual and material.

## YANTRA

Yantras, as the visual or diagrammatic form of mantras, are closely linked to meditation and, although I do not personally use them as part of my spiritual practice, they have nevertheless formed an important part of this study and, as such, will be discussed here. Yantras are very precise images constructed according to particular formulae and usually only by trained priests. My images, while a visual expression of meditation and mantra, are clearly not yantras in the strictest sense of the term.

A yantra, as the visual form of a mantra, can be used as a tool for meditation and mentally constructed, step by step, during the process of meditation. Yantras occur in the Vedic, Tantric and Buddhist traditions and the cosmological mystical diagrams from the Jain tradition are closely related. Additionally, the wall and ground paintings executed by women on their houses all over India are akin to yantras. (See fig. 7) These designs devoted to the goddess will be discussed separately in chapter two.

---

<sup>55</sup> Some theorists, for instance David Kinsley, are adamant that the goddesses are separate entities, whilst others such as Ajit Mookerjee, speak of deities representing particular aspects of the Great Goddess.

<sup>56</sup> Mohenjo-Daro is an important archeological site in the Indus Valley near what is now Karachi in Pakistan. It is the site of the Harappa civilisation dating from around 3000 BC. It contains evidence of a highly civilised society with drainage systems, fired brick houses and wide streets. It is an important source of seals, amulets, figurines and textile implements.

Yantras, which are usually composed of radiating forms such as circles, squares, lotuses and triangles, all have a central point – the mahabindu, or great point. This central point signifies the creation, dissolution and reabsorption and controls everything which is projected from it. The circle which symbolises wholeness, totality and the revolution of the planets, is frequently placed within a square pattern with four gates. (See fig. 3 - Sri Yantra) The square symbolises the elemental earth and the four gates represent the transcendence of the earthly plane in order to realign with the Ultimate Self. The triangle has many symbolic meanings including female energy (when it is pointing downward) and male energy (when it is pointing upward).

Each of the deities has their own yantra and there are also yantras used for architecture, divination and occult purposes.

“An inexhaustible number of fresh yantras may be made by rearranging the basic shapes and/or reshuffling the mantras. With each fresh mantra-combination a new yantra is created. Reciprocally, a particular yantra illustrating a specific religious idea may be composed in countless variations. Thus, for instance, one tantric text describes how the sixteen yantras of the Moon Goddesses (Nitya-Saktis) can be expanded into 9,216 variations simply by re-assigning their mantras.”<sup>57</sup>

Yantras can be executed on all sorts of surfaces, as gouache paintings on paper, inscribed on copper, gold and other precious metals and into the surfaces of rocks and crystals. They can also be drawn on the ground with rice paste or coloured powder and on parts of the body as a healing ritual. The layout of temples and shrines is usually based on a specific yantra, Borobodur in Java is an early example of this.

Tantric temples devoted to Shakti<sup>58</sup> worship employ yantras in a very specific way. They are used for the architectural layout of the temple as well as being actually incorporated in the fabric of the building. Particular yantras are laid into the foundations of the garbhagriha, the womb chamber or inner cell of the temple.<sup>59</sup> The architectural yantras for temples devoted to the goddess are rectangular in nature, symbolising the growth and rhythmic continuity of Shakti, as opposed to the static square format of the temples devoted to the gods.

Perhaps the most celebrated and well known yantra is the ‘Sri Yantra’ which is visually equated with the ‘om’ mantra. (See fig. 3) It is composed of nine interpenetrating triangles, with multiple layers of meaning, and is said to represent a condensed image of the whole of

---

<sup>57</sup> Khanna, M. Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity. London: Thames & Hudson, 1979, p.22.

<sup>58</sup> Shakti is the goddess or female principle.

<sup>59</sup> Khanna, M. *ibid*, p.145.

Fig. 3

**Sri Yantra.** Rajasthan, c. 1700, gouache on paper







creation. An astonishing example of the visual and sound connection between mantra and yantra was demonstrated by Hans Jenny, an eighteenth century German physicist who developed sophisticated equipment to further the study of the interrelationship of wave forms with matter.<sup>60</sup> Jenny built a piece of equipment which he called a ‘tonoscope’, which transformed sounds uttered through a microphone into a visual form on a screen.

“The sacred Hindu syllable ‘Om’, when correctly uttered into the tonoscope, apparently produces the circle ‘O’, which is then filled in with concentric squares and triangles, finally producing, when the last traces of the ‘m’ have died away, a ‘yantra’ – the formal geometrical expression of sacred vibration which is found in many of the world’s religions.”<sup>61</sup>

My interest in yantras developed as a result of examining Indian paintings of the chakras<sup>62</sup> in the human body which are often depicted in the form of yantras with their resident deity. Additionally, I was fascinated by the mystical diagrams drawn onto the ground with coloured powder and rice outside temples and houses in India. (See fig. 7) In one of the practices I perform, swadhyaya,<sup>63</sup> the triangle, a significant component in yantras, is described.

“In the round space of the thousand-petaled lotus, there is a triangular lotus, which is formed by the three lines beginning with *a*, *ka*, and *tha* and which has *ham* and *sah* on two sides. One should remember the Guru, who is seated in its center.”<sup>64</sup>

This triangular lotus is in the sahasrara, the uppermost chakra at the top of the head which is described as a shimmering thousand petalled white lotus. This is the ultimate destination of Kundalini once she is awakened.

---

<sup>60</sup> This research had been started by Jenny’s predecessor, another German physicist Ernst Chladni who discovered that sand granules and metal filings, when scattered onto a steel disc, would form themselves into different patterns when varying notes were played on a violin. Jenny replicated the experiments and recorded them on a film he entitled ‘Cymatics’. For further discussion see Blair, L. Rhythms of Vision – The Changing Patterns of Belief. London: Croom Helm, 1975, pp. 112 – 115.

<sup>61</sup> Blair, L. *ibid* p.115.

<sup>62</sup> Chakras are the energy centres in the subtle body.

<sup>63</sup> Swadhyaya refers to the practice of chanting and reciting sacred texts.

<sup>64</sup> This verse occurs in Sri Guru Gita, a lengthy chant devoted to Shiva and the guru principle which occurs in the latter part of the Skanda Purana. The Nectar of Chanting. New York: SYDA Foundation, 1984, p.23.

# KUNDALINI – SERPENT POWER

Intertwined with this discussion of meditation, mantra, yantra and the Inner Self is a consideration of meditation energy, referred to in Indian philosophy as Kundalini. Kundalini, her spiralled form, the path she follows, and the classical location and depiction of the chakras, have all played a major role in my visual imagery.

Kundalini is from the Sanskrit 'kundala', meaning coiled. This phenomenon is recognised in other cultures and known by a variety of names; the Chinese know it as Chi, the Japanese as Ki and the Kung people of the Kalahari desert call it n/um.<sup>65</sup> This meditation energy - Kundalini - is thought of as a coiled serpent which lies dormant in the subtle body until awakened through spiritual practices. Indian philosophy says that we are actually equipped with four bodies, which include the physical and subtle bodies. (Fig. 2 depicts the chakras in the subtle body) Once awakened, this energy rises up through the subtle region of the spine, to the top of the head. The Kung tribes of Africa describe a trance-like state, induced by dance, in which they experience the sensation of an empty column down the spine with an opening at the crown of the head through which a powerful energy moves. The Hopi Indians of North America teach about an energy which runs along the spinal column on which are a number of subtle vibratory centres and the Masons speak of the Spirit Fire, which moves up through thirty two degrees of the spinal column before entering the head. Saint Teresa of Avila, the sixteenth century Spanish mystic, describes comparable experiences in the seven inner mansions of the soul.<sup>66</sup>

The life-giving power of Kundalini has been represented universally by the image of a snake or serpent and whilst in the western Christian tradition the serpent has a negative connotation of sinfulness, its broader association is with spiritual and physical health. There are however contradictions in the Christian world and examples of the serpent representing life giving properties. In the Old Testament Moses' rod becomes a serpent which leads him to water in the desert - the parting of the Red Sea - and the symbol commonly used to identify doctors and medicine is a snake twining around a staff. Deities with serpent body parts or other snake associations abound in the ancient world and are found in cultures as diverse as the Aztecs of

---

<sup>65</sup> Swami Kripananda has written extensively on Kundalini energy in other cultures and spiritual disciplines. See particularly chapter one in her The Sacred Power: A Seeker's Guide to Kundalini. New York: SYDA Foundation, 1995.

<sup>66</sup> Kripananda, *ibid.* pp. 5 –12.

Fig. 4

**Kundalini and the Devi.** Rajasthan, c. 19<sup>th</sup> century, manuscript page, gouache on paper



*Kundalini and the Devi*



*Kundalini and the Devi, Rajasthan, 19th century*

Mexico, the Australian aborigines and the Minoans of Crete.<sup>67</sup> Whilst there are various theories about the importance of the serpent as a symbol, including its association with water and the underworld, it seems to be the ability to shed its skin and hence appear to be reborn, that is perhaps most significant. This regenerative power is undoubtedly linked with the feminine power of birth and fertility and the predominant evidence from early times presents the snake/serpent as distinctly feminine; this is also the case in India where goddess/snake associations abound. (See fig. 6 and 7)

In the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, shrines to the goddess Durga are built over a snake hole at the base of the sacred neem tree and Kali often wears a snake twining around her arms or torso which signifies the umbilical cord basic to creation, broken it means death. The *Devi Mahatmya* describes Narayani, an aspect of the Goddess, carrying a trident, moon and snake. In Bengal, where the goddess is widely worshipped, Manasa is much beloved.<sup>68</sup> Manasa wears a crown of seven cobras and is sometimes referred to as the snake goddess. She has a complex character and the ability to bestow the gift of fertility both for the land and for women. She is petitioned with clay and wooden carvings of snakes by women wanting children or a trouble free birth and these are offered at her shrine, again often at the base of a tree.

India is home to many snakes, including the deadly cobra, and also the art of snake charming. Snakes, or Nagas, are seen as possessing great power, wisdom and magical ability, and often appear in creation myths or adorn the bodies and hair of deities. In a story that is retold in many ancient texts including the Puranas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the serpent Shesha was used in order to churn the Ocean of Milk. In doing so nectar was produced for the gods to drink in order to reinvigorate their powers. This is thought to be an analogy for the awakening of Kundalini. In another image, Vishnu performs his role of cosmic sleep reclining on the multi headed Sheshanaga - snake of eternity - whilst the crowned Buddha sits on the coiled body of Muchilinda whose seven hooded heads curve over him protectively.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> See Part Four in Johnson, B. Lady of the Beasts: Ancient Images of the Goddess and Her Sacred Animals. New York: HarperCollins, 1988.

<sup>68</sup> Johnson, B. *op.cit.* pp. 173-4.

<sup>69</sup> Shakyamuni Buddha, after receiving enlightenment, was sheltered during a fierce storm by Muchilinda the multi-headed serpent for seven days, or in some accounts, seven years. Two sculptures depicting this event formed part of an exhibition of works selected from the Rockefeller Collection at the National Gallery of Victoria, 12 March - 10 May 1999.

# THE PATH OF KUNDALINI

In the classical Yoga traditions, Kundalini is said to lie sleeping coiled two and a half times in the chakra at the base of the spine and, when awoken through spiritual practice, begins an ascent upwards to finally emerge through the crown of the head where she is united with divine consciousness. Swami Muktananda has described this phenomenon:

“Just as a needle on touching a piece of cloth pierces and passes right through it, so the Mahashakti Kundalini rises from the *muladhara*, at the base of the spine, and goes up the *sushumna*, the central channel, to the *brahmarandhra*, the spiritual centre in the crown of the head, piercing the *chakras* on Her way.”<sup>70</sup>

This journey of Kundalini takes place, not in the physical body as we know it, but in the subtle body: one of our four bodies according to Indian beliefs. Each of these four bodies is represented by a different coloured light and can be seen in deep states of meditation. The supracausal body, or Blue Pearl, is the finest of these four bodies and will be discussed in detail later. The next is the causal body, in which we experience the deep sleep state. This is seen as a black light the size of a fingertip. The third body, seen in meditation as a white light the size of the thumb, is the subtle body in which we experience the dream state. This body, composed of many channels which carry the vital energy throughout our system, is interwoven with the fourth body - the physical body. This body appears as a red light the actual size of the physical body.

There are three main channels, or nadis, along the spinal region of the subtle body; the ida, pingala and sushumna; and the sushumna, the central channel, is considered the most important as it is the route which Kundalini takes. (See fig. 2) The ida and pingala nadis, on either side of the central sushumna, are male and female, sun and moon, white and red and control the circulation of the breath or prana. The subtle body is said to be filled with millions of nadis just as the physical body is filled with nerves and at the points where the nadis converge lie the chakras. The three prongs of the trident, an icon associated with both Durga and Shiva, is representative of the ida, pingala and sushumna nadis as well as the cosmic functions of creation, preservation and dissolution. Within the sushumna nadi are stored all the trace impressions and tendencies from many lifetimes. It is these trace elements that Kundalini burns and purifies as she travels upwards.

---

<sup>70</sup> Muktananda, S. Play of Consciousness (Chitshakti Vilas). New York: SYDA Foundation, 1978, p.173.

Along the way Kundalini moves through these energy centres, or chakras. The human body has many chakras, including ones on the palms of the hands and fingertips and soles of the feet. The main ones in the path of Kundalini are the seven up the trunk of the subtle body. Some Hindu traditions recognise six rather than seven and some Buddhist traditions confine it to four. Although the word 'chakra' actually means wheel or disc, the chakras are usually described as lotuses with varying colours and numbers of petals. The chakras are said to regulate all the functions of the body, senses and mind; they are also the centres where all the different qualities are stored. Each chakra has distinct characteristics, number of petals, colour, sound vibration, resident deity and corresponding seed mantra. Painted imagery from Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions include similar depictions of the chakras and their positions in the subtle body; Kundalini is represented in Buddhist Tantrik art by female figures such as the red Dakini.<sup>71</sup>

The 'muladhara' chakra, where Kundalini lies sleeping, is located approximately at the base of the spine, is deep red in colour, has four petals and represents the earth elements. Within this four petalled lotus is a white elephant, also representing solidity; the presiding deity is Brahma; its Shakti, or female power, is Dakini representing skin.<sup>72</sup>

Kundalini can be awoken in a number of ways but the most usual is through intense spiritual practice. Tantric traditions, both Buddhist and Hindu, prescribe techniques to focus intently on each chakra in order to draw the Kundalini upward. These are often lengthy and elaborate involving specific yoga postures, tantric sexual acts and mental puja to the resident deity of the chakra. Other schools, such as Kashmir Shaivism, place more emphasis on the role of the master or guru to awaken the seeker's dormant Kundalini. This is done through a process known as 'Shaktipat', or literally, the descent of shakti, or spiritual energy, from the awakened master to the student. This initiation, or 'diksha', can take place in one of four ways: through the guru's word (often mantra), look, thought, or will. Once the Kundalini reaches the chakras in the heart, throat and brow regions aspirants may experience intense feelings of love and undergo purification of the senses.

---

<sup>71</sup> Rawson, P. Tantra: the Indian Cult of Ecstasy. London: Thames & Hudson, 1973, plates 20,57, 64.

<sup>72</sup> Gitananda, S. "The Splendor of the Chakras" Darshan Journal no. 41-42,1990, p.33.

“When Kundalini reaches the centre of smell located between the eyebrows, it purifies that, and then one comes into direct contact with the subtle essence of smell. According to the Indian scriptures, the earth-principle springs from this subtle essence of smell, and all our food and plants and flowers trace their scent back to this essence. When Kundalini stabilizes in this centre of divine fragrance, such subtle smells are released that one is overwhelmed. No external perfume could surpass this fragrance.”<sup>73</sup>

The ultimate attainment of sadhana, or spiritual practice, is when the Kundalini journeys upward through all the chakras and finally reaches the sahasrara chakra located at the top of the head. This is classically described as a brilliantly shimmering thousand petalled white lotus. It is here, in the sahasrara, that we finally merge into the Self or God.

Different traditions vary in their description and depiction of this uppermost chakra and will usually locate their chosen deity or emblem within the white lotus. In Shaivite traditions this is where Shiva dwells and Kundalini merges (see Fig.2). The petals of this lotus, which is said to shimmer like the radiance of a thousand suns, are inscribed with the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet and surround an inverted triangle. Within this triangle the merging is represented iconographically by an image of Shiva and Shakti, or sometimes by a pair of footprints - one red and one white. The white lustre represents Shiva and the red lustre Shakti.

At this level one experiences the light of the Self in the form of the Blue Pearl. Whilst this vision might be glimpsed by meditators, it is when one dwells permanently in this state that spiritual liberation has occurred.

## **BLUE PEARL**

‘Blue Pearl’ is the name given to a vision seen in deep states of meditation. It is referred to as ‘bindhu’ in Sanskrit, meaning point containing the universe, and is said to house the divine presence. My own experience of the Blue Pearl has been more of a fleeting awareness. It appears as a hovering, shimmering dot that moves from the outer edge to the centre of the inner field of vision or floats in and out during meditation. The edges are indistinct and the colour varies although most often it appears as an electric blue with elements of turquoise. As soon as the conscious mind becomes aware of this vision and tries to examine it more closely or hold onto it, it naturally fades or disappears. Visions and impressions experienced during meditation or the dream state are difficult to fully convey in spoken or visual language as they are a hazy realm of colours, shapes and fleeting sensations.

---

<sup>73</sup> Muktananda, S. Kundalini: the Secret of Life, New York: SYDA Foundation, 1979, p. 41



This phenomenon of a blue hued light is described in religious traditions from both east and west. Swami Muktananda in his spiritual autobiography Play of Consciousness describes a shimmering tiny blue pearl emanating from the sahasrara region during meditation. This blue pearl expanded into an egg shape out of which emerged a blue being who imparted profound teachings. Muktananda was convinced that this was the divine Being described in the verses of the Bhagavad Gita:

“He has all the qualities of the senses and yet is without any of the qualities of the senses, unattached and yet supporting all, free from the three attributes of manifestation and yet enjoying them.

That is without and within all beings, the unmoving and also the moving, unknowable because of its subtlety, and near and far away.”<sup>74</sup>

Muktananda says that this divine being, this Blue Person, dwells within every animate object in the form of that object; ie in a woman as a woman, in a bird as a bird, sustaining, protecting and giving life and then finally gathering them all into Himself. Indeed, one of Muktananda’s fundamental teachings is - meditate on your Self, bow to your Self, your God dwells within you as you.<sup>75</sup>

Another account of inner visions of blue light comes to us from a western Christian tradition. Hildegard of Bingen<sup>76</sup>, the twelfth century German mystic and composer, also experienced a blue person surrounded by light who spoke to her. This vision is described and illustrated in her book Scivias:

“ the voice spoke to me: My fire burns like the sun. Cry aloud and explain and write these mysteries of mine which you see and hear in this mystical vision. Do not be timid. Speak these things which you understand in the spirit, so that I may speak these things through you.”

---

<sup>74</sup> Bhagavad Gita 13:14-15 quoted in Muktananda, S.Play of Consciousness (Chitshakti Vilas) New York: SYDA Foundation, 1978, p.171-2.

<sup>75</sup> Muktananda, S. Kundalini: the Secret of Life. New York: SYDA Foundation, 1979, p.48.

<sup>76</sup> Hildegard of Bingen received what she called “illuminations” from God from the age of three which were rich in detail and colour. For most of her early life she kept them secret fearing the attention and brand of heresy revealing them might bring. She lived a secluded and cloistered existence from the age of eight in a Benedictine monastery until the age of forty three when, as the abbess, she became extremely ill and, upon her sick bed, received very specific ‘illuminations’ and instructions to record these visions for others to see and in order to heal herself. Her book, Scivias, or Know the Ways, contains commentaries and painted illustrations of twenty six of her visions of the inner worlds and it is thought that the paintings on the original manuscript were done by Hildegard herself or nuns under her direction. As a prolific writer and composer, her work influenced thousands during her lifetime and was authorised by Pope Eugenius III but after her death it was suppressed by the ecclesiastical authorities for 800 years and has only been rediscovered relatively recently.

The accompanying illumination reveals a standing figure with both palms outward in the abhaya mudra<sup>77</sup> bestowing fearlessness, surrounded by a glowing circle of light. She describes it thus:

“Next I saw a very bright light, and inside it there was a person who was the colour of a sapphire.... Both the fire and the light surrounded the person, existing as one light with the force of potentiality. Then I heard the living light speak to me.”<sup>78</sup>

The vision of the blue pearl has also provided inspiration for artists in the west. ‘Colour Music’ and ‘Lumia’ are terms referring to artistic works combining abstract film projections and sound, or music. Early proponents<sup>79</sup> were Thomas Wilfred and Oskar Fischinger both of whom were working in the US during the 1920s and 30s. Two Indian meditation masters, Swami Prabhavananda and Swami Paramahansa Yogananda, were living and teaching in California influencing a significant movement of artists during the 1940s and 50s. James Whitney, an artist who studied yoga and was greatly influenced by the teachings of the Indian master Sri Ramana Maharshi, concentrated his visual language, through film, to an expanding and contracting blue dot. In 1955 he entitled one such work ‘Yantra’. Jordan Belson, another artist working in lumia, sought to describe deep meditative states visually and aurally, and in 1967 entitled one of his works ‘Samadhi’, which is a Sanskrit term referring to a very deep state of meditation.<sup>80</sup>

Jackie Winsor, a contemporary artist and meditation practitioner working in New York, describes her concrete sculpture ‘Blue Sphere’ in which she attempts to convey a sense of bliss attained in meditation.

“I had been trying unsuccessfully to recreate a beautiful, undulating blue that I would see whenever I closed my eyes. Baba Muktananda used to say that blue is the colour of Consciousness and that the state of Consciousness is the state of bliss. This blue, I thought, could be the focus of a sculpture. The blue I saw had a luminous quality, a sense of depth to it....”<sup>81</sup>

The blue pearl is a phenomenon that I experience from time to time in meditation or whilst chanting with my eyes closed. The appearance of it, which is completely surprising and

---

<sup>77</sup> Mudra is a Sanskrit term referring to symbolic gestures and movements of the hands which express inner states. Deities are often depicted with their hands in the open palmed abhaya mudra which signifies the bestowal of fearlessness.

<sup>78</sup> Hildegard of Bingen (trans. Bruce Hozeski) *Scivias*. Santa Fe: Bear and Company, 1986, pp. 78 & 87.

<sup>79</sup> Further information on these artists can be found in Tuchman, M. op.cit. pp. 300 -306

<sup>80</sup> *ibid*, pp. 304 – 306.

<sup>81</sup> Winsor, J. “Concrete Bliss” *Darshan Journal*. No. 97, 1995, p. 57.

unpredictable, might occur during what I consider a shallow meditation, or during a deep and intense experience. The nature of the mind and ego is such that it tends to 'judge' meditation in these sorts of terms but the appearance of such a vision only serves to emphasise how superficial and false these judgements really are. I have depicted my visions of the blue pearl in two of the thesis works: a wall installation and accompanying artists' book. (See slides 16 and 32)

The inner space, my meditation practice and inner visions are of paramount importance to this research project and the body of artworks it has generated. The inner space is the primary source of my imagery and my practices of mantra repetition are linked with the repetition of the stitches and the repetition of the printed images in my work. Of equal importance is the concept of offering, which, on a number of levels, weaves through my imagery and my intention.

# Chapter Two

## OFFERING

“First I am silent and in the quiet the picture is made in my heart.”<sup>82</sup>

The notion of offering is a concept that is integral to eastern spiritual practice. As a westerner, my ability to fully grasp the concept of offering, in the eastern sense, is an ongoing challenge. Even more of a challenge is putting it into practice. I consider my art practice as an offering: the process itself and each artwork I produce.

Throughout this research project I have considered offering to be a base thread – drawn through and connecting the artworks. A number of the artworks examine more consciously the Indian practices of offering, and offering to goddesses in particular. The work entitled Votive Site 1 refers to the tradition of attaching cloth and metallic talismans onto trees and other natural objects. This practice, which was once common in many cultures, is not peculiar to India and is still carried out in places as diverse as Mexico and Greece.<sup>83</sup>

Using textiles as an object for offering has a long and rich tradition in India. Hindu and Buddhist practices of offering range from the simple to the most elaborate. Perhaps most importantly one must realise that offering is fundamentally a state of mind –

“Ultimately the offering is this: in all acts and practices, to see God in oneself and others and to act without expectation or selfish motive.”<sup>84</sup>

Indian philosophy teaches that we should become detached from the fruits of our actions and offer these fruits to god – only then are we truly free from the bonds of karma and rebirth. This teaching, which also encompasses dharma, or righteous action and self discipline, forms the basis of Lord Krishna’s instructions to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Huyler, S. Painted Prayers: Womens’ Art in Village India. New York: Rizzoli, 1994. p. 19.

<sup>83</sup> I have a small tin votive from Greece with a female torso embossed onto it. This is one of a series which depict different limbs and parts of the body that are used as offerings to gain blessings for overcoming illness and afflictions.

<sup>84</sup> Keller, D. “The Appearance of Gold, the Lightness of Air” Darshan Journal. no. 135, 1998, p.10.

<sup>85</sup> The Bhagavad Gita, meaning literally the Song of the Lord or Blessed One, occurs in The Mahabharata – the great Indian battle epic. Whilst difficult to date it was certainly written after the Vedas and Upanishads as it presents many of the Vedic teachings. It takes the form of a dialogue between Arjuna, a warrior about to enter

“His mentality unattached to any object,  
Self-conquered, free from longings,  
To the supreme perfection of actionlessness  
He comes through renunciation.”<sup>86</sup>

The Bhagavad Gita teaches that it is also important to renounce the fruits of our actions when worshipping or making offerings:

“By men who are not desirous of fruits, worship  
Which is offered as contemplated by injunctions,  
With the thought that it is simply one’s duty to offer it, the mind  
Concentrating, that is of goodness.

But with a view to the fruit,  
And also if for mere hypocritical ostentation  
It is offered, O best of Bharatas,  
That worship know to be of passion.”<sup>87</sup>

The Vedas teach that the secret of a full life is sacrifice and offering. Life is considered a gift and to attain a human birth is an even rarer gift. The physical body that we inhabit is said to be on loan from god and by making sacrifice or offering we are paying off that loan. More specifically, by performing spiritual practice we purify the body through the fire of Kundalini and fill it with nectar in order to offer it back to god. Offering, at its simplest level, focuses on the most basic item which is always available to the worshipper, her or his own body - thus the incoming breath is offered to the outgoing breath, and the breath is offered to the Self, the indwelling god.

Whilst we can examine offering in the more general or abstract sense, in most cases offering is directed to a more concrete or specific form – the deity of one’s choice. The artworks from my Images of Offerings series are all offerings to the feminine or goddess principle. One particular work, Book 11 – Prosperity and Abundance, is directed to a specific goddess - Lakshmi. (See slide 36) In this chapter, I will examine the broader concept of goddess and her relationship to fertility and nature. I will also devote some discussion to specific goddesses who are addressed in my work: Durga, Kali and Saraswati. In addition to this, I will examine some of the fundamentally essential components of offering: fire, light, food and cloth. Cloth is clearly a major component of this thesis but fire, light and food are not topics that I have

---

battle, and Krishna his charioteer. Krishna reveals himself to be the Lord or Godhead and presents teachings on the path of dharma and discipline.

<sup>86</sup> Edgerton, Franklin. The Bhagavad Gita. New York: Harper & Row, 1964, verse 49 chapter 18, p.89.

<sup>87</sup>ibid, Verses 11 & 12 chapter 17, p.80.

specifically investigated in the artworks. Nevertheless, my visual storehouse of imagery has undoubtedly been enriched through my participation in, and observation of, yajnas – sacred fire ceremonies, arati – waving of lights, and prasad – blessing of food.

## MOTHER GODDESS

Throughout the world much of the earliest evidence of religious reverence has been to the Universal Mother and significantly, India is perhaps the only country where the goddess, or female principle, is still widely and actively worshipped today in a tradition that stems back to the prehistoric period.<sup>88</sup> The archeological finds of the pre-Aryan Indus Valley civilisations at Mohenjo-Daro are concrete evidence of the existence of an earth or mother goddess widely worshipped and propitiated for her role in fertility and agriculture and also as a protector or communicator with wild beasts.<sup>89</sup> Important goddesses of the Vedic period include Aditi and Vac. In these early texts Aditi is regarded as the cosmic womb or mother who holds Agni, the god of fire, within her and she is offered prayers for humankind's protection. She is also identified with the cosmic or sacred cow whose milk pours down from the heavens as nourishment. Vac represented the power of the word and sound, particularly ritual sound and spoken mantras which were the cornerpost of cosmic ritual order. In some texts she is known as Gayatri, both a female divinity and as one of the most sacred mantras still used in Vedic rituals today.<sup>90</sup> In her role as divine creator Vac is said to be the mother of the Vedas and ritual sacrifice.

“I am the queen , the confluence of riches, the skilful one who is first among those worthy of sacrifice.  
The gods divided me up into various parts, for I dwell in many places and enter into many forms.  
The one who eats food, who truly sees, who breathes, who hears what is said, does so through me.  
Though they do not realise it, they dwell in me.  
I gave birth to the father on the head of this world. My womb is in the waters, within the ocean. From  
there I spread out over all creatures and touch the very sky with the crown of my head.  
I am the one who blows like the wind, embracing all creatures. Beyond the sky, beyond this earth,  
so much have I become in my greatness.”<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> Mookerjee, A. Kali The Feminine Force. Rochester: Destiny Books, 1988, p.11.

<sup>89</sup> Images come to us in the form of amulets, seals and a vast number of female figurines. Jayakar suggests that before the emergence of settled agricultural societies with temples and icons it was the amulet which was charged with life breath and operated as the holder of power and divinity. Jayakar, P. op.cit, p.44.

<sup>90</sup> Mookerjee, A. op.cit. p. 21.

<sup>91</sup> O’Flaherty, Wendy. The Rig Veda: An Anthology. London: Penguin Books, 1981, p. 63 (10.125)

There are literally thousands of different deities worshipped in India for different purposes, often according to tribe and region, and they are called upon for helping with every aspect of life – material and spiritual. Nearly every village in India has its ‘grama devata’ - village deity - most of whom are feminine, and these tend to be worshipped with much more intensity than members of the Hindu pantheon who seem more remote. Such goddesses tend not to be represented by an anthropomorphic image but rather by a rock, tree or uncarved shrine. Sometimes the village boundary is marked by a simply hewn head standing on the ground which signifies that the village itself is Her body.

The power of the feminine is ambivalent; it protects and ripens, yet also destroys and it is always associated with fertility. In Indian philosophy, particularly the fields of Tantra and Kashmir Shaivism, the male principle Shiva is seen as passive and inert whilst the female principle Shakti is seen as the active and creative pulse of the universe. Shakti is known by the general name ‘Devi’ from the Sanskrit root ‘div’ meaning to shine. This male/female distinction is not perceived as a hierarchy with one being superior to the other, rather it is perceived as two equally important parts of the whole.

The earth, and the Indian sub continent in particular, has been seen as the personification of the goddess since early times. In a number of spiritual texts the geographical features of the earth’s surface have been equated with parts of her body. The Devi-bhagavata-purana speaks of the earth as the loins of the Devi, whilst the oceans are her bowels, the rivers her veins, the mountains her bones, and the trees her body hair. It also says the sun and moon are her eyes and the nether worlds her hips, legs and feet.<sup>92</sup> Rivers and flowing water are held sacred for their powers of purification and life giving properties. The most holy of rivers, the Ganges, said to flow through the heavens before it reaches its course on earth, is personified by the Vedic goddess Ganga.

A series of seals from the third millenium BC<sup>93</sup>, with as yet undeciphered script, depict a female figure and a tree communing with a tiger. Such scenes repeat themselves in endless variations; the tiger with upturned head appears to be listening to the female spirit of the tree who sits in yogic posture entwined in the foliage with her arm outstretched toward the tiger below. In one seal the figure is part of the tree, and in another one the tiger has buffalo horns of leafy branches whilst the female figure is half buffalo. In yet another seal from the second millennium BC the female figure has a tiger’s body for her lower half and buffalo horns on

---

<sup>92</sup> Kinsley, D., Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Traditions. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987, p.179.

<sup>93</sup> These are the Mohenjo-Daro seals discussed in relationship to the ‘Kali Durga’ mantra in chapter one, p. 22 Jayakar,P. op.cit. p. 52 – 61.

her head. It is thought that these images are perhaps the early prototypes of yakshis, female nature spirits who dwell in trees, or of the goddess Durga, who emerges again during the Puranic period, astride a lion, or in some parts of India a buffalo - as in the Mata Pichedi temple cloths discussed in the following chapter. Other seals of the Harappa culture depict a buffalo horned male figure seated in Yoga Padmasana, or lotus meditation posture, surrounded by beasts of the jungle: a tiger, buffalo and elephant. This figure is thought to be the earliest representation of the god Shiva as Pashupati - lord of the animals.

The Indian countryside abounds in significant sacred sites of natural geographic features, including caves, hills, springs or rivers, known as 'Shakti Peeths' devoted to the reverence of the goddess (the term 'peeth' means seat). Whilst the origin of the sites probably resides in much older times, mythology from the mediaeval period explains the location of fifty one of these sites. It is said that Shiva, inconsolable at the death of his beloved wife Sati, wandered the earth in grief carrying her body until Vishnu, in an attempt to relieve Shiva's burden of grief, cut Sati's body into pieces which fell to earth in different places resulting in a series of Shakti peeths - centres of worship. The most famous of these is at Kamakhya in Assam where Sati's yoni fell to earth and a temple was built to mark the spot. The temple doesn't contain an image of the goddess but inside the shrine is a naturally occurring cleft in a rock said to represent the goddess's yoni. A natural spring within the rock keeps the rock moist and during the monsoon months the spring water runs red with naturally occurring iron oxide which is a cause for great celebration and ceremony as it signifies the flowing of the goddess's menstrual blood.<sup>94</sup>

## **LAKSHMI AND THE LOTUS**

One of the goddesses revered by many as the Mother Goddess is Lakshmi and she is particularly associated with the lotus. As the goddess of the home, abundance and good fortune, she is usually depicted standing on a lotus floating on water with gold coins streaming from the palms of her hands. She is also associated with the elephant and one of the most common representations is the Gaja-Lakshmi image which shows her standing on a lotus flanked by two elephants who shower water over her from their trunks. The elephants have early associations with water, clouds, and the fertilizing potency of rain, and were commonly kept by royalty as vehicles for transport and as part of the artillery. In addition to this they were a signifier of the ruler's responsibility for the fertility of the crops and the

---

<sup>94</sup> Mookerjee, A. op.cit. p.30



bringing of rain. These two aspects, fertility and royalty, have come together to represent a broader concept of wealth and abundance for which people petition Lakshmi.

Lakshmi attained prominence during the Puranic period but has earlier roots in the Vedic goddess Shri or Shri Lakshmi. Shri is a concept appearing in the early Vedas denoting wealth and ruling power; it is seen as an auspicious quality of material and spiritual wellbeing that may be acquired by anybody.<sup>95</sup> Lakshmi is one of the most popular deities in India today and is worshipped by people from all castes and backgrounds mostly in homes and domestic situations rather than temples. She is particularly popular with business people, due to her associations with material wealth, and her image is frequently painted onto the bodies of trucks or displayed on the dashboard of taxis. She is seen as the bringer of good fortune as well as the protector of home and hearth, particularly by women.

Flowers, in general, are an important part of offering and puja rituals and I have used floral motifs extensively in the thesis artworks. India is said to be the only country that supports an entire industry of garland makers and to the visiting westerner the abundance of floral offerings is astounding. Garland stalls are a frequent sight throughout urban and rural India and simple wayside shrines are often heaped in floral garlands in various states of demise.

Of all the flowers and vegetation which feature in Indian art, scriptures and literature, none is more significant than the lotus. The lotus, of which there are at least two that occur naturally in India, is a multi-layered and complex symbol in Hindu and Buddhist iconography. The petal structure, which is the basis of many yantras and mandalas, can be viewed as a symbol of the entire created universe. Goddesses, gods, and buddhas are depicted standing or seated on a lotus and the cross legged yoga posture, 'padmasana' or lotus seat, is the position most often prescribed for meditation.

The lotus, which grows in ordinary mud, stretches up to bloom most perfectly in all its untainted glory and an analogy is drawn between the ordinary aspects of human existence and our innate capacity to rise up and achieve spiritual enlightenment. It is because of this innate capacity for growth, that it has come to represent spiritual perfection and authority; whoever is seated upon it has obviously attained that state of inner perfection and transcended the trappings of the material world.

In the classical texts, descriptions of a deity's physical appearance often refer to the lotus, for example:

---

<sup>95</sup> Kinsley, D. op.cit. p. 20.

“Sakhambhari is of blue colour, with eyes like a blue lotus...”

“Dwelling in a lotus, (she carries) a fistful of arrows, a lotus...”<sup>96</sup>

and,

“ the lotus feet of Kali are place of pilgrimage enough for me.”<sup>97</sup>

## PAINTINGS FOR THE GODDESS

The lotus and Lakshmi occupy an important place in the art of wall and ground painting performed by women throughout rural India and artworks from my *Images of Offering* draw on this tradition. This form of artistic offering, performed exclusively by women and taught by mothers to their daughters, is known by many different names depending on language and region. Some of these are: *alpona*, *rangoli*, *kolam*, *mandana* and *chita*. The external decoration of homes occurs mostly in villages where the majority of houses are still constructed of mud bricks and where mud render is re-applied annually after the eroding effects of the monsoon rains. In the larger towns and cities, where the housing is usually apartment blocks of bricks and concrete, external decoration is less prevalent.

The home is the domain of women and, as mentioned, the presiding goddess is usually Lakshmi; the home is also seen as the personification of the goddess. Preserving the safety and sanctity of the home is the responsibility of the women and the paintings are usually done on and around the doorway, the walls facing the street and the threshold – the transitory points. (See fig. 7) As one woman has explained,

“I must protect my family from danger. It is my primary duty in life. The *mandanas* prevent any evil from entering. Then we paint designs on all the outside walls, usually peacocks or elephants or other symbols that we know Goddess *Lakshmi* likes. We believe that if the painting is pleasing to her, then she will want to bless our home and our family will prosper.”<sup>98</sup>

The paintings are usually made with rice paste or coloured powders and may include a variety of images such as lotuses, elephants, peacocks and tree of life. Sometimes, simple handprints are used to enclose an image and render it auspicious.<sup>99</sup> White is the most common colour

---

<sup>96</sup> Coburn, T. op.cit. p.192.

<sup>97</sup> Mookerjee, A. op.cit. p.102.

<sup>98</sup> Huyler, S. op.cit. p.16.

<sup>99</sup> Jayakar, P. op.cit. p.174.

used as it is considered pure and sacred. In rice growing areas the paint is made from ground rice mixed with water and in this way Lakshmi's gift of rice, as the goddess of bountiful harvest, is offered back to her. In drier areas the paint is made from locally excavated chalk or lime and red pigment is also used in some areas. The women say that the red is symbolic of the menstrual blood of the goddess and that it promotes fertility.<sup>100</sup> These designs are renewed daily in some parts of India whilst in other areas the focus is on a particular occasion such as Diwali. In the southern state of Kerala during the harvest festival women create elaborate ground mandalas with fresh flowers to celebrate the end of the monsoon period.<sup>101</sup>

Huyler points out that the literacy rates for women in India are still very low and that the painted decorations function as a personal prayer written to the goddess. He draws attention to the fact that the verb used to describe the wall paintings is 'to write' rather than 'to paint'.

“First I am silent and in the quiet the picture is made in my heart. Then I bring it out whole from my heart to write on the walls. It is a message from me to *Ma* (the Mother Goddess), my painted prayer, and when it is pure I know she will hear me.”<sup>102</sup>

## DURGA, KALI AND SARASWATI

Three of the most important and widely worshipped goddesses from the Puranas are Durga, Kali and Saraswati. The fame of Durga was regionally widespread - she was also worshipped in neighbouring Cambodia.<sup>103</sup> The Puranas consist of eighteen sacred books containing stories, legends and hymns and were written over a period of time from the third century to the thirteenth century. The portrayal of goddesses as consorts of male gods took on greater preponderance during this time when deities from the epics were linked and presented in a greater sense of order. Despite this a number of goddesses were revered and worshipped as individual powers rarely appearing with their male counterparts; among them are Saraswati, Durga, Kali and Lakshmi who all feature in my thesis artworks. In a country that recognises thousands of deities, some of them quite specific to particular regions or tribes, Saraswati, Durga, Kali and Lakshmi are some of the more widely popular goddesses. They are also

---

<sup>100</sup> Huyler, S. op.cit. p.18.

<sup>101</sup> Oki, M. India: Fairs and Festivals. Tokyo: Gakken Co., 1989, plate 61.

<sup>102</sup> Huyler, S. op.cit. p.19.

<sup>103</sup> Hinduism was the state religion in Cambodia from the first century AD until the thirteenth century after which time it was eclipsed by Buddhism.

goddesses that I am familiar with as they feature in the practices and teachings of my path, Siddha Yoga.

Three important texts glorifying the goddess principle were written between the sixth and the eleventh centuries AD, and whilst it is not possible here to discuss them in any great depth, it is worth noting a distinct trend which Mackenzie Brown suggests emerges from the first text, the Devi Mahatmya composed during the sixth century, through the Devi-Bhagavata Purana to the third text, the Devi Gita, composed some time after the eleventh century. He argues that the Devi Mahatmya, occurring as part of the larger Markandeya Purana, marks the emergence of the Great Goddess tradition. This developed from an initial focus on the warrior goddess battling with demons into Bhuvanesvari of the Devi Gita, a benevolent world-mother goddess who is a comforter of devotees, and a teacher of wisdom.<sup>104</sup>

Durga and Kali are the subject of the above mentioned text, the Devi Mahatmya, and are closely associated, as Kali is said to have been born from Durga's brow during battle with the buffalo demons who were threatening the stability of the cosmic order. The legend describes how the gods, after battling for one hundred years with Mahisha and his army of demons from the netherworld, approached Shiva and Vishnu for assistance who, in their fury, sent forth a radiant light from their faces in the form of Durga. Durga, alone but in her thousand armed form astride her lion, went into battle. At one point in the lengthy battle she reduces one of the demons to ashes through a supersonic utterance of the mantra 'hum' and then later, on the verge of being taken captive:

“ (she) then uttered a great wrathful cry against them, and her face became black as ink in anger.

From the knitted brows of her forehead's surface immediately came forth Kali, with her dreadful face, carrying sword and noose.

She carried a strange skull-topped staff, and wore a garland of human heads; she was shrouded in a tiger skin, and looked utterly gruesome with her emaciated skin... ”<sup>105</sup>

The legend then goes on to further describe the gruesome appearance of Kali and the heroic feats she and Durga performed to overcome the enemy. This description of Kali and Durga, as the warrior goddesses overcoming evil and negative forces, is one of the most popular and enduring themes in painting and sculpture. Arpita Singh, a contemporary Indian artist, paints

---

<sup>104</sup> Mackenzie Brown, C. The Devi Gita – The Song of the Goddess: A Translation, Annotation and Commentary. Albany: SUNY Press, 1998, p.8.

<sup>105</sup> Coburn, T. op.cit. p.61, verses 7.4 – 7.6.

Fig. 5

**Durga with Mantras.** Rajasthan, c. 18<sup>th</sup> century, gouache on cloth





Durga as a gun toting figure in a white sari trampling on a male figure in a western style business suit.<sup>106</sup>

The story of this battle, the 'Durga-Saptashati' which literally means 'Seven Hundred Verses to Durga', is a text still in common usage particularly during Durga Puja, a ten day autumn festival celebrated in many parts of India. (Fig. 5 depicts Durga with a body of mantras) Durga and Kali have come to represent the forces of good overcoming adversity and the Durga-Saptashati is recited as one long mantra for the power that it engenders. This power can be used for releasing one from the bonds of karma in order to obtain moksha, spiritual liberation, or for achieving a personal goal such as passing an examination.

The origins of Kali and Durga are thought to be much older than the Purana legends and, as a result, their iconography is complex. The garland of fifty human skulls, which Kali wears, is said to represent each one of the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet and the fifty fundamental vibrations in the universe. In this form Kali is a symbol of the repository of knowledge and wisdom with links to Saraswati the goddess of learning. Kali also wears a girdle of human hands symbolising the instruments of human work and endeavour: karmic action. In Bengal she is worshipped and welcomed into the home as the Divine Mother and the name itself has links with other parts of the ancient world.<sup>107</sup>

Saraswati first appears in the Vedic literature as a distinct goddess associated with purification and a particular mighty river which has since disappeared. In later literature she is credited with giving rise to the Devanagari script of the Sanskrit language<sup>108</sup> whilst during the Puranic period all these themes converge to produce the Saraswati who is widely worshipped today as the matron goddess of the arts, music and letters. Although she has a male consort Brahma, she is usually depicted alone with a white swan<sup>109</sup> or a peacock by a flowing river playing the veena, a stringed instrument, and holding in her other hands a manuscript, and a string of prayer beads or japa mala. Saraswati is rarely worshipped in temples but is a goddess of the home. At Navaratri (nine nights of the goddess) celebrations in September she is worshipped along with Lakshmi and Durga and people place before her on their altar, tools of study such as books, pens, pencils and musical instruments for her to bless for the coming year.

---

<sup>106</sup> Singh, Arpita. Durga, 1993. Illustrated in Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions. New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1996, p. 207.

<sup>107</sup> Mookerjee, A. op.cit, p.72.

<sup>108</sup> Narayanan, V. "Saraswati: Stream of Knowledge, Source of Song" Darshan Journal. no.66, 1992, p.33.

<sup>109</sup> The symbology of the white swan is discussed in relation to the final thesis artwork Heart Mat on p. 96.

Kali and Durga are significant goddesses in the Siddha Yoga tradition as their roots are ancient and date back to pre-Aryan times along with Shiva. Kali and Durga feature in a number of my thesis artworks through their mantric form both as seed mantras and longer mantras. They also feature more explicitly in the *Images of Offering* series (see slides 22 and 23) and a number of the artist's books in the *Images of Contemplation* series where they are accompanied by Saraswati and Lakshmi. (See slides 3, 4 and 11)

## FIRE, LIGHT AND FOOD

Fire, light (particularly candles and oil lamps) and food have complex symbolic meanings and are important ingredients of offering. Perhaps the most complex, ancient and regulated form of offering is the Yajna, or sacrificial fire ceremony performed by Brahmin priests.

“Fire, the highest cosmic component, emanates from the sun and stars and acts as a generator of life and a symbol of transformation. It provides an archetypal image of physical and spiritual energy.”<sup>110</sup>

Yajnas are thought to be one of the earliest forms of ritual performed by humans and much of the material in the Rig Veda is instruction for correct conduct during the yajna. Fire was seen as Lord Agni, or life itself, and Indian philosophy abounds with fire references and analogies. The stomach is said to contain the digestive fire to which we offer our food<sup>111</sup> and Kundalini, once awakened, is said to burn up the impurities of our past deeds and actions.

Yajnas used to be performed regularly in communities to mark important occasions such as holy days and harvest ceremonies but are now performed much more rarely due to a decline in the number of appropriately trained Brahmin priests.<sup>112</sup> The yajna itself is a lengthy and elaborate event dedicated to a particular deity which takes place continuously over a number of days. It is performed by a group of Brahmin priests chanting Vedic mantras and offering various substances into a specially consecrated fire pit. Hundreds of different substances are offered at particular points in the mantras and include items such as ghee, oil, rice, grains, fruit and flowers. The manner in which these offerings are actually poured into the fire and the vessels used is also significant.

---

<sup>110</sup> Johnson, B. op.cit, p.32

<sup>111</sup> Bendet, P. “A Day in the Life of a Brahmin Priest” Darshan Journal. no. 51, 1991, p.70.

<sup>112</sup> In the above mentioned article, Vivek Godbole, a Brahmin priest, discusses the various reasons for shortages including the fact that families are reluctant to have their sons study for fifteen years to completely learn one Veda.



I have been fortunate to attend two yajnas, one of which was dedicated to Lakshmi.<sup>113</sup> The experience of sitting in the temple for extended periods of time whilst the yajna takes place is both powerful and indescribable. The intense heat of the fire which hissed and crackled as the various substances were offered to it, combined with the sounds of rhythmic chanting and the rich array of aromas, was quite hypnotic. The experience had a timeless quality and was both familiar and exotic at the same time. There was a sense of lifetimes of worldly existence and karmas burning up. Visually, the ordered arrangement on low platforms of all the different offerings in silver bowls and neat pyramids, was enticing. The great variety of flowers, fruit, leaves, grains, pulses, confectionery and coconuts smeared with stripes of bhasma – or sacred ash, is an image that has stayed with me for many years and has re-emerged visually in two of the thesis artworks, Votive Site 2 and Daily Meditations. (See slides 22, 23 and 26)

Another ceremony, or ritual form of offering related to fire, is arati – the waving of lights. This practice has its roots in cosmological creation myths where the first act of creation is usually the generation of light.<sup>114</sup> Arati is accompanied by a hymn of praise to an image of one's chosen deity or guru and symbolises the ignition of spiritual light in the heart of the devotee – using one flame to light another. This ceremony is performed as a daily ritual by people in their homes as well as by priests in temples; I participate in it frequently at my local meditation centre. It is often accompanied by the ringing of bells, and in temples, the blowing of conches and banging of drums are common. These sounds are said to summon the deity to the worship and also to correspond to the inner celestial sounds; they also serve to still the restlessness of the mind. One of the more common methods for performing arati is to wave a silver tray upon which is placed an assortment of offerings including a lighted candle, flowers, spices, grains and gold objects. The light of the candle or oil lamp represents our own inner light and the other objects signify wealth, auspiciousness and abundance. In addition to these objects a coconut is often waved separately and then smashed open on the ground as a form of offering. The hard outer shell of the coconut symbolises the tough shell of our ego, which must be broken, before we can attain the sweet nectar of self realisation.

Although usually performed for the deity, arati is sometimes performed to animals such as cows and elephants, trees and also to inanimate objects. This is particularly the case during the October/November festival of Diwali when the goddess Lakshmi is honoured. Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity and abundance, is offered, amongst other things, everyday items and utensils to be blessed for the year ahead. Household appliances, cooking and sewing

---

<sup>113</sup> The first yajna I attended was in Gurudev Siddha Peeth, the Siddha Yoga ashram in India, and the other one was in the Melbourne Siddha Yoga Ashram.

<sup>114</sup> Johnson, B. op.cit. p.32.

utensils, cars, farming equipment and animals may all be offered. This often takes the form of garlanding the actual object, anointing it with coloured powders, waving a lighted candle and incense and chanting mantras to Lakshmi.

Whilst items of food and grain are included as components in yajna and arati rituals, food alone forms the basis of another important offering ritual known as prasad. On holy days and special religious occasions, prepared morsels of food are offered to the deity and then distributed to the people present to eat. Such food is prasad, or food that has been blessed by the gods. In temples, ashrams and many households, this is a daily event and a way of consecrating each meal.

Food, grains and crops are associated with many deities, often varying according to tribe and region. The goddess Sita, whilst known primarily as the wife of Rama through the epic 'Ramayana', had an earlier manifestation in Vedic times as a deity associated with agriculture. The word 'sita' means furrow and Sita is said to be born of the ploughed furrow in the earth. References abound, visual and literary, of female divinities issuing forth vegetation from their bodies; one of the Harappa seals depicts an upside down female figure with a plant issuing from her yoni whilst another early terracotta seal depicts a goddess with a lotus emerging from her neck.<sup>115</sup> Silver amulets from the western state of Maharashtra depict goddesses whose bodies are formed of leaves and stems, particularly the corn or grain goddess - Kansari.<sup>116</sup> The Devi-Mahatmya in describing the attributes of Durga says:

“Then I shall support the entire world with life sustaining vegetables,  
Produced from my own body, until the rains come, O gods.  
In this way, I will attain fame on earth under the name ‘She-who-  
supports-with-vegetables’ (sakambhari).”<sup>117</sup>

Sakambhari, mentioned above, and Annapurna, another goddess associated with crops and food, are featured in my artist's book entitled Book 10 - Fertility and Food. (See slide 35) These two new goddess names were made up from a rearrangement of the letters of other goddess names in the work Votive Site 2. Rearranging component parts of one work to create another new work has parallels with the rearrangement of mantras to create more yantras discussed in the previous chapter.

---

<sup>115</sup> Mookerjee, A. op.cit. p.22.

<sup>116</sup> Jayakar, P. op.cit. p.235.

<sup>117</sup> Coburn, T. op.cit. p.78 (verses 11.44 – 45).

Fig. 6

**Yogini with Serpent Energy.** South India, c. 1800, carved wood





Fire, food, light and flowers all constitute part of the rituals of offering that have been performed since ancient times. Cloth, particularly in its raw form, uncut and unstitched, is also an essential item used in these rituals.

## CLOTH

The notion of using cloth as a form of offering is one that underpins all of my work. Traditionally, textiles, in their myriad forms, have been offered at shrines, temples and at the feet of holy figures; even today a devotee may offer a new shawl along with fresh flowers and a coconut at the feet of their guru or chosen deity. It is worth noting here that iconographic statues (murtis) are thought to have a life force after priests have performed an enlivening ritual inviting the deity to dwell in the murti. The murtis are then bathed, clothed and adorned with jewellery as either a daily or special puja so that shawls and saris, once offered, may indeed be worn by the deity. And, like a live being, there are special clothes for special days and more ordinary clothes for everyday wear. A verse from the latter section of the Skanda Purana, which occurs in the conversation between Shiva and Parvati describing methods of worship, suggests that a seeker should offer clothing, along with other things such as a vehicle and ornaments, to the Guru.<sup>118</sup> Gillow and Barnard mention a practice once existing in East Punjab, now lost since the turmoils and migrations of partition in 1947, whereby an elaborately embroidered shawl called a 'darshan dwar' was presented to a temple on the fulfillment of a wish.<sup>119</sup> The importance of uncut cloth, of which a shawl is an example, will be discussed in the following chapter.

In Vrindavan, at the site where Krishna is said to have stolen the clothes of the gopis (cowherd girls) whilst they were swimming in the river, women traditionally offer a sari or a piece of their clothing to a Krishna tree shrine, often by tying it in the overhanging branches, which symbolises their freedom from fear and attachment, and re-establishes their own link with the divine. Krishna is said to have sat in the Kadamba tree playing his flute attracting all to himself and, through the theft of the clothing, signifying that, naked, we are all equal before the divine.

Even the most humble of textiles, rags and tatters are offered to the gods and there are indeed deities for this purpose: Cindiyadeo, the Lord of Tatters, and Cithariya Bhavani, Our Lady of

---

<sup>118</sup> Much of the text in the Skanda Purana takes the form of a dialogue between various deities discussing aspects of daily life and methods of worship. Cited in: *The Nectar of Chanting*, New York: SYDA Foundation, 1983, p.14.

<sup>119</sup> Gillow, J & N. Barnard. *Traditional Indian Textiles*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1991, p.114.

Tatters.<sup>120</sup> Sages and holy figures are sometimes depicted wearing rags or robes made from patches which signify their vows of poverty and renunciation of worldly goods, whilst the rags themselves are given a new wholeness. Fig. 10 portrays a Shaivite devotee wearing a patchwork shawl seated on his meditation mat performing japa, or continual repetition of the mantra, with the aid of his japa mala.<sup>121</sup> It is said that the Buddha was wearing a patchwork shawl when he received enlightenment under the bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya and hence a patchwork shawl is still a standard item of clothing worn at certain ceremonies by monks of the Mahayana Buddhist traditions.<sup>122</sup>

Ajit Mookerjee, in his survey on Ritual Art, has presented photographic documentation of some more unusual offerings of cloth and thread at shrines and temples. One such image depicts a Shiva temple in Tamil Nadu where the trident has been almost completely wrapped in a ritual red cloth representing Shakti, the feminine energy, with just the tips of the prongs visible and adorned with flowers. Another image shows a wayside shrine to Shiva in the western city of Poona where a stone has been painted with a trident then layers of cotton thread and scraps of fabric have been wrapped and tied around it a number of times to create a figure in motion. He suggests that the crisscrossing of fabric and thread creates absorption and dissolution points which preserves the power and rhythm of the abstracted image of Shiva.<sup>123</sup> In his study of Kali, Mookerjee mentions a ceremony in the southern state of Kerala known as 'trippukharattu' which is held eight to ten times a year. In this ceremony a reddened cloth, representing menstruation, is wrapped around the image of the goddess and is then keenly sought after by pilgrims who regard it as a holy relic.<sup>124</sup>

Pupul Jayakar, in yet another example of textiles used as offerings, describes a practice in Bengal where the fierce Mothers, believed to dwell in trees outside the village, were propitiated by the village women who tied pieces of cloth dipped in turmeric to the branches of the trees to ensure safe childbirth. Vermillion paste was applied during worship to the base of the tree and branches were never cut for fear of the calamity which might ensue.<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> Stoler Miller, B. ed. Exploring India's Sacred Art: selected writings of Stella Kramrisch. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983, p.110.

<sup>121</sup> The yellow marks on his forehead and neck distinguish him as a worshipper of Shiva. The mala that he uses to recite the mantra is probably made from the Rudraksha seeds, sacred to Shiva, that are discussed in chapters four and five.

<sup>122</sup> Myers, D. & S. Bean, (eds) From the Land of the Thunder Dragon: Textile Arts of Bhutan, London: Serindia Publications, 1994, p.148.

<sup>123</sup> Mookerjee, A. Ritual Art of India, London: Thames and Hudson, 1985, p.82 & 91.

<sup>124</sup> Mookerjee, A. Kali: The Feminine Force, Rochester: Destiny Books, 1988, p.32.

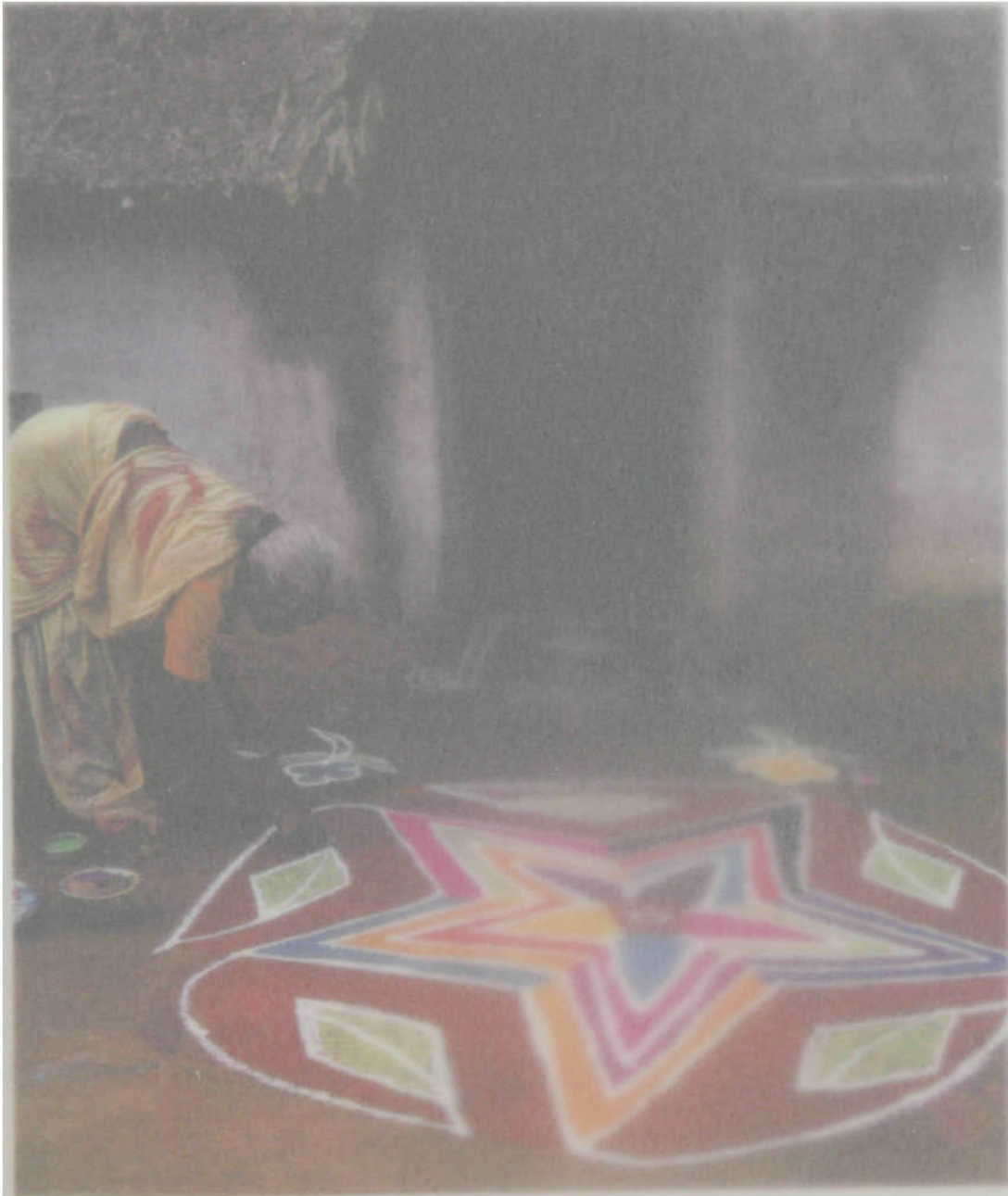
<sup>125</sup> Jayakar, P. op.cit. p.240.

Offering is a multi-faceted practice and almost any daily task, from cooking a meal to stitching a piece of cloth, can be imbued with this sense of reverence. This practice has become part of my life through walking the spiritual path and is applied on a daily basis during meditation as I offer the forthcoming day's activities and ask for grace. In this way each artwork is offered at the beginning of its creation, at each stage throughout and at the end as it is mounted for exhibition. In the next chapter 'Thread', I will discuss the broader significance of textiles in religious and ceremonial contexts.

Fig. 7

**Woman Making Kolam.**

Woman doing ground painting (kolam) outside her house during harvest festival of Pongal. The five pointed star is considered a potent protective charm.







# Chapter Three

## THREAD

Thread and textiles are the artistic mediums through which my visions and experiences of meditation and offering are expressed. Underpinning the entire body of the thesis artworks is a celebration of women's textile work and particularly the textile traditions of India. In chapters two and three I have examined the concepts of mantra, meditation, offering and other aspects of spiritual practice. This chapter will now investigate the means by which these concepts are expressed through textiles in traditional Indian culture, both historically and contemporaneously. Where appropriate, I have included mention of textile traditions from other cultures and religions.

The textile arts have been an important part of my life since childhood. I developed a love of Indian textiles during the 1960s and 70s, the era of my adolescence, when they became highly fashionable. As young adolescents, my friends and I frequented a local Canberra shop called 'The Peacock' which was a den of wondrous costumes, ornaments and incense from exotic India. We spent our meagre earnings on block printed circular skirts and mirror embroidered clothes from Rajasthan. As I sewed and screenprinted<sup>126</sup> I was intrigued by the unusual embroidery and lines of block printed patterns which were often not quite aligned. The script and symbols incorporated into the designs also fascinated me and one particular written symbol that drew my attention, as it occurred in many of the designs, I later realised was the 'Om' mantra.<sup>127</sup> My mother bought striped cheesecloth bedspreads for our holiday house which had a slightly blurred figure printed over the stripes. No-one in the family could distinguish the mysterious multi-limbed image and it is only now, many years later, that I realise it was Shiva as Nataraj, or Lord of the Dance.<sup>128</sup> In fact Indian meditation and Indian textiles came together for me at about the same time: I was purchasing and wearing Indian embroidered clothes and attending a 'Learn to Meditate' course in the early 1970s.

---

<sup>126</sup> Following a lesson on screenprinting at school I had persuaded my mother to buy me a small silkscreen, inks and a squeegee so that I could print, using simple paper stencils, onto fabric.

<sup>127</sup> Fig.8 includes an 'om' mantra printed on a silk gamcha, or mantra shawl.

<sup>128</sup> This is one of the ways in which Shiva is portrayed and it denotes the creation and the dissolution of the world through the dance. It also symbolises the play of consciousness and is performed to free all souls from the fetters of illusion.

Spirituality is woven through most aspects of daily life in India and this is particularly apparent in textile production and usage. Ceremonially, textiles are used in the temple context as well as in the home for puja, as coverings for prayer books and as special shawls and saris worn for particular religious days or occasions. Mantras and invocations are woven into and printed onto cloth, certain textiles and lengths of cotton thread are imbued with the power to bestow blessings and protection when hung on walls and over doorways, or as coverlets to sleep under. Cloth also has many ceremonial uses as prayer flags and in the creation of temporary temples in desert regions.<sup>129</sup> References to the spinning and weaving of cloth occur in some of the most ancient scriptures and the simple thread itself symbolises the unbroken stream of creation. In the Vedas and the Upanishads there are a number of descriptions of Brahman (Ultimate Reality) and the Atman (the Self) in terms of woven fabric.<sup>130</sup>

In order to look more specifically at the spiritual and religious aspects of textiles it is useful to have some understanding of the historical importance of Indian textiles in a worldwide context. Joyce Burnard, the Australian textile writer whose work I have drawn on here, argues that almost every process of industrial textile manufacture that is carried out today could trace its origin to India and that the whole world owes an enormous textile debt to that country.<sup>131</sup>

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Textiles and their close connection with the lives of women has been written about at length and the textiles archeologist, Elizabeth Wayland Barber, has argued that,

“In truth, cloth for thousands of years was the notebook that recorded the woes and joys, hopes, visions and aspirations of women.”<sup>132</sup>

The historian Buffie Johnson has drawn our attention to the very early indications of the associations between fertility, birth and spinning through the discoveries in Ecuador and Peru of spindle whorls, dating back to 300 BC, which were decorated with the owl and a mother goddess in the birthing position.<sup>133</sup> In western culture the three Greek goddesses, the Fates, or

---

<sup>129</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>130</sup> See p. 55.

<sup>131</sup> Burnard, J. Chintz to Cotton: India's Textile Gift to the World. Sydney: Kangaroo Press, 1994, p.6.

<sup>132</sup> Barber, E. W. Women's Work: the First 20,000 Years - Women, Cloth and Society in Early Times. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994. p.256.

<sup>133</sup> Johnson, B. op.cit. p.34.

Moirai, are all portrayed with spindles, shuttles and shears – symbolic instruments of birth, life and death.

“They determine human history by spinning, twisting and finally cutting the thread of life. The sacred meaning attached to weaving as a metaphor for the creation of new life has been observed since the time women began to create fabric out of wool thread. It is a natural parallel to the human mother who spins new life in her womb.”<sup>134</sup>

These parallels between birth, life, death and the textile arts have also been absorbed into the vernacular of everyday language and storytelling. In the English language, we spin a good yarn, fabricate evidence and grasp the thread of a story. In Buddhist and Hindu philosophy, two main classes of spiritual texts are the ‘sutras’ and the ‘tantras’ both of which are derivations from ‘tauttu’ the Sanskrit word for cotton thread.

Virtually every imaginable method of producing and embellishing fabric can be found in India, from the simplest cotton embroidery to the most beautiful and complex silk brocade weaving, and whilst there are major factories in the larger cities and towns of India, a significant level of production is carried out in village and home based workshops using simple hand operated techniques and equipment. There is much regional and tribal variation in designs and techniques; patterns and colours on cloth will often denote the wearer’s religious or tribal origins and affiliations. Unlike neighbouring Southeast Asia, where textile production is solely the domain of women,<sup>135</sup> in India both men and women are involved in most areas of production, the most notable exception being dowry items which are the work of women. These textiles made by village and tribal women continue to be a major source of exquisite work, particularly the embroidery and mirror pieces from Gujarat and Rajasthan which find their way onto the western market.

The field of Indian textiles is enormous and immensely varied. Designs and techniques have had a significant impact on furnishing and clothing fashions throughout history in many parts of the world. The exceptionally fine Dacca muslins were highly sought after in the courts of the Roman Empire in the first century AD where they were variously described as ‘bafta hava’ (woven air), ‘venti’ (fine as the wind) and ‘nebula’ (misty in nature).<sup>136</sup> Long time experts in textile design and trading, the Indians have been quick to realise the appeal of particular styles and have then gone on to create designs and patterns for specific countries and markets. Mordant dyeing techniques formed the basis of both chintz, the immensely

---

<sup>134</sup> Johnson, B. op.cit, p.34.

<sup>135</sup> Maxwell, R. op.cit. p. 55.

<sup>136</sup> Gillow, J & N. Barnard, op.cit. p.8.

popular furnishing fabric designed specifically for the British and European markets in the seventeenth century, and the roots of the batik industry in Java in the eighteenth century. Whilst cotton clothing and furnishing had existed in much of Asia, the Mediterranean and the Middle East for centuries, it was virtually unknown in Western Europe. In England and Western Europe clothing was made mostly of wool and occasionally of linen, velvet or silk until the seventeenth century.

One of the series of artworks of my thesis, Twenty Shawl Images,<sup>137</sup> tells the story of the Kashmir shawl industry. These finely woven and embroidered woollen shawls caused a revolution in European women's fashions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

“Kashmir shawls were first taken to England by the East India Company in the 1760s but did not become established fashion until the end of the century. Napoleon was responsible for taking the shawls to France. He and his officers had acquired them during the Egyptian campaign in 1798 bringing them back as gifts. In France they were at first regarded as male attire, but Empress Josephine made them fashionable for women. She is said to have owned more than 60 shawls and started a fashion for cutting them up into gowns and bedcovers.”<sup>138</sup>

Their immense popularity led to the establishment of entire shawl industries in Britain and France which produced similar shawls in a bid to control the market. Indian artists were employed to paint copies of the Kashmir designs for the British textile designers and Queen Victoria lent her extensive collection of Kashmir shawls to the shawl weaving mills at Paisley for copying. Indeed, the term ‘paisley’, derived from the Scottish weaving town of the same name, is now commonly used to describe the particular Kashmiri shawl motif of buta. Textile merchants from England and Scotland travelled to India to study the textile production methods in order to produce their own shawls and other fabrics which could in turn be exported back to India.<sup>139</sup> This led to the Indian market being flooded with mass produced cottons from Britain which caused considerable suffering to the Indian weavers.<sup>140</sup>

Throughout the series Twenty Shawl Images, in which I have incorporated various examples of the paisley/buta motif, the images and text make reference to the burgeoning European shawl industry during the nineteenth century. The images include reproductions of some of

---

<sup>137</sup> See fig. 11 and page 72 in chapter 5 for further discussion of this series.

<sup>138</sup> Burnard, J. op.cit, p.33.

<sup>139</sup> John Forbes Watson published an eighteen volume treatise entitled The Textile Manufactures of India in 1867 in which he systematically documented the various textiles produced throughout the subcontinent giving details of weights and uses. This was intended for use by British textile manufacturers. Askari, N. & L. Arthur. Uncut Cloth: Saris, Shawls and Sashes. London: Merrell Holberton Publishers, 1999, p.107.

<sup>140</sup> These imports declined in the late nineteenth century as the government imposed controls to protect the Indian textile industry.

the watercolours painted by Indian artists who were employed to record the design and weaving processes for the British manufacturers. One of the images also incorporates a reproduction of a painting done in 1809 by Antoine-Jean Gros of 'L'Imperatrice Josephine' clothed entirely in shawls – as gown, sash and stole.<sup>141</sup> Fig. 11 depicts another such painting by Ingres of Madame Riviere reclining wrapped in her luxurious Kashmir shawl.

An indication of the widespread influence of Indian textiles can also be found in the English language through words such as calico, chintz and bandanna which are all derivations of the Indian or Sanskrit names for particular items of clothing or textile techniques. Bandanna, from the Sanskrit 'bandhani' meaning 'to tie', is the name for a complex tie-dyeing technique which was used on silk and cotton handkerchiefs from Bengal which became popular in America and England in the mid eighteenth century, whilst the coastal port of Calicut gave rise to the name 'calico' and chintz is from the Sanskrit 'chitra' meaning variegated.

The cotton plant, *Gossypium arboreum*, is indigenous to the Indian sub continent. The Indus Valley civilization is thought to have first domesticated it as the seeds have been found at a Neolithic site in northern Baluchistan, which is considered proof that it was being grown in the western part of India as early as 4000 BC.<sup>142</sup> The oldest known textile example from the region is a fragment of cotton cloth dyed with madder found wrapped around a silver pot, the chemicals of which leached out and preserved the cloth. This archeological site of the third millennium BC, Mohenjo-Daro (also the source of the seals depicting early images of Durga discussed in chapter three) is particularly significant to textile history as it contains dye vats, spindles, bronze needles and stone sculpture depicting figures clothed in patterned cloth. The depiction of patterned cloth indicates that the culture had the requisite knowledge to adhere colour to cotton (which naturally rejects dye unless treated with mordants to make it bind with the fabric). From these finds scholars have deduced that peoples from the subcontinent were perhaps two to three thousand years ahead of European cultures in their cultivation and uses of cotton and mordanted dyes. These technical skills were not discovered by the west until the seventeenth century.<sup>143</sup>

Cotton fabric has been India's foremost trading commodity since before Roman times when the various traders realised that the most popular and widely valued currency throughout their trade routes was Indian cloth. The Indians were experts in the field of cotton spinning,

---

<sup>141</sup> This painting was reproduced in Levi-Strauss, M. *The Cashmere Shawl*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987.

<sup>142</sup> Lynton, L. *The Sari – Styles, Patterns, History, Techniques*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1995, p.8.

<sup>143</sup> Gillow, J. & N. Barnard, op.cit. p.7.

weaving and dyeing and with over three hundred indigenous dye yielding plants at their disposal, and with sophisticated techniques of block printing, were able to create an immense range of rich and desirable coloured fabric. The Greek historian Herodotus, in his history of the war between Greece and Persia (490 – 480 BC), recorded that the Indian soldiers of the Persian King Xerxes wore cotton – virtually unknown in the western world at that time. He described it as

“an exotic cloth that had been woven by Indian craftsmen for more than 1,000 years.”<sup>144</sup>

The Romans, who held Indian cotton, silk and muslin in very high esteem, imported great quantities for clothing, furnishing and tents. Caesar’s soldiers were known to have worn Indian cotton uniforms and the Roman historian Pliny wrote

“there was no year in which India did not drain the Roman Empire of a hundred million sesterces.”<sup>145</sup>

At one stage, the Roman Senate blamed the vanity of Roman women for this debt, because of their desire for the fine Indian printed cottons which were highly sought after at the time.<sup>146</sup>

Indian cloth, especially chintz and calico, has been so popular in the west that protectionist laws in both Britain and Europe have been enacted at various times preventing or at least controlling its importation. A comment made by the Venerable Bede in his “Life of St Cuthbert”, written during the eighth century, informs us that the synod of Cloveshoe forbade its priests to wear clothes dyed with Indian colours.<sup>147</sup>

Indian textiles also found their way onto the Australian market in the early days of the colony. Early records show that there was a great shortage of suitable food and clothing in the 1790s and Governor Phillip sent a store ship, the ‘Atlantic’, to Calcutta to purchase food supplies and clothing for male and female convicts.<sup>148</sup> Indian cotton cloth was used to make clothing for convicts and workers right through the 1800s and in the 1820s more luxurious fabrics were being imported including “Ladies fashionable shawls.”<sup>149</sup> The importation of Indian textiles went into decline after the 1860s as Australia developed its own cotton

---

<sup>144</sup> Burnard, J. op.cit. p.8.

<sup>145</sup>ibid, p.9.

<sup>146</sup> Dhamija, J. & J. Jain, Handwoven Fabrics of India. New York: Mapin Publishing, 1989, p.17

<sup>147</sup> ibid. p.39

<sup>148</sup> Burnard, J. op.cit, p. 72.

<sup>149</sup>ibid, p.77.

industry and imported cloth from other parts of Asia and Europe until the 1960s and 70s when there was a major resurgence.

Having examined the place occupied by Indian textiles historically and globally, I will now investigate the religious and spiritual aspects of textiles in the traditional context. Generally speaking, I have confined the framework of this study to include textile production and usage within the subcontinent. However, as Indian cloth and religion has travelled far and wide I have also made cross references with customs in other parts of Asia.

## TEXTILE SYMBOLISM

Textile symbolism in India is hallowed by tradition. The cosmos, the ordered universe, is envisioned as a fabric woven by the gods. In a number of places in the Vedas and the Upanishads, Brahma (Ultimate Reality) and the Atman (Self) are described metaphorically in terms of weaving. In the Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad the sage Yajnavalkya answers Gargi's question about the nature of the 'imperishable' (Brahma).

“That, O Gargi, which is above the sky, that which is beneath the earth, that which is between these two, sky and earth, that which people call the past and the present and the future-across space is that woven, warp and woof.”<sup>150</sup>

In the Mundaka Upanishad another description occurs.

“The immortal Soul, the one warp of the world and of the individual  
He on whom the sky, the earth, and the atmosphere  
Are woven, and the wind, together with all the life-breaths (prana)  
Him alone knows as the one Soul (Atman).  
Other words dismiss. He is the bridge to immortality.”<sup>151</sup>

As mentioned earlier, some of the most well known Hindu and Buddhist scriptural texts are the Tantras and Sutras, and both of these words are derivations of the Sanskrit 'tauttu' meaning cotton thread. A sutra is said to be the bare thread of an exposition which is then expounded in the form of a spiritual or philosophical teaching whilst Bhattacharya likens the

---

<sup>150</sup> Hume, R.E. (trans) The Thirteen Principal Upanishads Translated From the Sanskrit. New York: Oxford University Press, 1931, p.117.

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.* p.372.



tantras to spinning out a strong, unbreakable thread of creation from a shapeless mass of fibre.<sup>152</sup>

As a direct expression of this belief in the universe as a piece of woven fabric, cloth is particularly valued in its uncut form, woven in a single piece, as it is a symbol of totality and the wholeness of the manifest world. As discussed in the preceding chapter, it is lengths of uncut cloth such as shawls and saris that are presented as offerings in temples and tied into trees for Krishna. Uncut cloth is also used ceremonially in the home as a baby's first swaddling band, a circumcision wrap, coming-of-age veils for girls, and to mark the end of a widow's formal period of mourning.<sup>153</sup> Uncut and unstitched cloth also plays a part in Muslim devotional practices during the pilgrimage to Mecca when people wrap lengths of simple white cloth (ahram) around themselves before circumambulating the Kaaba.<sup>154</sup>

Some of the most common garments of clothing in India are still single unstitched pieces of cloth worn draped around the body in styles which have changed very little since antiquity<sup>155</sup>, the sari and odhani (headcloth) worn by women, the lungi, dhoti and turban worn by men, and the shawl worn by both men and women. Hindus in particular wore untailored clothes as they felt that cloth cut and pierced by needles was impure. It is believed that the invasions and immigrations of other peoples, particularly the Moghuls from Persia, led to the adoption of cut and stitched garments (trousers, tunics and jackets) that were better suited to the newcomer's horse riding culture.<sup>156</sup> Draped clothing is still the predominant form of garb for both women (sari) and men (dhoti and lungi) in the eastern and southern areas of the subcontinent while those in the north and western areas tend to wear stitched garments more. Even amongst those who favour stitched garments, uncut lengths such as headcloths, turbans and shawls are still an integral part of their clothing.

Saris themselves are a storehouse of information as colours and designs vary significantly between regions, tribes and castes and while it might appear to be a restrictive item of dress to western eyes, it can in fact offer much versatility to the wearer.<sup>157</sup> The sari length, usually between five and eight metres, is a highly structured piece of cloth distinctly divided into

---

<sup>152</sup> Bhattacharya, B. Towards a Tantric Goal. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1989, p.50.

<sup>153</sup> Askari, N. & L. Arthur. *op.cit*, p.21.

<sup>154</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>155</sup> Lynton, L. *op.cit*. p.10.

<sup>156</sup> Askari, N.& L. Arthur. *op.cit*, p.20.

<sup>157</sup> Village women at work in the fields and on the roads often wear their saris tucked up high between their legs offering as much freedom of movement as a pair of running shorts would to a western woman.

three main areas: the endpiece (pallu), the field and the longitudinal borders. The sari production industry accounts for about a quarter of all textile production in India today, and most traditional sari design motifs fall into one or both of two categories: serving a protective function - warding off the evil eye, or relating to fertility, in the broadest sense of the word. In a country where about 75 per cent of the population is rural or agricultural, fertility and wealth are closely linked as the annual harvest is directly responsible for the level of a community's well being. Various floral and vegetative motifs, linked to the feminine principle, occur on saris as fertility symbols and have played a major role in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain iconography. A small circular motif woven into saris from the south eastern state of Orissa is believed to be derived from the rudraksha seed which is strung into prayer beads for mantra repetition or japa.<sup>158</sup> I use one of these rudraksha seed malas myself in my daily practice of japa.

## MANTRAS AND TEXTILES

The incorporation of mantras into textiles has been a primary focus of mine throughout this thesis and the concept of japa, or continuous mantra repetition, underpins much of my work and provides linkages with the repetitive nature of much textile production: spinning, weaving and stitching.

Traditionally mantras and other sacred symbols were woven into and printed onto fabric that could be worn next to the body as a way of invoking the deity's grace and protection. Rawson, in his publications on Tantric art, reproduces two such pieces. One is an eighteenth century piece of brocade fabric from Banaras woven in silk and gold threads, with invocations to the goddess Durga, the border of which is lined with stylised floral motifs and footprints. The second is a piece of silk from seventeenth century Bengal with repeated invocations to the functional aspects of the goddess.<sup>159</sup> Although my thesis artworks are not designed to be worn, the mantras and invocations painted and printed onto the surfaces do represent this practice.<sup>160</sup>

From Nuapatna in the southern state of Orissa comes the silk 'Gitagovinda' cloth which includes a repeated stanza from the devotional poem, the 'Gitagovinda' composed by Jayadeva in the twelfth century. 'Govinda' is one of the many names of Krishna and 'gita'

---

<sup>158</sup> Lynton, L. op.cit. p.170.

<sup>159</sup> Rawson, P. The Art of Tantra. London: Thames & Hudson, 1973, pl.42 and Rawson, P. Tantra: The Indian Cult of Ecstasy. London: Thames & Hudson, 1973, p.101.

<sup>160</sup> See for example Woven Mantra Shawls 1 & 2 (slides 1, 2, 3 and 4)

means song. The invocational stanza in the local Oriya script, which occurs at the beginning of the poem praising Jagannath (an incarnation of Krishna), is woven into the silk using a weft ikat technique; the same stanza is sung daily in the Jagannath temple. The cloth, approximately 3.8 metres, is used in temple ceremonies and worn by the male attendants as either turbans or shoulder cloths.<sup>161</sup>

A pilgrim's cotton shawl, a 'Gamcha', is bought by devotees as a visual reminder of a successful pilgrimage. These are block printed with sacred symbols and repeated mantras or invocations to the particular deity; shawls such as these are readily available on the market today, both in India and the west, woven from cotton, rayon or silk. (See fig. 8) Typically used motifs, apart from the mantras, include the deity's footprints, swastikas, lotuses and tridents. The feet are a site of significance in the Indian tradition as they represent the level at which the deity or guru is most easily approached - the earthly level. The feet are repositories of sacred power and are worshipped as such; the left foot is said to have a pearly white lustre representing Shiva, the male principle, whilst the right foot has a red lustre representing Shakti, the female active principle. The guru's sandals, or padukas, the traditional Indian footwear, are also revered as repositories of sacred power.

"Indians attribute a clear set of values to different parts of the body. The head is the most valuable; the feet the least. To touch someone with one's foot or shoe is an insult. But to pay true reverence to someone, one may set their feet on one's own head and worship them. On the transcendent value-scale it is the feet of the deity which are nearest to men. Hence, as the most direct approach to God and as an emblem of one's own humanity, one may pay worship to the divine footsole, such as the Visnupada in which the created world is reflected."<sup>162</sup>

The swastika symbol on the Gamcha, or pilgrim's shawl, is an early auspicious symbol representing the sun, moon and male and female energies. It was first seen on intaglio seals excavated at the Mohenjo-Daro sites circa 3000 BC and has also been found on Paleolithic pottery shards and goddess figurines from Siberia, Turkey and Greece.<sup>163</sup> The trident has a number of associations, it is the divine weapon of the deities and has long been associated with both Shiva and Durga who wielded them in another of the Mohenjo-Daro seals. The three prongs of the trident, or trishula, represents the functions of creation, preservation and dissolution as well as the three subtle channels (ida, pingala and sushumna) in the human body through which the kundalini, or meditation energy, travels. The path of the kundalini

---

<sup>161</sup> Hacker, K. & K. Turnbull, Courtyard, Bazaar, Temple: Traditions of Textile Expression in India. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982, p.45.

<sup>162</sup> Rawson, P. The Art of Tantra. London: Thames & Hudson, 1973, p.111. The 'Visnupada' is the footsole of the god Vishnu.

<sup>163</sup> Johnson, B. op.cit. p.236.

Fig. 8

**Mantra Shawl.**(gamcha) India, c. 1995, printed silk

Silk shawl printed with mantras, including the 'om' mantra and other auspicious symbols such as tridents, footprints of the deity and conch shells.



पुस्तक

संख्या

ॐ नमो भगवते नित्या नंदाय  
ॐ नमो भगवते नित्या नंदाय



ॐ नमो भगवते नित्या नंदाय  
ॐ नमो भगवते नित्या नंदाय



and the iconographic importance of the lotus have been discussed in chapters one and two. Lotus references occur throughout the thesis artworks, most notably in the large seven petalled white flower of Votive Site 1. (See slide 18)

The incorporation of prayers and invocations into cloth also occurred in other parts of Southeast Asia and in other religious traditions. In Muslim devotional practice, within India and Pakistan, devotees purchase specially printed lengths of bright cotton cloth to spread on the graves of Sufi saints on their anniversaries. These cloths are often embroidered or printed with verses from the Quran.<sup>164</sup> Maxwell suggests that the incorporation of Arabic calligraphy into textile weaves posed no problem in Southeast Asia where textiles had always been inscribed with magic and protective properties anyway. She includes images of warrior's costumes from Malaysian, Khmer and Philippino cultures with script and talismanic diagrams from Islamic, Buddhist and Christian traditions respectively, designed to deflect the blows of the opponent's weapons.<sup>165</sup> Included also is an image of a Javanese baby-carrying cloth with batik text at each end of the cloth. The text is a classical Javanese verse poem to be sung or recited asking God and Muhammed for blessings to protect the baby from diseases, stomach worms and convulsions.<sup>166</sup> Pastor-Roces, in her extensive study of Philippine textiles, also describes the use of cloth shreds with magic words printed onto them as amulets and a type of chastity cloth on which magic verses were written – worn by young girls when sleeping.<sup>167</sup>

Textiles embellished with mantras and invocations are thought to offer protection and blessings to those who wear them. In the following sections I will discuss some of the many other examples, both within India and Asia, of particular types of textiles used to protect and bless objects both animate and inanimate.<sup>168</sup> The significance of the simple cotton thread when wrapped around certain parts of the body will also be discussed.

---

<sup>164</sup> Askari, N. & L. Arthur. *op.cit*, p.21.

<sup>165</sup> Maxwell, R. *op.cit*, pp. 199, 335 – 336.

<sup>166</sup> *ibid*, p. 340.

<sup>167</sup> Pastor-Roces, M. Sinaunang Habi – Philippine Ancestral Weave. Manila: Nikki Coseteng, 1991, pp. 210 – 211.

<sup>168</sup> Maxwell and Pastor-Roces have written extensively on this subject.

# TEXTILES BESTOWING BLESSING AND PROTECTION

Textiles have been ascribed particular powers in many cultures whether as clothing, bodily adornment, furnishing or for ceremonial use. In Korea, *pojagi*, or wrapping cloths, are used to cover a variety of objects ranging from vessels of food taken as offerings to the temple, to written marriage proposals. It is believed that by wrapping an object, good fortune, or *pok*, is held within the wrapping cloth. Blessings and happiness are thought to accumulate with each stitch.<sup>169</sup>

Textiles woven in Malaysia known as *Pua*

“ were used by the Iban in ceremonies invoking the presence of benevolent ancestors and spirits. Such is the power of *pua* woven by ritually experienced women, that malevolent beings can be kept at bay on such occasions by a display of these fine textiles”<sup>170</sup>

The Tai Nuea and Tai Lue tribes of Laos and northern Thailand weave a ceremonial cloth with a lozenge pattern which is related to Indian yantras. As part of an ancient ceremony to appease the spirits, a long textile displaying the yantra is wrapped around the head so that the centre of the lozenge lies on the third eye region of the wearer’s forehead.<sup>171</sup> Pastor-Roces refers to various uses of textiles in burial ceremonies and also to a particular cloth used to wrap the cut portion of the umbilical cord in a post partum ritual in the Philippines.<sup>172</sup>

Old cloth and fragments of clothing are believed to hold special protective powers. The patchwork shawls worn by Buddhists and Hindus, discussed in chapter two and depicted in fig. 10 are concrete examples of this belief. The kantha textile art of Bihar and Bengal, first mentioned in Panini’s Sanskrit grammar written around the sixth century BC<sup>173</sup>, is another example of rags being given new life and power as disused saris and dhotis are reassembled to create quilts, bags and wraps. Layers of old garments are sandwiched together between the white cotton outer layers of the sari or dhoti (a standard item of male dress), then lines of

---

<sup>169</sup> Rapt in Colour: Korean Textiles and Costumes of the Choson Dynasty exhibition held at the Melbourne Immigration Museum from 10<sup>th</sup> October 1999 to 27<sup>th</sup> February 2000. Originated from the Seoul Museum of Embroidery, Korea.

<sup>170</sup> Maxwell, R. op.cit, p. 44.

<sup>171</sup> *ibid*, p.200.

<sup>172</sup> Pastor-Roces, M. op.cit. pp 210 – 211.

<sup>173</sup> Sen, P. Living Traditions of India: Crafts of West Bengal. New York: Mapin International, 1994, p.56.

simple running stitch, the coloured thread for which is drawn out of the old sari borders, are positioned closely together to create elaborate designs of animals, flowers, human figures and deities. Kanthas are made by both Hindu and Muslim women, although the Muslim kanthas are decorated in a non-representational mode employing largely geometric motifs.<sup>174</sup> The kantha can be seen as a textile version of the floor paintings, discussed in chapter three, created by women to attract the blessings of the goddess Lakshmi to the house and its occupants but with the added protective powers of the old clothes. Kantha art is largely a rural tradition of village and tribal women who create them to be given as gifts bestowing blessings on those who sleep under them.

Another form of protective textile is the embroidered 'Ganesh Stapana' (see fig. 9), produced by the embroidering communities of Saurashtra in the state of Gujarat. Ganesh is the very popular elephant headed god, son of Parvati and Shiva, who is worshipped as the remover of obstacles and is usually depicted in the centre of the embroidery flanked by his two wives (Siddhi and Buddhi), a rat, which is his vehicle or vahana, and other gods, flowers and animals. The elephant and the rat represent the different ways in which obstacles can be removed; the elephant tramples down everything in its path to reach its goal or destination whilst the rat creeps through small gaps and crevices to achieve the same end result. The stapana can take the form of an arched doorway hanging or a pentagonal wall hanging or covering used on the household puja items. By hanging a Ganesh stapana over the doorway the occupants of the house are inviting Ganesh to enter and bestow his blessings on the lives of those within and help them overcome the obstacles to health, prosperity and happiness.

A common form of blessing from a Buddhist lama is to be given a thin cord of red or yellow cotton or silk with a knot in it which is tied around the neck. This should be worn for three days and then burnt, or worn until it falls off of its own accord. This is thought to offer both blessings and protection whilst also keeping demons at bay.<sup>175</sup> The festival of Rakshabandhan, which also involves a thread, is celebrated across India and reaffirms the ties between brother and sister. It is traditionally expressed by a sister tying a simple cotton bracelet around the wrist of her brother, as a sign that it is he who must look after her welfare. He in turn presents gifts of money, jewellery or clothes. In the eastern state of Tripura, a ritual is still performed whereby a village is enclosed by wrapping a continuous piece of thread around it which is thought to contain the virtue and cleanse away any evil that exists.<sup>176</sup>

---

<sup>174</sup> Stoler Miller, B. op.cit. pp 108-112.

<sup>175</sup> Myers, D & S. Bean, op.cit. p.145.

<sup>176</sup> Dhamija, J. op.cit. p.17.



Fig. 9

**Ganesh Stapana.** India, c. 1986, embroidered cotton

Embroidered Ganesh Stapana depicting Ganesh in the centre with his two wives Siddhi and Buddhi on either side, Krishna (blue figure) playing his flute to the cows, swastikas, lotuses and elephants.





Threads are also wrapped around sacred trees for wish fulfillment, and in many parts of India the first warp from a new cotton harvest is blessed by the local priest.

In Rajasthan, ceramic pots covered in pieces of bright red cotton cloth, symbolising the female powers of fertility and fecundity, are placed on mounds of earth in a ritual performed to ensure conception and safe birth.<sup>177</sup> The ceramic pot, in particular the water jar, is an ancient fertility symbol and is thought to represent the body of the goddess herself.<sup>178</sup>

Many types of Indian textiles were highly esteemed, due to a belief in their special powers, and were used in religious and healing practices in Southeast Asia. They were wrapped around sick and dead bodies, or fragments were burnt and wiped on afflicted parts of the body. Indian cloth was used in courts throughout the Southeast Asian region as a signifier of wealth and power; the ornate double ikat silk patola woven in Gujarat were prized by royalty and, unlike in India, were rarely worn as clothing but used as royal canopies, palanquins and shrouds for the court. These patola, employing the painstaking technique whereby the warp and weft threads are dyed separately to create patterns when woven together, were particularly thought to have magical and protective qualities. The patolu still forms an important part of a bride's dowry in some areas of Gujarat and the Hindus, Jains and Bohra Muslims perform a ceremony in the seventh month of pregnancy where a pregnant woman sits on an outspread patolu whilst receiving gifts.<sup>179</sup>

## RELIGIOUS AND CEREMONIAL USE OF TEXTILES

Both Hindus and Buddhists hang simple coloured cotton flags and bunting outside their shrines, temples and houses; at Buddhist Stupas multiple lines of prayer flags encircle the site exposed to the elements and are added to or replaced as they disintegrate in the weather. Buddhist lamas and students undertaking meditation retreats hang prayer flags outside their retreat huts to ward off interfering spirits who are attracted to the meditator. Flags are readily bought and then taken to a lama for blessing before being hung. They are hand block printed with prayers which are endlessly repeated each time they flutter in the wind and this endless repetition, like the turning of the prayer wheel, enhances the effect of the prayer and the merit accrues to the donor of the flags.

---

<sup>177</sup> Mookerjee, P. Pathway Icons: The Wayside Art of India. London: Thames and Hudson, 1987, p.14.

<sup>178</sup> Rounded pots with two breastlike protuberances were made especially for use in Vedic fire rituals - yajnas, discussed in chapter 2, and a pot containing water or seed is thought to contain the life force and protective powers of nature.

<sup>179</sup> Hacker, K. & K. Turnbull, op.cit. p. 57.

The miniature textiles I have woven and printed with mantra text in Shawl Diagram Panels and Prayer Mats (see slide 5) refer to the tradition of fluttering prayer flags which occurs throughout various parts of Asia. The mats are constructed from narrow strips of open weave white cotton printed with lines of gold mantra text which echoes the type of simple cloth that prayer flags are constructed from. The simple and relatively unsophisticated screen printing techniques I have used also refers to the simply printed appearance of these Asian prayer flags.

In parts of the desert regions of Gujarat the semi-nomadic Vaghri tribes create a temporary temple for worshipping the Mother Goddess with huge printed and painted fabric hangings and canopies known as 'Mata Pachedi' and 'Mata Chandarvo' which are rectangular and circular respectively, forming the walls and ceiling of the structure.<sup>180</sup> These are predominantly red, black and white and usually depict the goddess in the form of Durga mounted on a black buffalo flanked by devotees bearing gifts. These temple cloths are easily rolled and transported by their owners and serve as a compelling and powerful means of visual storytelling. Another form of temple cloth is the 'kalamkari' produced in the Kalahasti area of Andhra Pradesh, a southern state. The kalamkari describes a fabric patterning technique using a 'kalam', bamboo or wooden pen, to apply mordants to the cotton cloth which is then dyed accordingly. These cloths contain very detailed depictions of events from the epics - the Ramayana and Mahabharata - and are embellished with bands of narration in the regional Telugu script. They are intended for use in the temple shrine and as decoration for the processional cart and function in much the same way as temple murals and sculpture.<sup>181</sup>

Rituals and ceremonies around the significance of the sacred thread still form an important part of Hindu and Buddhist customs. Orthodox Hindus wear a sacred cotton or silk thread which is tied across the torso from shoulder to waist, thus crossing the heart externally which symbolises the thread which exists within the heart (signifying the supreme state). The Brahmopanishad from the Atharva Veda states that

“By It all this (universe) is transfixed, as a collection of gems is strung together on a thread. The Yogi who is the knower of all Yogas and the seer of truth should put on this thread. On account of wearing this Sutra or thread, they can neither become contaminated nor unclean, those (namely) who have this thread existing within them - those with this sacrificial thread of knowledge.”<sup>182</sup>

---

<sup>180</sup> Barnard, N. Arts and Crafts of India. London: Conran Octopus, 1993, pp.76-79.

<sup>181</sup> Hacker, K. & K. Turnbull. op.cit. p.37.

<sup>182</sup> Madhavananda, S. Minor Upanishads. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968, p.66.

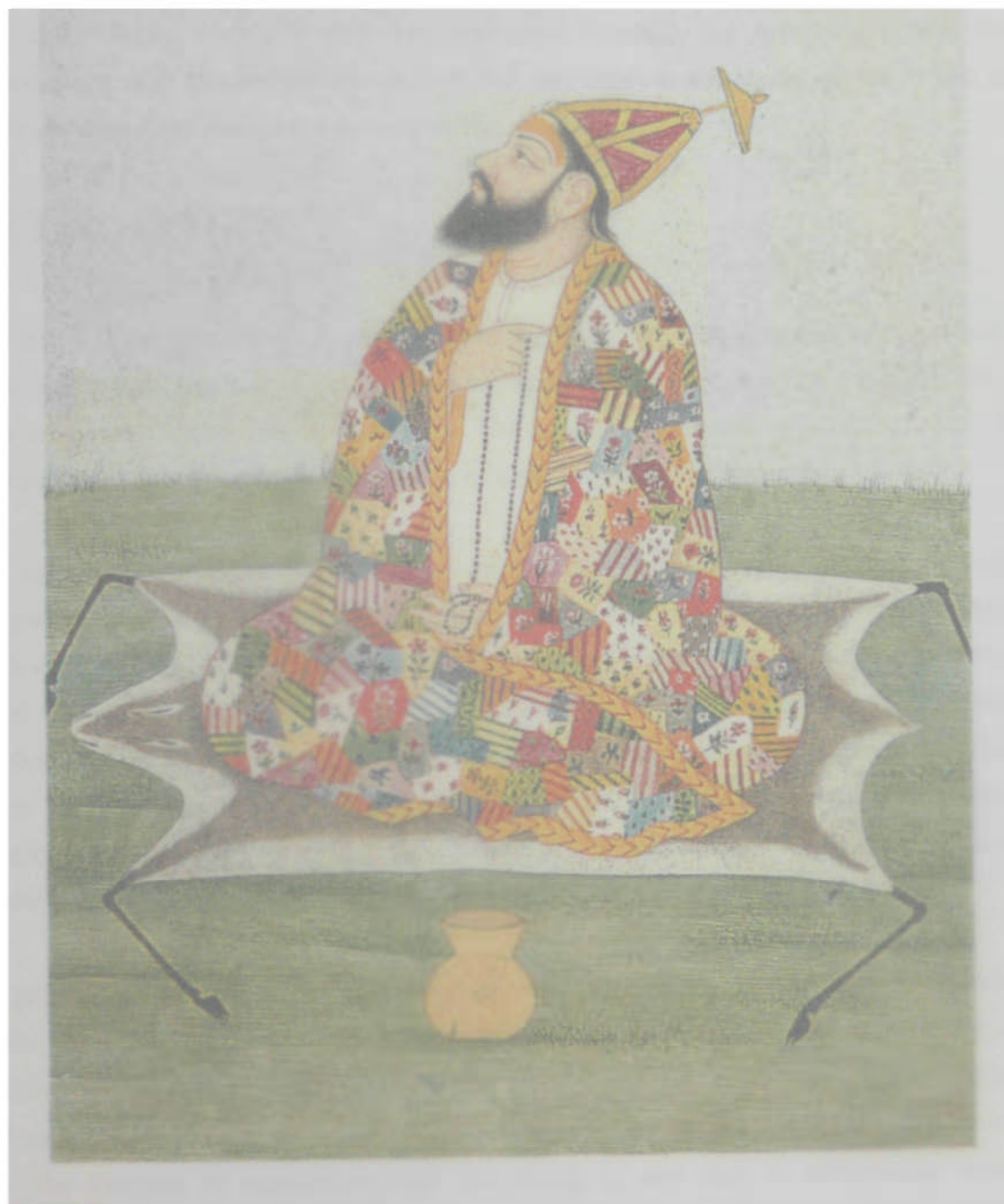
The thread is a significant metaphor. It is used to hold pieces of cloth together, to decorate and to enclose. When tied around certain parts of the body it mirrors an internal thread of knowledge. I have used the thread, and the repeated action of passing a needle in and out of cloth to mirror the action of mantra repetition and its connection with the coming in and going out of the breath. The process of making the artworks is a repetition in itself and as such is a manifestation of meditation.

An examination of the salient features of Indian textile traditions, philosophy and spiritual practice has now led me to the central focus of this research; the body of artworks. The nature of this thesis is that the artworks, which are the visual expression of meditation, have been produced by a western artist following an eastern spiritual path. It is precisely this feature, or cross-cultural perspective, which makes this research unique.

Fig.10

**Religious Teacher.** Himachal Pradesh, c. 1820, watercolour on paper

Shaivite religious teacher seated on meditation mat of antelope skin wearing a patchwork shawl. He is performing japa, continual repetition of the mantra, with his rudraksha beads.





# Chapter Four

## WOVEN MANTRA – THE ARTWORKS

This research project has been a journey of discovery: a convergence of spiritual practice and visual arts practice. Aspects of the inner space, offering and traditional Indian textiles have so far been examined in an historical and theoretical framework. This chapter will examine how these three areas underpin and are expressed through the artwork. I will discuss the methodology and the processes used in the physical construction of the work as well as devoting some attention to the history of the project.

### METHODOLOGY

This research project set out to demonstrate the links between spiritual practice and visual art and in particular to examine the relationship between the repetition of a mantra, the repetition of an image and the repetition of a stitch. The artwork I intended to produce would be both an offering and a meditation, an expression of meditation and a meditation in itself.

The research developed in ways I could never have envisaged and presented some unexpected challenges. Perhaps most significantly, the links I set out to demonstrate became much more subtle and included facets of the research that I had overlooked, particularly the actual exegesis writing process. The exegesis, like the thesis artworks, is by no means a seamless whole; it has been patched, stitched, applied, darned and rewoven. The different stages of the writing process, the referring back, the hinting toward and the continual repeating is like a pattern woven or stitched into cloth, it is like a cycle of the mantra *om namah shivaya om....* with no clear beginning or end.

The process of artmaking, writing and meditation has been a multi-layered one held together by the combined action of stitching and mantra repetition. Like mantra repetition, the stitching is continual and repetitive but has breaks and pauses as each length of thread comes to an end before stitching commences again with a new thread and a new momentum. In this way, the process of meditation and artmaking is one that is continually evolving and changing, yet always striving toward the same ultimate goal.



Perhaps one of the more challenging aspects of this research has been that of applying an academic analysis to what is essentially a very private and personal subject, one's own meditation and inner visions. As the project progressed, and particularly at the exegesis writing stage, the degree of introspection and self reflection required was, at times, quite difficult for me. Some aspects of this research have remained private; detailed descriptions and analyses of the spiritual practices I perform have not been a feature of this exegesis. It is not the practices themselves that are under investigation, but rather the artwork which expresses and is inspired by these practices. These concerns notwithstanding, I have tried to embrace the intimate and personal nature of this research believing that it mirrors a universal quest – that of the search for the Self.

Throughout this exegesis, I state that the artworks produced are usually as a direct result of images or sensations experienced whilst performing spiritual practice, in particular meditation and chanting. The particular images that were produced as artworks and selected for inclusion in this thesis are those that I felt most strongly about and those which were most successful in terms of conveying a vision, sensation or experience in a way which felt authentic and yet also worked visually and conceptually. A process of choice and selection inevitably occurred, usually at the stage of production. There are a number of journal drawings of works which were never made or never progressed past the initial stages. The process of selection was one that took place on a number of levels which are somewhat difficult to separate. There is the deep knowing state of meditation where choices seem to be made by an inner wisdom, and then there is the fully conscious intellectual level where decisions are made based on a number of more concrete criteria such as aesthetics, practicality, availability of materials, to name a few. At times I would feel very enthusiastic about a work only to find that eventually it somehow lost its power or significance and was therefore never completed. Other works however, the three small hand images<sup>183</sup> for instance, conveyed an experience that was so clear and profound I was in great haste to complete them.

The different levels of engagement evident in the writing are indicative of the layers which emerged throughout the process. It is also reflective of the whole meditation process and the practice of mantra repetition, sometimes almost mechanical, or just on the surface, and sometimes much deeper. Earlier works such as Shawl Diagram Panels and Prayer Mats are discussed briefly focussing more on descriptions of technique and style whereas latter works such as Heart Mat are discussed at length and in far greater detail. The level of engagement between the creative process of producing the artworks and writing the exegesis deepened significantly as time progressed. It deepened as I became more critically aware of the various

---

<sup>183</sup> See slides 11, 12 and fig. 13

themes and influences that fed into the creation of a new work and as I was more able to articulate these in the writing. It was also partly due to the fact that earlier works were produced during the stage when I was conducting the background research into Indian textiles and religious customs whereas the later works were produced at the stage when I was writing this chapter about the actual works. Additionally, some of the later works were more closely connected to changes in my personal life at the time<sup>184</sup> and this is echoed in the writing. This represented a deep contemplative time when the writing was more enmeshed in the process of art making and meditation rather than being quite separated from it. As the writing developed, this mirrored the meditation process where practice enhances the process over time and distractions fall away. As the time span of this thesis is close to five years, it is inevitable that the powers of self analysis and self awareness concerning the creative process and the development of ideas, have grown. The ability to be self reflective developed greatly as time went on.

The cross disciplinary nature of this investigation, drawing on theological, anthropological and archeological analyses of the subject areas, has been reflected in the previous chapters. Furthermore, there are a number of strands that interweave to form a complex whole in the creative process. These include spiritual practice, the images which are inspired by and arise from this practice, and the physical manifestation of these images, that is, how they are made. In this way, sewing technology weaves into meditation, which weaves into colour and through into printmaking. Offering also plays an important part in the methodology, as does memory, particularly memories of ritual and worship in ashrams and temples both in Australia and in India. As the creative process concerned here is multi layered, it is useful to examine some of these layers separately.

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

My daily practice, or sadhana, includes periods of meditation, making offerings, chanting prescribed texts, japa and contemplation. Over the past twelve years these practices have led to mantras becoming interwoven through my life and more particularly through my artwork. These practices, whilst often performed alone, are part of a much greater pattern and I meet with groups of similarly minded seekers weekly at my local meditation centre. I participate in larger events regularly throughout the year at the Melbourne Siddha Yoga ashram and, in addition to this, I spend time with my guru, Swami Chidvilasananda, either here or in India as the opportunity arises. All this provides a rich and fertile ground for spiritual growth, and in my case, an abundance of visual imagery.

---

<sup>184</sup> See particularly Daily Meditations discussed on pp. 85-86.

Memories from my first trip to India, more than ten years ago, still form a significant portion of my mental storehouse of artistic images. This journey to Gurudev Siddha Peeth marked the beginning of a number of major changes in my life, not least of which was an important realignment with my artistic self.<sup>185</sup> During this ashram visit I witnessed and participated in ceremonies and rituals which had a profound effect on me and continue to influence my artwork.

Meditation and spiritual practice are the foundations of my existence and my art practice, and this research project has provided the opportunity for me to delve more deeply into the inner worlds and to visually express these experiences. Frequently, images of completed artworks appear in my mind during periods of meditation and chanting. Sometimes these images are very clear and detailed and sometimes they are more obscure. When the conscious mind is engaged in focussed periods of stimulating research or growth, many ideas, thoughts and images filter down to, and are stored in the subconscious. I believe that it is from this place, the subconscious storehouse, that images arise in a new form during meditation.

My journal drawings are usually headed with the date and place of the initial vision, often with details of which particular practice I was performing at the time. Technical or spatial arrangement issues are also often clarified through meditation. Although many of the images appeared to me in a virtually complete form, others, such as Votive Site 1, were less precise and have been resolved over a greater period of time. The feeling of 'rightness' or satisfaction with a piece is not necessarily dependent on whether I have been able to recreate it straight from the meditation image but rather it evolves into a new and complete form through the physical construction of the work. As the images arise from a point of meditative stillness and are created in a way that maintains that inner focus, through the painting and stitching of mantras, I believe that the final work is in itself a manifestation of meditation.<sup>186</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> At this time I was working as a Community Artist facilitating groups in poster design and production. Although this was challenging and rewarding it was all consuming and provided little opportunity for me to pursue my own ideas and images. Following my return from India I began to set aside studio time for myself and to recommence solitary artistic activity.

<sup>186</sup> Gallery directors have described a 'peaceful and meditative' feeling in their galleries when my work is exhibited. Dianne Tanzer spoke of a recognisable change in gallery visitors as they spent time with the work.

## SEWING

The methods I have used throughout the production of the thesis artworks are firmly grounded in textiles technology, the stitch being the basis of all the thesis artworks, including those which employ printmaking, painting or laser printing as all have the stitched cloth as their starting point. When I commenced this research as a Masters Degree I had no particular intention to work so completely in textiles and initially I was painting sections of Indian embroidered cloth. As the study progressed, and developed more emphasis on the investigation of Indian textiles, it became clear that stitching and working with cloth were to be a fundamental element of both the theoretical and practical components of the thesis.

Since I was a young child I have always sewn and constructed things by hand. My mother and maternal grandmother taught me to knit, sew and crochet at an early age. My paternal grandmother, who didn't knit or sew, as far as I was aware, has nevertheless had her input as I now own her sewing machine, sewing table and tins of buttons and cottons – some of which were used in the thesis artworks. As I suspect that my generation is possibly the last one where most women will have been taught basic sewing skills either by their female forebears or at school, it is vitally important to me to celebrate and preserve these 'feminine skills' through my art practice.

Stitching is the basis of the artworks: stitching, padding and embellishing through surface decoration. Generally speaking, I did not spin, weave or dye from raw materials, although I did reweave strips of canvas. I have intentionally chosen a limited range of fabrics, generally simple, unrefined cloth. The main ones are canvas, both cotton duck and Belgian linen. I have also used some finer fabrics such as 'tarlatan', traditionally used in bookbinding and etching, and 'Shapewell', a dressmaking interfacing. I chose to use these simple fabrics as they have a direct reference to Indian textile history and western traditions of domestic sewing, painting, printmaking and bookbinding. The cotton canvas was actually imported from India and sold as painter's canvas in art supply shops which added another dimension, particularly when laser copies of actual paintings from the western art tradition were transferred onto it.<sup>187</sup>

Much of the work is stitched by both hand and domestic sewing machine with machine zig zag commonly used to prevent the raw edges from disintegrating altogether – although the frayed edge has been used consciously in a number of the works.<sup>188</sup> The embroidery and hand stitching is relatively simple and I have used three main stitch types: running stitch, chain

---

<sup>187</sup> I am referring here to two individual components of Twenty Shawl Images, see Fig. 11

<sup>188</sup> See for example Kundalini Blue, Kali Flower, Shiva Star and Mantra Spiral

stitch and satin stitch, all of which are stitches common to both European and Indian embroidery and textile crafts. Initially I was primarily using closely layered chain and satin stitch to create solid areas of sewn colour but after reading about kanthas<sup>189</sup> and being greatly inspired by the Amish quilt show<sup>190</sup> which was visiting Melbourne at the time, I began to use more openly spaced running stitch.

The quilts included in the exhibition, Lit From Within: Amish Quilts of Lancaster County, were hand sewn from large pieces of richly coloured woollen cloth and many designs followed the popular 'diamond in the square' format which has visual similarities with Indian yantras. Hung, as they were, in a large dimly lit space, the overall feeling was one of quiet religious awe. Robert Hughes has described them as having an "exalted emotional silence" and likened them to the geometric American art of the 1960s, which included work by artists such as Noland, Stella and Le Witt.<sup>191</sup> The Amish, with their attention to quality and austerity, purchased bolts of plain coloured wool which were used for under clothing and quilts. The use of large solid areas of deep colour resulted in a vastly different looking quilt to the patchwork variety that provided a means of recycling and extending the life of clothing. The quilts, made purely for the practical purpose of keeping warm and not in the tradition of friendship quilts, are objects of extraordinary beauty and I was struck by the energy that seemed to emanate from them in the gallery. The hand stitching, which held the layers of fabric together, was simple running stitch overlaid in diagonal lines, stars and feather shapes. Seeing this technique helped me to expand my view of stitching and to become aware of the aesthetic possibilities of very simply stitched lines within my own works rather than using the stitch as a tool for providing blocks of colour.

The process of padding and sewing the thesis works was often physically and technically challenging, particularly in the case of the spiral in Kundalini Blue and the large flower in Votive Site 1. (See slides 13 and 18) The large flower was too bulky and heavy to manoeuvre around the sewing machine and thus had to be sewn by hand with a large mattress needle. Most of the works were partially stitched, padded and then completely stitched. The padded works are stuffed with 'dacron', a synthetic wadding commonly used in quilts, cushions, pillows and clothing. The paint was then applied, except in the case of the pink stencilling which was done prior to padding, and any surface embroidery stitched once the paint was dry. This in itself created some problems as the painted canvas became stiffer and more

---

<sup>189</sup> Kanthas are an Indian quilt made from recycled cotton garments, discussed in chapter three.

<sup>190</sup> Lit From Within: Amish Quilts of Lancaster County was held at the National Gallery of Victoria during July 1997.

<sup>191</sup> Hughes, R. Amish, the art of the quilt. New York: Alfred A. Knopf-Callaway, 1990.

impenetrable to the needle. Surface embellishments such as brass, buttons, pearls and artificial flowers were sewn on once the shapes were complete. These embellishments are a combination of materials purchased in haberdashery shops, opportunity shops, Asian groceries, and brass suppliers. As mentioned earlier, some of the buttons and embroidery threads came from sewing supplies passed down from my grandmother. The final thesis work, Heart Mat, is comprised of printed and stitched sheets of paper and due to the construction technique, is considerably more delicate than the padded works.

## COLOUR

The colours I have used are bright pure hues – lots of pinks, blues, mauves, reds and golds. I have generally tended to use bright colours, partly as a result of screen printing posters for many years. An earlier body of work, *Prayers and Mantras* (see fig.1), not part of the thesis, was largely pink and yellow. Additionally, I have drawn reference from the colours of India, particularly the painted buildings, trucks and the images of the deities in the posters and calendars of popular art. Temples, shrines and houses are often painted rich colours with lolly pinks, lilacs, yellows and blues predominating. In fact entire streets and villages are often painted in a particular colour for a specific reason.<sup>192</sup> Not only are buildings brightly painted and decorated, but the pavements outside and the bodies of trucks and buses provide other surfaces for embellishment. Perhaps the greatest source of colour and decoration are the Indian textiles themselves, the exuberance and array of designs is overwhelming.

During 1988/89 I spent some time in India travelling and then residing in the Siddha Yoga ashram – Gurudev Siddha Peeth. Experiences and memories from this time have continued to be a major influence and source of inspiration. Whilst there, the religious statuary in the ashram gardens was undergoing its annual repaint after the vicissitudes of the monsoon period. When I arrived everything was under coated in a ghostly white, which I assumed was their permanent state, but over the coming weeks they were returned to their customary bright colourful state embellished with gold.

---

<sup>192</sup> The Brahman section of the old city of Jodhpur in Rajasthan is almost entirely painted a bright blue. Local legend has it that one of the women, thirty years ago, accidentally added too much blue to her white and then decided she liked it and painted her house an even stronger blue. Neighbours admired it and over the years gradually followed her trend until the entire area was repainted deeper shades of blue each year.

## PRINTMAKING

Printmaking plays a crucial role in the thesis artworks because of its parallels with stitching and mantra repetition. Once again it is repetitive in nature and can be linked with the repetition of a mantra and the repetition of the stitch. The printmaking techniques used are collography, monoprinting, screenprinting, stencilling, laser printing and laser transfer. Printmaking is the primary medium used in the series of artists books entitled *Images of Contemplation* and laser transfer is used extensively in the other series of works, as a means of putting mantra text onto cloth and reproducing sections of embroidered shawls. Monoprinting and screenprinting techniques are used extensively in the final installation work Heart Mat.

Most of the books are unique state works except those that are collographs, Book 3 – Goddesses and Book 5 – Perfection, which are both in an edition of two. (See slides 29 and 31) The binding on the majority of the books has been done professionally by a bookbinder, although I have bound three myself which have soft covers in the tradition of rag books or needlework sampler books. (see slides 30 and 34) I have used cotton canvas for some books and a range of printmaking papers for others. Tarlatan, a traditional bookbinding open weave fabric which is also used in the printmaking process to wipe excess ink off intaglio plates, has also been utilised as an interleaving page in the same way tissue is used in the paper paged books.

The collographs were printed from plates which were created by adhering pieces of stitched canvas onto small squares of masonite. In this way the stitch and the weave of the cloth were used to create another image of stitched and woven cloth in a new format. The actual process of the stitching and piecing together of the canvas for the collograph plates was also used to create another print – laser transfers onto canvas.<sup>193</sup> By doing this I was able to record the reverse side of the stitched cloth as well as the pure form of the clean white and beige canvas before it became completely transformed through the application of black etching ink.

Three of the books, Book 4 – Goddesses Cloth, Book 8 – White Sampler and Book 9 – Red Sampler, all have hand embroidered pages and hand stitched covers. The latter two are miniatures with white canvas pages decorated in simple repeated stitching. There is no printmaking nor are there specific mantras on the pages, although the repeated stitches denote the repeated mantra, and the soft covers are made from laser transferred shawl images from the Twenty Shawl Images series.

---

<sup>193</sup> See Book 2 – Stitch.

The hand imagery I have used in the thesis artwork is derived from readymade plastic henna stencils that were bought by a friend in the United Arab Emirates city of Dubai. These are an Indian product designed to adhere to the palm or back of the hand whilst a thick henna paste is applied over the top. Once the stencil is removed and the excess henna washed off, the hand is decorated. The stencils are quite durable and are intended for re-use. Such decoration, both free hand and with a stencil, is common in various parts of the world and in various cultures. Both Muslim and Hindu women decorate their hands and feet – usually for special occasions such as weddings and holy days.<sup>194</sup> I found the stencils were ideal for applying acrylic paint onto canvas and could be washed and re-used indefinitely. In this way they provided another means of extending the printmaking techniques within the artwork. I have also photocopied the actual stencils and used them in Warm Chakras 1 & 2 and Installing the Mantra. (See slides 11, 12 and fig. 13)

The hand is a significant motif in the thesis works and refers to a number of aspects of spirituality. The hands perform mudras, or sacred gestures, which denote certain powers or states of being. Deities are usually depicted with their hands in one of two mudras, abhaya mudra which denotes the bestowal of protection and fearlessness, or varada mudra which denotes the bestowal of grace.<sup>195</sup> The hands are also the site of the palm chakras in the subtle body and sensations of heat or energy are sometimes felt there during meditation. (See fig. 12) Printmaking, which plays an important role in the research due to its repetitive nature, will be investigated in greater depth in the section entitled *Images of Contemplation*.

## HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

Prior to the commencement of this project in 1996 I had been painting in oils on shaped wooden panels. This body of work entitled *Prayers and Mantras* was exhibited in Melbourne in 1994 and Canberra in 1995. The imagery contained three significant motifs of spiritual transformation – the boat, the lotus and the mantra – and influenced the direction my research was to take during the development of the thesis. The lotus and the mantra have continued to be major components of my current research whereas the boat motif was explored extensively and diminished in importance as an ongoing reference. In Kali House 1, the seeds of *Woven Mantra* are clearly indicated as I overlaid the wooden mantra coated slats and

---

<sup>194</sup> Muslim Somali women I taught in a sewing class at Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE used to dye the soles of their feet and the palms of their hands regularly.

<sup>195</sup> See p. 80-81, 86-87 for further discussion of mudras.



lashed them together with brass wire. Below this construction hung three small panels where I overlaid lines of painted text to simulate woven cloth. (See fig.1) Another work produced during 1995, Miss Beard's Case, whilst having no relationship to matters spiritual, provided an opportunity for me to revisit a textiles installation method of working that I had been neglecting whilst painting. In this work, I used an open suitcase on the floor, out of which flowed small textile panels onto the wall and paper apron pattern pieces onto the floor. Both the concepts and the manifestation of these paths fed into the early thesis works.

During the early stages of this research I set out to explore the ritual and religious aspects of Indian shawls in the context of meditation and spiritual practice. This culminated in the exhibition *Shal* held at Dianne Tanzer Gallery in August 1996. In this body of work I investigated the use of shawls as items of offering and prasad (blessed gifts) and as a cloak for warmth and protection.<sup>196</sup>

“Traditionally to be presented with a shawl is a great honour. Until recently, at the time of honouring great artists, craftsmen and religious personages a shawl was presented along with other things. Religious saints and chief priests of the temples also used to bring shawls as blessing – gifts for the Jaipur kings and nobles...”<sup>197</sup>

As well as the spiritual dimension of shawls I examined the social history, construction techniques and design aspects. Within *Shal* were four distinct works, or series of works, one of which, Twenty Shawl Images, dealt specifically with the design and historical aspects of the Kashmir shawl. The three remaining series of works within *Shal* refer more to the meditative aspects of shawls and are therefore included in the *Woven Mantra* body of work.

Twenty Shawl Images (see fig. 11) references contemporary and historical embroidered and brocade loom woven shawls from Kashmir and India. It also explores the history of the local Kashmir shawl industry and those industries that were established in Britain and Europe to reproduce the original shawls which had become the height of western fashion in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Each of the stretched canvas works was created using a colour laser copier and a heat transfer press. Seven of the canvases contain images reproduced from books and onto these I have hand embroidered a written description of each image. The twenty images can roughly be divided into two equal categories: firstly, those which have sections of contemporary Indian shawls depicting various design styles printed

---

<sup>196</sup> See chapter two p. 46 for discussion of offerings of shawls at temples and the feet of the deity.

<sup>197</sup> Singh, C. & D. Ahivasi. Woollen Textiles and Costumes from Bharat Kala Bhavan. Varanasi, 1981. p.8.

Fig. 11

**Twenty Shawl Images.** (detail) Carole Wilson, 1996, laser transfer on canvas, embroidery





Jean-Auguste Ingres 1805  
Madame Rivière

onto them, and secondly, those which provide a commentary on the history of the shawl in Kashmir, Britain and Europe.

The originals of the contemporary shawl images are owned by myself, family and friends. The majority of shawls are worn for meditation; four of them were purchased in India, one in Tibet and the remaining five in Australia. The origin of manufacture of most of the shawls is unknown as they were purchased in cities such as Bombay, Delhi and Melbourne and whilst undoubtedly manufactured in the last ten years they are examples of the various styles and methods of construction as discussed in the historical texts. There are two examples of tilikar, or brocade loom woven shawls, which are reversible with contrasting colours, back and front. There are seven examples of amlikar, or needle-work embroidered shawls, and one example of a loom woven design of stripes and geometric patterns from the Kulu valley area in the north of India. Apart from the striped shawl, most of the others incorporate buta/paisley motifs in the patterning and adhere to the traditional design principles, as depicted in the work Shawl Diagram Panels and Prayer Mats, (see slide 5) albeit in a much more simplified and less ornate form. I would argue that the three shawls devoid of buta represent what is referred to as a 'floral meander' style in the scholarly texts. The embroidery is quite different and has a raised feel and appearance which is created with the use of an awl, resulting in a layered linear effect similar to what we know as chain stitch.

Following the production of Twenty Shawl Images, I refocussed on the central theme of meditation and mantra. This led into the spiritual aspects of shawls and the major body of artworks – *Woven Mantra*.

## **WOVEN MANTRA – THE MAIN BODY OF WORKS**

In discussing the artworks I have chosen to group the majority of them into four categories: *Shal*, *Images of Meditation* and *Images of Offering*. I will examine the artist's books separately as *Images of Contemplation*. Whilst these categories are not mutually exclusive and may not be immediately apparent to the viewer, the work does tend to sit more comfortably in one category or the other. That is not to say that works included in the *Images of Offering* or *Shal* did not have their genesis during meditation, or that *Images of Meditation* works do not address aspects of offering. Nevertheless, there is a subtle distinction and the *Shal* and *Images of Meditation* works were produced earlier in the project and the *Images of Offering* works at a later stage. The *Images of Contemplation* – the artists' books - were produced throughout the entire period of the research and some of them are linked quite

specifically to particular installations. The final installation piece Heart Mat is a distinct work which spans all the categories and will therefore be discussed separately.

## SHAL

As a meditator, I use shawls in my daily practices both to keep me warm and to signify to the body and mind that it is time for meditation. Occasionally I also wear them in winter as a warm and decorative article of clothing. One of the first shawls I came to own is of plain white wool, bought in the village of Ganeshpuri whilst staying at Gurudev Siddha Peeth in India.<sup>198</sup> I have a range of other shawls that were given to me by friends and family. The shawl is probably one of the earliest and simplest garments known to humanity; various versions of it existed in most cultures. The ‘tallis’, a plain white shawl worn by Jews for worship, is thought to be forerunner of the ‘stole’ that Christian clergy wear. While ‘tallis’ is the Hebrew word for prayer shawl, the word ‘shawl’ itself is derived from the Persian ‘shal’, which originally denoted a class of woven fabric rather than a particular item of dress.<sup>199</sup> The shawl is another example of uncut cloth, ie a garment woven and worn as a single piece of cloth, which was an important symbol of totality and the wholeness of the manifest world in Vedic times. Untailored clothes were favoured by Hindus as they felt that cloth cut and pierced by needles was impure. Shawls are also important to Buddhists as Buddha is said to have been wearing a patchwork shawl when he received enlightenment.<sup>200</sup>

In the works Woven Mantra Shawl 1 & 2, (see slides 1 – 4) I was looking at the two aspects of the shawl, namely the meditative spiritual aspect, and the worldly/ historical aspect; the shawl as a high fashion garment. The colour of the fabric of these two shawls, roughly white and grey, also had an unintended historical relationship to early shawl manufacture.<sup>201</sup> In Woven Mantra Shawl 1, I wanted to create a very pure ethereal feeling whilst still retaining the raw effect of a simple unrefined cloth such as canvas. The canvas is a fairly lightweight soft bodied one that frayed readily as I was cutting and re-weaving it, thus imbuing it with a sense of fragility. The shawl is easily rolled and transported somewhat like a personal prayer mat. The painted gold script on the shawl is the Sanskrit mantra *om namah shivaya*, a

---

<sup>198</sup> This is the mother ashram of Siddha Yoga in India and is situated about two hours drive outside Bombay in the state of Maharashtra.

<sup>199</sup> Irwin, John. The Kashmir Shawl. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1973, p.1.

<sup>200</sup> See chapter two, p. 47.

<sup>201</sup> The shawl wool came from a Tibetan mountain goat and in its original state was a dark grey colour – it was then bleached white with rice flour and dyed as desired. Gupta, S.P, ed. Costumes, Textiles, Cosmetics and Coiffure in Ancient and Mediaeval India. Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1973, p.241.

protective mantra and one that is personally significant as I use it daily for meditation and japa.<sup>202</sup> The mantra was painted onto sheets of canvas which were then cut into strips and rewoven to recreate the original shawl width and length. The repetitive actions in the visual appearance and physical creation of this piece echo the oral and mental repetition of the syllables of the mantra. In both shawls the lines of mantra text have been further dissected and rewoven to create a kind of overall graphic textual pattern; a method of constructing, deconstructing and then reconstructing. I also wanted to achieve a veiled effect which relates to the fact that mantras were, and are, often secret and passed directly from a guru to disciple. They were shrouded in mystery as was the actual process of transmission, The shawl wraps around one as a garment of warmth and functions as a portable personal temple or meditation cave; the fact that it is imprinted with mantras provides even greater protection.

The text on the adjoining small canvas, a laser copy transferred onto the fabric using a heat process, is a text book description of the nineteenth century Kashmir shawl industry and its Scottish and French counterparts.<sup>203</sup> (See slide 2) There is much debate about the origin of the motif we refer to as 'paisley' which is an Indian or possibly Persian motif known as 'buta', and the passage of text reproduced on the canvas discusses this.

“As remarked by Irwin discussion about Kashmir patterns suffer too much from the alleged symbolism and antiquity of the Kashmir cone. He is of the opinion that the *buta* or cone whose direct ancestry is traceable in the Persian Safawi patterns of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was introduced in Kashmir in the same century. He derives the Kashmir cone from two Safawi motifs namely – (1) the combination of a cypress with a flowering almond tree, with a gradual tendency in the 17<sup>th</sup> century for the cypress and almond trees to merge into a common outline, and (2) flowering shrubs and vase-and-flower motif so common in Persia of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as a fusion of these two Safawid motifs...

Unfortunately, the absence of material, literary and otherwise makes the problem of the history of shawl patterns of Kashmir a difficult one. As we have already pointed out, according to Srivara floral meander was a common motif of the silk weavers of Kashmir... In Jahangir's time only two patterns *nahrma* or wavy lines and *puhup* or flower are mentioned. Stripes also seem to have been a common motif...”<sup>204</sup>

Surrounding this passage of text on the canvas I embroidered simple three coloured versions of the motifs discussed: buta (paisley), stripes and wavy lines.

Woven Mantra Shawl 2 is constructed from raw Belgian linen with painted mantra text in a red/brown; the mantra again is *om namah shivaya*. This grade of Belgian linen is a grey/beige

---

<sup>202</sup> See chapter one, p. 21 for further discussion of this mantra.

<sup>203</sup> Paisley is a Scottish weaving town which became the British centre of the shawl industry reproducing Kashmir shawls. Hence the name 'paisley' which refers to the common shawl motif.

<sup>204</sup> Gupta, S.P.(ed) op.cit. p.246.

colour and the reddish brown script refers to kum kum, a similarly coloured powder used in a variety of ways in religious rituals in India and other parts of Asia. Kum kum can be smeared on the body and clothing, given as an offering or used to create small ground paintings.<sup>205</sup> The lines of mantra text, through being cut up and rewoven so that the text becomes largely unreadable, serves to embed the mantra in the body of the work or the structure of the cloth. I found that while I was painting the mantra text, the level of concentration and absorption needed to carry out the task and to avoid a misspelling, led me into a state of meditative stillness. The shawl then became imbued with my mental state, as the artist creating the work, that of inner focus or one pointedness.<sup>206</sup>

This shawl has a more roughly hewn quality than the white and gold of Woven Mantra Shawl 1 and the richly coloured canvases of Twenty Shawl Images. The body of this fabric, unbleached linen, is much sturdier and has a distinctly earthy smell. The frayed hemline is tied into net-like groups of knotted fringing as is often done on shawls, saris and other Indian textiles, a common method of finishing off rarely seen on western textiles. The small stretched canvas hanging to the right of the long shawl is composed of text and an image. (See slide 4) The black and white image is a photocopy from a 1950s Australian dressmaking book of a piece of table linen with 'drawn thread work' and knotted fringing. This knotted fringing echoes that at the bottom of the adjoining shawl. The two passages of text selected describe the manufacturing techniques and are a revealing account of some of the more paternalistic aspects of British colonialism and the appropriation of textile designs from the east.

"In its country of origin, Cashmere, the shawl was a gift of princes in return for the offerings of their vassals; the word shawl means gift. Cashmere shawls were made of the finest, most delicate wool in the entire world – that of the Tibetan goat. The method of forming it into complicated patterns by a combination of needle and loom work remained the secret of a few native families. The production of a pair of shawls – two identical shawls were always made together – took several years...

In Europe, methods of production on hand-loom were invented in Lyons, Rheims, Norwich, Bradford and Huddersfield, but only the factory at Paisley near Glasgow came close to the quality of the originals. Queen Victoria lent the Paisley mill her shawls as patterns. Under the Treaty of Lahore, 9 March 1846, by which Cashmere was ceded to Britain, the Maharajah Gholab Singh as tributary sovereign sent Queen Victoria an annual tribute of one horse, twelve shawl goats, and three pairs of shawls."<sup>207</sup>

---

<sup>205</sup> Kum kum and red coloured powder is used extensively during the spring festival of 'Holi' when people throw it over each other as a form of blessing.

<sup>206</sup> 'One pointedness' is a term commonly used in a number of meditation disciplines to describe the meditative state.

<sup>207</sup> Gernsheim, A. Victorian and Edwardian Fashion – A Photographic Survey. New York: Dover, 1981, p.30.

Shawl Diagram Panels and Prayer Mats (see slide 5) comprises seven small paired pieces, painted wooden panels with woven cotton mats hanging directly below. The painted panels are black and white textbook-like diagrams of shawl motifs and border designs, with the original Urdu names and English explanation painted below.<sup>208</sup> The woven mats are slightly larger than the panels and are made of a fine white open-weave cotton with mantra text screenprinted in gold. These mats preceded the long woven shawls and are constructed in much the same way: printed on, cut into strips, and rewoven to form the square mat - each individual mat is slightly different. They were pinned directly onto the gallery wall by the top corners and would flutter gently with any passing draughts reminiscent of Hindu and Buddhist prayer flags. The mats are designed to be read in a number of ways, as a votive offering, an object for contemplation such as a mandala or yantra or as a miniature prayer flag or mat.

Following the exhibition of *Shal* in 1996 I commenced more extensive research into yantras, rangolis and Indian textiles and this led into the next body of thesis artworks – *Images of Meditation*. In the transition phase, I made a series of small works which were the linking point between the earlier *Shal* body of work and the larger constructions which were to follow. Two of these works, Seed Mantra and Hand, clearly have their roots in the various series which comprised *Shal*. (see slides 6 and 7) The ground is woven strips of Belgian linen with an English script version of the ‘Kali Durga’ mantra painted onto it in a similar manner to the method of construction of Woven Mantra Shawl 1 & 2. Seed Mantra also has a Kali bhija, or seed mantra, overlaying the gold text in a red Devanagri script.<sup>209</sup> Hand has a stencilled hand print overlaying the woven gold mantra, and was the first use of the hand to represent the mark of the goddess in the thesis works. In fact both of these works are significant in that they are the first ones to consciously address the feminine principle through the use of goddess mantras devoted to Kali and Durga.

---

<sup>208</sup> These were reproduced from a glossary of terms used in Kashmir shawl weaving included in J. Irwin’s book The Kashmir Shawl.

<sup>209</sup> Devanagri is the name of the most commonly used Indian script. In some legends the goddess Saraswati is credited with having invented it. Bhijas, or seed mantras, are discussed in chapter one, page 19.

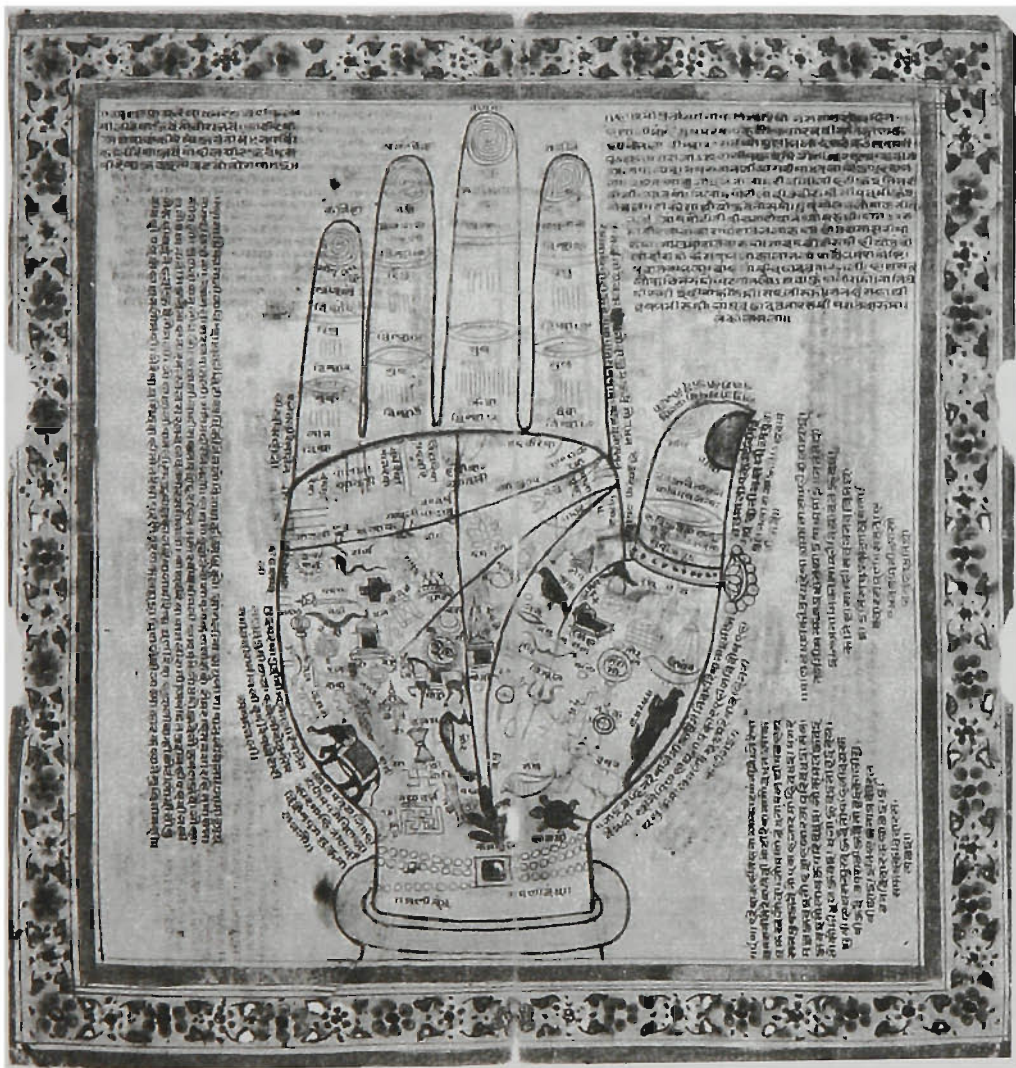


Fig. 12

**Hastakara Yantra.** Rajasthan, c. 18<sup>th</sup> century, gouache on paper

The auspicious signs on the palms indicate the integral relation between interplanetary rhythms and the human organism.





## IMAGES OF MEDITATION

1997 marked the beginning of a period of renewed vigour in spiritual and creative activity largely as a result of the meditation tour of Swami Chidvilasananda who visited Australia at that time.<sup>210</sup> A number of the thesis artworks are direct expressions of visions experienced during that period of intense focus, and later works also had their genesis during this time.

Three of these works are Kali Flower, Shiva Star and Mantra Spiral (see slides 8, 9 and 10) which signalled a move away from the earthy tones of the earlier work to bright colour. I rarely work with anything other than bright colour so the earthy tones were a somewhat unusual choice for me. In addition to this I had recently discovered a local Greek embroidery shop which stocked an extensive range of threads including stranded rayon in a variety of glittering shades of gold. The ready access to this source of supply undoubtedly affected the work. Initially these works were simply the stretched canvas embroideries, without the padded pieces below, a later development when I began to pad many of the works. These works also grew out of the *Shal* body of work where I utilised the techniques of laser transfer in order to put mantra text onto canvas without actually painting all the letters manually. This method also enabled me to have very fine typewriter like script that was reminiscent of the less sophisticated printing presses of India and Indian philosophical publications. The types of embroidery stitches used are satin stitch and chain stitch which refer directly to the stitch types on Indian shawls and other embroidered textiles such as Ganesh Stapanas<sup>211</sup> discussed in chapter three (see fig. 9). Two such Ganesh Stapanas, which I bought whilst visiting India in 1988, hang on my bedroom walls and are often my first sight upon waking.

Three significant works entitled Warm Chakras 1 & 2 and Installing the Mantra (see slides 11, 12 and fig.13) arose from experiences in a guided meditation with Swami Chidvilasanda during a Meditation Intensive held in Melbourne in February 1997.<sup>212</sup> In this, we were led through a lengthy and detailed exercise of installing the mantra, *om namah shivaya*, in all the various parts of the body. As we approached the area of the arms and hands I felt a strong sensation of heat and energy in the palms of my hands. I had experienced this sensation on

---

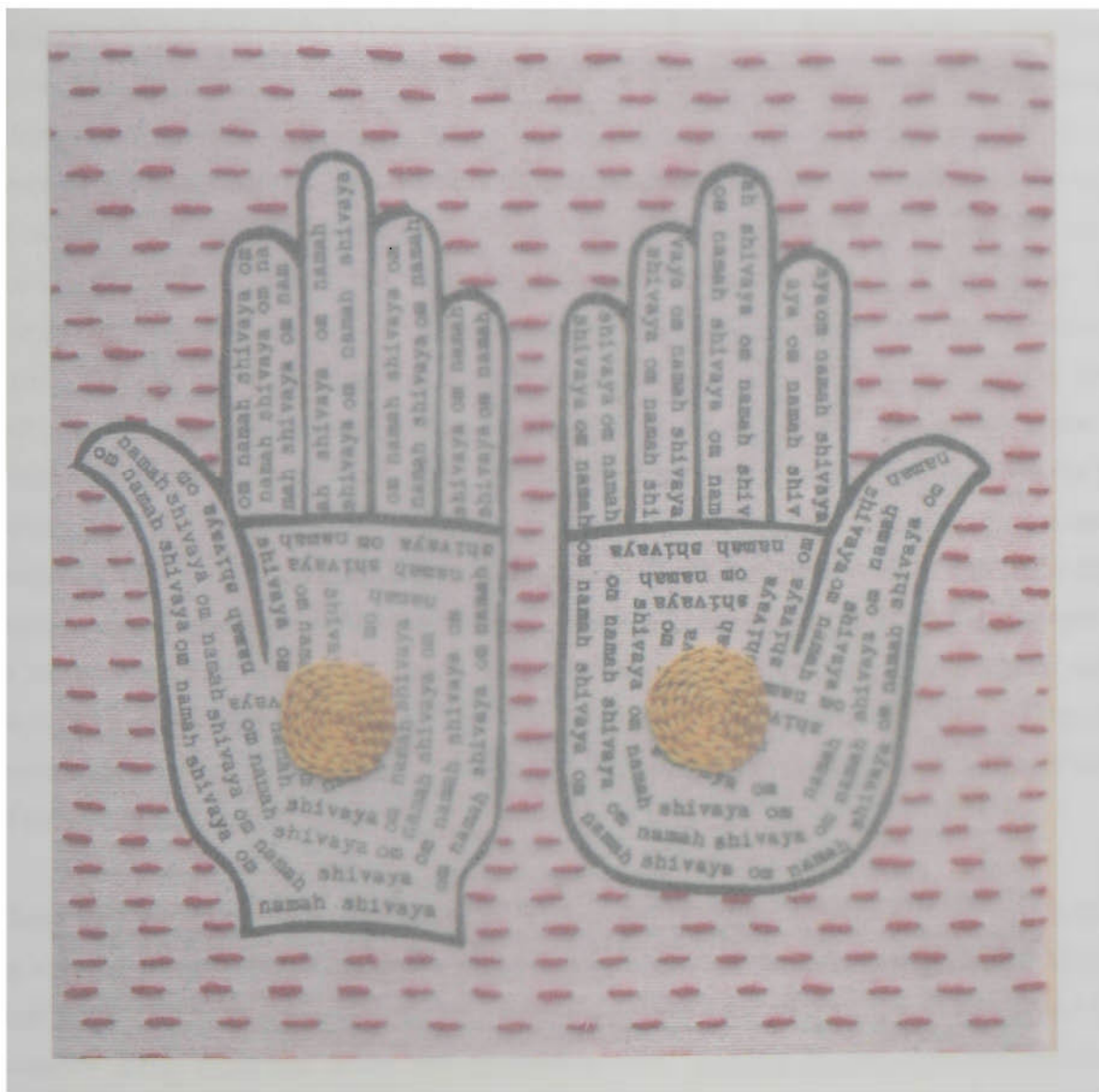
<sup>210</sup> Swami Chidvilasananda, or Gurumayi, is the spiritual head of the Siddha Yoga lineage and my meditation teacher. She conducted a meditation tour of Australia and New Zealand during February and March of 1997. I attended programs and Intensives in Melbourne and Sydney.

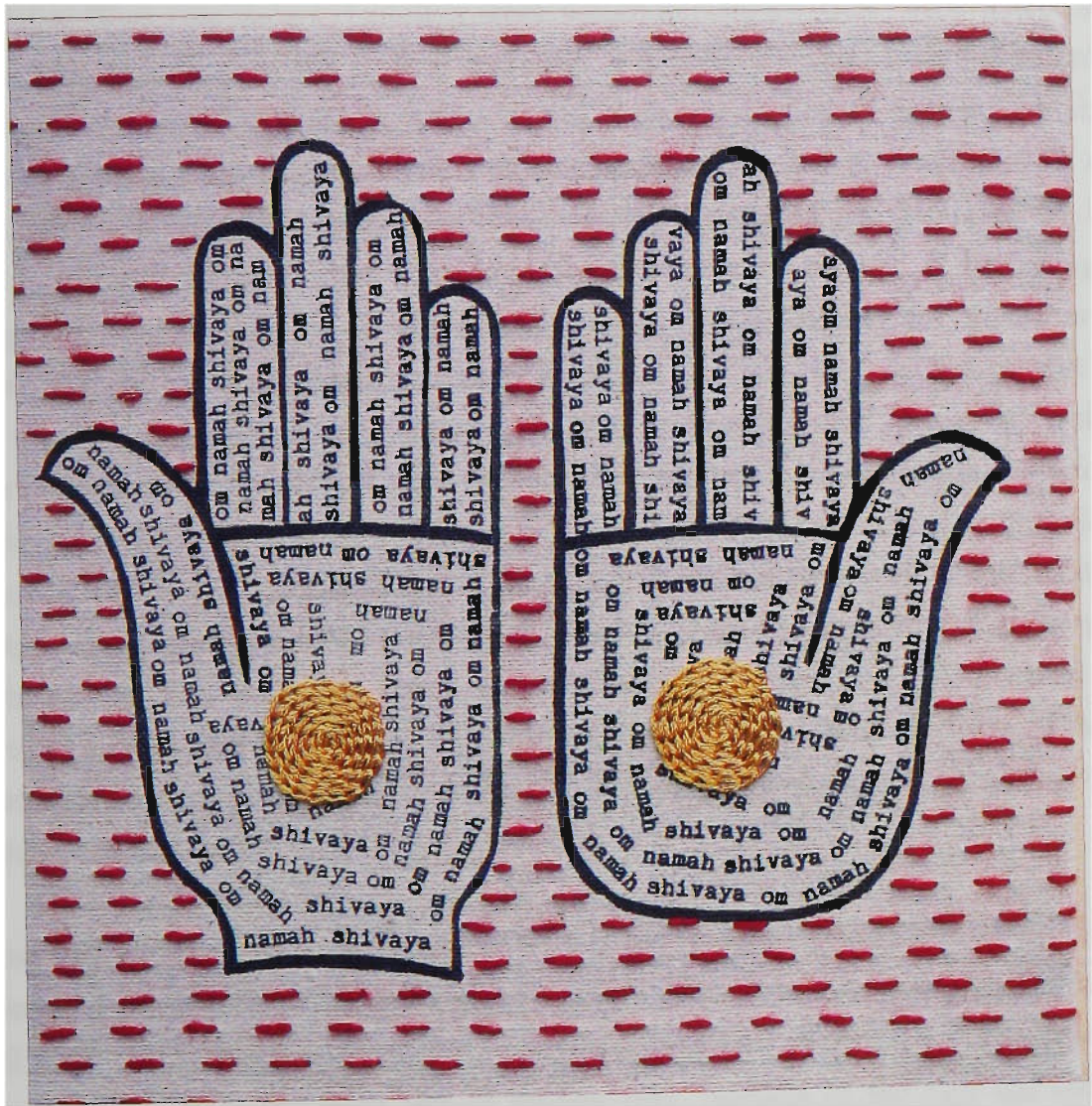
<sup>211</sup> These are an embroidered wall hanging often hung above doorways welcoming the elephant headed god Ganesh into the house to bless the occupants with good fortune.

<sup>212</sup> The Intensive is a two day event devoted to intense meditation and spiritual practice which was developed by Swami Muktananda, of the Siddha Yoga lineage, in the 1970s.

Fig. 13

Installing the Mantra. Carole Wilson, 1997, laser transfer on canvas, embroidery





occasions previously – only in the presence of a Siddha guru.<sup>213</sup> These sensations and visions of glowing red heat in the palm chakras of the hands were expressed in the three works with the mantra flowing in, around, behind and through the hands. The open palmed hand held upright with palm facing outward is known as the ‘abhaya mudra’, or mudra bestowing fearlessness and protection.<sup>214</sup> Deities are often depicted with one of their hands in this gesture. Two of the other most commonly depicted mudras are the meditation ‘chin mudra’, with the tips of the thumb and index fingers touching to form a circle, and ‘varada mudra’, the open faced palm pointing downwards bestowing boons or grace.

Kundalini Blue, (see slide 13) another work which depicts a vision I experienced at that time, signals the beginning of the padded surfaces. In Kundalini Blue, I wanted to create a three dimensional snake-like coil that had a certain softness but could also hold a shape. Many years ago, when I had first established a daily meditation practice, I experienced, on a couple of occasions, a soft white snake-like form moving up around my neck and the back of my head – fleeting and fast. This is a classical meditation experience of the rising Kundalini energy. It was the quality of this soft shape that I was aiming for in the artwork. The cushioning and padding also solved some technical problems such as how to give a relatively soft fabric a sense of solidity without stretching it over a frame. The seven white cushions with pink stencilled hands and gold embroidered flowers I considered as seats for the seven deities who reside in each of the seven main chakras,<sup>215</sup> as well as being reminiscent of the cushions we sit on for meditation. As discussed in chapter two, each of the main chakras, or energy centres are commonly depicted as lotuses. These are situated along the spinal region in the subtle body and each has a resident deity, an associated colour, seed mantra and physical quality. The gold embroidered flowers refer to the lotus depictions of the chakras in eastern art, and the pink hands represent the imprint of Kundalini as she passes through each of the seven chakras.<sup>216</sup>

These earlier works, with the exception of Kundalini Blue, all rely heavily on mantra text as an integral component of the work. By the time I commenced work on the two larger padded wall installations, Aspects of the Self and Blue Pearl (see slides 14 and 16), I was beginning to move away from the overt use of mantra text. Aspects of the Self has reduced use of mantra and Blue Pearl has none at all. At this stage I was beginning to feel that the literal use

---

<sup>213</sup> This kind of physical energy is acknowledged by the scriptures and is referred to as Shakti, or the power of Shakti which is the universal female creative energy, also a goddess.

<sup>214</sup> Mudras are sacred hand and finger gestures which may be either performed spontaneously during meditation or adopted as gestures during particular practices.

<sup>215</sup> See chapter one, p. 28 for discussion.

<sup>216</sup> The chakras are depicted as lotuses in both Hindu and Buddhist art and scriptural texts.

of mantra text in the work was not essential to convey the sense of meditation or quietness within, and I was wary of becoming habitual in the artwork. I continued to use mantras in some of the books, which were being produced at about the same time, but in a less overt way.

Blue Pearl and Aspects of the Self took the textile wall installation format, that I had begun exploring with Kundalini Blue, to a new level. The work now expanded up and across the wall and comprised many smaller pieces; the wall itself now became part of the work. The studio I was working in at the time, a room in my house, had blue/green walls and this colour, or a derivation of it, became an integral part of Aspects of the Self. Both of these works are made up of an assortment of padded, painted and stitched shapes – flowers, stars, triangles and circles, all of which occur in yantras and ground paintings. These two works speak about the deeper states of meditation and are my attempt to express some of the feelings, glimmers and fleeting sensations experienced therein. The white soft shapes of Aspects of the Self describe the various shaped thought forms which float across the blue field of the mind whilst in the meditative state.

The ovoid configuration of the forty flowers in Blue Pearl (see slides 16 and 17) attempts to describe the blue pearl I have glimpsed in meditation.<sup>217</sup> Each of the flowers is a slightly different shape, thickness and colour, with varying patterns of surface stitching. The colour blue I have seen in meditation is difficult to reproduce using paints and canvas as it is a shimmering concentration of particles of light. Unprimed canvas painted with acrylic paints has a certain flat quality that approximates suede or velvet, but the stranded cotton surface embroidery is shiny and captures the light. The overall effect of the total installation, including all the various blue, mauve and aqua flowers, does depict the glimmering blue circular shapes I have seen in meditation.

## IMAGES OF OFFERING

As discussed earlier in the exegesis, offering, in the eastern sense, is a concept that is somewhat challenging for me as a westerner.<sup>218</sup> Nevertheless, it is an integral part of my spiritual practice and the methodology of this thesis. In constructing these works, I considered each finished piece as an offering and the process itself as another form of offering. In this way, each stitch becomes an offering, one stitch is offered and connected to the next, just as each repetition of the mantra is offered and connected to the next in an ongoing cycle. Mantra

---

<sup>217</sup> Meditative visions of the blue pearl is discussed in chapter one, p. 29 – 32.

<sup>218</sup> See chapter two, p. 33.

is also connected with the breath; the incoming breath is offered to the outgoing breath which is then offered again to the incoming breath, and so on.

The other three large wall installations, Votive Site 1, Votive Site 2, and Three Hands, which were produced during 1997, 1998 and 1999, are *Images of Offering*. In addition to these larger works are a number of smaller works which also comprise *Images of Offering*. Votive Site 1, the padded white flower and nine spirals, actually addresses the two areas of meditation and offering.

I began constructing the white flower earlier in the research, around the time I was working on Kundalini Blue, and the same sensation of the soft white Kundalini snake form is evident in this work, both in the actual flower and in the white surrounding spirals. The flower has seven petals which refer, once again, to the various sevens, or 'saptahs'. These include the seven chakras along the sushumna nadi,<sup>219</sup> the central channel in the subtle body through which the Kundalini energy travels upward during meditation and the Saptah Matrikas, or the seven mothers, a distinct group of goddesses who appear throughout the subcontinent under various names and guises. The number of spirals around the flower is nine, rather than seven, and this relates to 'Navaratri', or 'Nine Nights of the Goddess', a festival held in various parts of India during September when a different aspect of the goddess is honoured on each night. As the title suggests, Votive Site 1 is in fact a site for offerings, a place to attach the metallic shapes and fragments of cloth as offerings to the gods, just as women tie pieces of cloth into the branches of trees all over India to signify offerings to Krishna.<sup>220</sup> The fragments of cloth are pieces of laser transfer shawl from the earlier *Shal* series and the thin brass 'shim' is also reminiscent of the small metallic discs attached to the borders of clothing and head scarves worn by tribal women, particularly in Rajasthan. (See slide19)

I also produced a series of smaller stretched canvases entitled Moon Works (see slides 20 and 21) at the same time as Votive Site 1. These works employ similar materials, the same laser transferred fragments of black and green shawl, metallic surfaces, canvas and black embroidery thread. The gold and silver surfaces are Chinese joss paper, rather than brass, and I have also used black crystal beads. These works take, as their starting point, the 'Nitya Shaktis'- the sixteen lunar goddesses and are a further extrapolation of the shapes and symbols in yantras. The metallic surface of the silver joss paper has a particular cool glow which I associate with the moon.

---

<sup>219</sup> See chapter one, p. 27 – 29 for discussion of chakras, the sushumna nadi and the subtle body.

<sup>220</sup> See chapters two and three for further discussion of the various practices of cloth used as offerings.



Votive Site 2, or ‘Names of the Goddess’ (see slides 22 and 23), as I tend to think of it, is a work about offering and naming. Naming is a significant concept in Indian philosophy as the ‘Names of God’ also function as mantras. When these names are chanted correctly, the vibrations caused in the subtle body can awaken the Kundalini energy.<sup>221</sup>

I have chosen seven names of various aspects of the goddess, or seven goddesses here. They are Devi, Shakti, Kali, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kundalini and Durga and the names are arranged down the wall vertically. Of the thousands of goddesses I could have selected, I have chosen seven with whom I am more familiar and with whom westerners in general are more likely to be familiar. The individual letters are, however, movable and interchangeable and can be reassembled to spell out the names of other goddesses, as in the accompanying artist’s books where the pages spell out the names of two goddesses associated with food, ‘Sakambhari’ and ‘Annapurna’. These two names have also been exhibited as a separate work entitled Food Goddesses.<sup>222</sup> In this sense the work is like an artist’s game of scrabble whilst also commenting on the goddess’s associations with letters, speech and writing. Kundalini, in a hymn to her, is described as,

“She is of the form of the letters”<sup>223</sup>

and one of the early Vedic mother goddesses, Vac, whose name means speech, is the cornerpost of ritual speech and order. Kali wears a necklace of fifty, or fifty one, human heads which is referred to in the scriptures as the ‘Garland of Letters’ or ‘Varnamala’, and each head represents a letter of the Sanskrit alphabet.<sup>224</sup> Saraswati is the patron of writing, music and the arts and is commonly depicted holding a book in one of her four hands whilst strumming a veena, a stringed instrument, with her other two hands. The fourth hand is usually holding prayer beads, a conch or a lotus.

In my choice of embellishment - beads, buttons and silk flowers, I wanted to convey a sense of the lavishness and abundance of floral offerings that are seen in shrines and temples. In addition to this, I was commenting on the colourful exuberance of the clothed and bejewelled

---

<sup>221</sup> See chapter one, p. 19.

<sup>222</sup> This work was exhibited in the group show entitled Origin, Birth, Deliverance as part of the Melbourne Midsumma Festival early in 2000.

<sup>223</sup> Siddha Meditation Ashrams, The Nectar of Chanting. South Fallsburg: SYDA Foundation, 1984, p.169.

<sup>224</sup> Woodroffe, J.G. The Garland of Letters: Studies in the Mantra-Sastra. Madras: Ganesh & Co. (5<sup>th</sup> ed) 1969, p.264.

murtis, or religious statuary, during holy days and festivals.<sup>225</sup> Johnson speaks of the goddess's sacred necklace in ancient cultures<sup>226</sup> and the significance of Kali's necklace has been discussed above. Dubin, who draws our attention to the symbolic associations frequently made between flowers, gardens and prayer beads in a number of religions and cultures, states that the Sanskrit word 'mala' means 'garden', 'garland of flowers' and necklace of beads'.<sup>227</sup> A variety of seeds, woods and gemstones are used to make japa malas associated with particular deities in India.<sup>228</sup> I have also used shell buttons from my grandmother's button collection in reference to the many uses of shells in Indian art and culture. Conch shells are particularly significant in both Hindu and Buddhist art, they are usually one of the items held in the many arms of the deities, and represent the primal vibration of the universe. Conch shells are still commonly blown in temples and ashrams to announce the commencement of morning and evening arati, or worship.

Some of the surface decoration relates to the specific goddesses named. The shade of pink of the flowers sewn onto Lakshmi's name is a colour that I associate with this particular goddess. I suspect this association comes from the images of popular culture: the posters, calendars and paintings on trucks. Undoubtedly it also comes from the lurid colours that are often painted onto statuary, houses and temples in India – pinks, blues, lilacs and turquoises. The dressmaker's pins used to decorate Kali's name refer to the goddess's warrior aspect and her weapons.

A smaller work, Daily Meditations (see slide 26), comprises eighteen small wall offerings that link with the eighteen books of the Puranas which retell the legends of the goddesses.<sup>229</sup> The small pieces of Belgian linen are embellished with similar materials: buttons, haberdashery items and artificial flowers. I saw this work as an expanded book, with each of the individual pieces suggesting a page for reading and contemplation. I also considered this work to have connections to patchwork quilting, with each piece telling a story, or as an early patchwork quilter has said,

---

<sup>225</sup> The clothing of murtis – enlivened images, has been discussed in chapter two, p. 46.

<sup>226</sup> Johnson, B. op.cit. p.128.

<sup>227</sup> Dubin, L. S. op.cit. p.31.

<sup>228</sup> See chapters one and two for further discussion of japa malas.

<sup>229</sup> The Puranas, which were written over a period of time from the third to the thirteenth centuries after the Vedas and the Upanishads, consist of eighteen sacred books containing stories, legends and hymns. In the Puranas, deities from the earlier religious texts and the Epics were linked and presented in a greater sense of order.

“Life is like a patchwork quilt  
And each little patch is a day,  
Some patches are rosy, happy and bright,  
And some are dark and grey.”<sup>230</sup>

I commenced this work in March 1999, and initially I sewed a piece each day as an offering to, and a record of the exegesis writing process at that time. Some of the buttons are from my own collection and some were given to me. All of them do, however, seem familiar and suggestive of the era of my childhood. This work now exists in two formats, both as Daily Meditations discussed above and as an artist’s book entitled Book 11 – Prosperity and Abundance. (See slide 36) A number of the buttoned linen pieces were used as the foundation for the book pages over which I have printed the verses of an invocation to the goddess Lakshmi. This invocation is entitled the Shri Mahalakshmyastakam and is sung daily in homes and ashrams. Lakshmi, whilst a goddess of spiritual and material abundance, is also very much associated with the home and domesticity.<sup>231</sup> Domestic arrangements were a significant aspect of my life at that time as I had relocated from Melbourne to the country and was in the process of establishing a new home and studio.<sup>232</sup>

Three Hands (see slides 24 and 25), the final of the larger padded installation works, brings together a number of concerns in my research to date. These are continual repetition of the mantra – japa, offering to the goddess, and contemplative meditation. The pink pearls on the circular padded forms echo the repetition of a mantra using a japa mala; repetition being a circular and cyclic process leading one ultimately to the central point of the Inner Self or Atman. The triangular padded forms with the pink flowers speak of the goddess and the female form. The downward pointed triangle, or yoni, is considered female and symbolises the ‘ghata’, the overflowing water pot of plenty, a symbol of the earth from which all life emerges.<sup>233</sup> The attached flowers refer to the tradition of offering fresh flowers both at the feet of the deity and by garlanding.

The hand imagery, whilst primarily signifying the abhaya mudra and the bestowal of protection and fearlessness, may also be read as signifying my presence in the work as the hands that paint and sew. The open palmed hand is a significant icon in Islam as ‘The Hand

---

<sup>230</sup> Colloquial saying attributed to Elizabeth Decoursey Ryan, an early American quilter.

<sup>231</sup> See chapter two for further discussion of Lakshmi and her associations.

<sup>232</sup> This was a major change as we had moved from the inner city to dense bush to live in our tiny mud brick holiday cottage devoid of electricity, plumbing and other home comforts. We had built this cottage ourselves over a number of years and whilst living there through the period of this research I was quite conscious of the associations with the mud houses of village India. Coincidentally, the colour of the Belgian linen is almost identical to the colour of our mud bricks.

<sup>233</sup> Jayakar, P. op.cit. p.174.

of Fatima' which is usually depicted with two outwardly turning thumbs, one on either side of the palm, and three upright fingers in between. In the centre of the palm is often a stylised vertical eye.

“The hand is a popular motif in Islamic art and often represents the hand of Fatima, daughter of the prophet Mohammed. The five fingers of the hand symbolise the Five Pillars of Islam while also referring to the five daily prayers... The white eye painted on the hand bore deep significance and the plate was an amulet meant to protect the owners and their possessions against the evil eye.”<sup>234</sup>

The hand, as an icon of significance in eastern symbology (see fig. 12), has some connection with the next series of works, the artist's books. These works, which are all quite small, fit comfortably in the hands and are designed to be handled. The works in the *Images of Offering* series inspired, and are supported by, the artist's books in *Images of Contemplation*. In many instances they were worked upon concurrently and stylistic innovations and developments fed back and forth between the various works. The stitch flowed quite naturally from the three dimensional textile object to the pages of the books.

## IMAGES OF CONTEMPLATION

The artist's books I have produced as part of this research draw upon the traditions of prayer and chanting books from the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain cultures. India has a long and rich tradition of bookmaking dating back to the fourth century BC. It has been suggested that the fragile palm leaf and paper manuscripts, due to their small scale and portable nature, have better survived the ravages of iconoclasm, shifts in religious affiliations, neglect and climatic forces than have more permanent artforms such as murals.<sup>235</sup> Book pages and manuscripts were made from a variety of plant fibres in ancient India, the most usual being birch bark, aloe bark and palm leaf. Other materials such as copper, gold and beaten cloths including linen, cotton and silk were also used.<sup>236</sup> Paper did not become prominent until the fourteenth century and The National Gallery of Australia holds a number of exquisite examples of surviving paper pages from a Jain manuscript dating back to that time.

---

<sup>234</sup> Terlouw, W. J. The Hand of Fatima – Moroccan Ceramics. Leeuwarden: The National Museum of Ceramics, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands, 1996, p.55.

<sup>235</sup> Guy, J. Palm-leaf and Paper: Illustrated Manuscripts of India and Southeast Asia. Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1982, p.9.

<sup>236</sup> Losty, J. P. The Art of the Book in India. London: The British Library, 1982, p.9.

Coburn presents evidence that bookmaking was viewed as a devotional act in association with the Goddess; the *Devi Purana* provides detailed instructions for the physical constitution of a manuscript, and the *Nilamata Purana* even declares that books should be worshipped in the temple of Durga. .<sup>237</sup>

“The Prajnaparamita (Perfection of Wisdom) text was so revered that not only was the manuscript itself the object of worship but the essence of the text was personified in a goddess of the same name, through whom devotion could be directed.”<sup>238</sup>

Prior to this the oral/aural Vedic tradition of performing ritual and worship was of paramount importance. Writing was seen as unnecessary and even blasphemous until the Buddhist and Jain religions gained prominence. It is believed that around the fifth century AD a Jain council decreed that the scriptures should be written down to ensure their survival during a severe famine which threatened the continuity of the oral tradition.<sup>239</sup>

The wooden covers of early manuscripts bear witness to the fact that the book itself became an object of worship. The painted surfaces often became totally obscured over centuries of ritual worship by the daubing of sandalwood paste, oil and milk.<sup>240</sup> This practice, of anointing with aromatic sandalwood paste, kum kum and washing with oil, ghee and milk (known as abhishek) is also performed on murtis, or enlivened statues of deities, as either a daily or special event.<sup>241</sup> Photographs and painted images might also be daubed with coloured powder in the region of the third eye.

The protective tradition of wrapping with textiles was also applied to religious manuscripts. Losty documents books covered with skins which were then wrapped in cotton cloth dyed with an arsenic solution to repel moths and insects and finally housed in a wooden box.<sup>242</sup> This custom of treating the written text as a manifestation of the deity is still prevalent today and holy books in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions are usually wrapped in a protective cloth covering. My personal chanting book is covered with a close fitting silk sleeve which then slides into a cotton brocade pouch.

---

<sup>237</sup> Coburn, T. Encountering the Goddess: a Translation of the Devi-Mahatmya and a Study of its Interpretation. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991, pp.103 –104.

<sup>238</sup> Guy, J. op.cit. p.11.

<sup>239</sup> ibid. p.22.

<sup>240</sup> ibid. p.19.

<sup>241</sup> Abhishek, or ritual bathing is also performed on live beings. I have been present at a special ceremony where Swami Chidvilasananda's feet were bathed and anointed with fragrant flowers by a Brahmin priest.

<sup>242</sup> Losty, J. op.cit. pp. 11-13.

Over the period of the research I have made eleven artist's books and although I have suggested that they perhaps have more in common with an eastern prayer book or book of invocations, they are nevertheless artist's books. Gary Catalano, in his study of artist's books makes some interesting points which apply to my work. He suggests that artist's books could be seen to hover ambiguously at the conjunction of two systems, one visual and the other verbal.

“For as well as arranging its material in a temporal order, the book also meets its reader as an equal. Whereas a film or play unfolds its acts or scenes in a single sitting and admits to no alteration, a book allows its readers to experience the work in their own good time.”<sup>243</sup>

The features Catalano is referring to are the hand held and intimate nature of the book as well as the reader's ability to flick back and forth at will. The artist's books I have produced are all quite small and are able to be easily held in the hands whilst turning the pages. The viewer is able to be intimately involved in the somewhat private experience of perusing and page turning. A number of the books have canvas pages, both stitched and printed, and are thus reasonably durable for frequent use. Most of the books contain printed mantras and repeated imagery. Book 6 – Blue Pearl (see slide 32) contains no mantras as such, but is composed entirely of varying images of blue flowers which are the individual components of the wall installation Blue Pearl, the artwork describing the deeper states of meditation.

The books involve a variety of techniques which include: stitched canvas, collographs printed onto both paper and canvas, laser prints on paper and laser transfers onto canvas. All of the books include actual stitching or document images of stitched cloth. Some I have bound myself with soft covers and those that were professionally bound have been stitched by the bookbinder. The imagery is closely linked to the installation works and in some cases particular pieces are reproduced as book pages. Some of the books, such as Book 6 - Blue Pearl and Book 7 - Aspects of the Self, are accompanying works and document three dimensional textile components of the installations in a two dimensional form. Other books, such as Book 1 - Mantra (see slide 27), contain pages that document a partially complete embroidery – a work in progress. One work, Book 2 – Stitch (see slide 28), records the stitched canvas collograph plates, in their uninked form, used to print the pages of another book, Book 3 – Goddesses Paper. (See slide 29)

---

<sup>243</sup> Catalano, G. The Bandaged Image – A Study of Australian Artist's Books. Sydney: Hale and Ironmonger, 1983, p. 84.

The book format provided an ideal opportunity to examine and document the various stages of the textile and printmaking processes that are otherwise unseen by the viewer. In addition to this, each new book tended to evolve from its predecessor resulting in a close relationship between all of the books. For example, Book 2 – Stitch contains images of the reverse side of a stitched piece of cloth and there is a photocopy of a partially inked collograph plate used to print one of the pages for Book 3 – Goddesses - Paper. Partially inked and wiped back printing plates have a certain beauty of their own which is rarely appreciated or available to anyone other than the artist or printer. In fact, producing the artist's books has been one of the most enjoyable phases of the thesis largely due to the element of surprise inherent in the printmaking process. Collography was a new printmaking technique for me and much less predictable than the technique of screenprinting that I was accustomed to. Laser printing and laser transfer also had a measure of unpredictability especially when photocopying three dimensional objects such as the padded blue flowers of the wall installation Blue Pearl. The laser printer would 'read' the padded object as best it could and produce a print complete with unexpected yet beautiful shadowing in various blue tones that looked remarkably like a watercolour painting.

The two miniature cloth works, Book 8 – White Sampler and Book 9 – Red Sampler (see slide 34) are more closely aligned with needlework sampler books and recall such booklets made in primary school sewing classes. These two books have been covered with left over shawl patterns from an earlier work (Twenty Shawl Images) and the simply stitched pages are able to be viewed from the back as you turn each page. The interrelationship of later works to earlier works through the use of left over pieces of cloth is important to me as it mirrors the repetitive and recycling aspects of domestic sewing. The kantha traditions of Bengal where old saris and dhotis are given new life as quilts and coverings, are also brought to mind.<sup>244</sup> Once again, repetition is the key.

Book 5 – Perfection (see slide 31), a book of collographs, uses a set of mantras known loosely as the 'perfection mantras'. These are,

Om purnamadah purnamidam  
Purnat purnamudacyate  
Purnasya purnamadaya  
Purnamevavasisyate  
Om santih santih santih.

---

<sup>244</sup> See chapter three for discussion of kantha traditions in Bengal.

The English translation of these mantras is as follows,

Om. That is perfect. This is perfect. From the perfect springs the perfect. If the perfect is taken from the perfect, the perfect remains.

Om. Peace! Peace! Peace!<sup>245</sup>

These mantras, which have a beautiful rolling sound when chanted, have always appealed to me both in terms of their sound and their inherent meaning. They are often recited at the beginning or end of a longer chant or particular event such as the morning or evening arati, or hatha yoga class.<sup>246</sup> The collograph prints in the book were made using very simply stitched pieces of cloth or scraps of cloth glued onto masonite. These pages are interspersed with the mantra pages of stitched lettering.

Book 2 – Stitch, Book 3 Goddesses – Paper and Book 4 Goddesses – Cloth all include the Kali Durga mantras. These are, ‘Kali Durge Namō Namah’ which mean essentially, ‘Salutations to Kali and Durga, again and again’. Kali and Durga, as discussed extensively in chapters two and three, represent the triumph over adversity, particularly over the negative tendencies of the mind. Each of these books also has a page which is the reverse side of the canvas with the stitched mantra lettering. The appearance of the stitching from the back was uncannily like Indian Devanagari script, even though the mantras were stitched in English script. This had an unintended relationship to the ‘veiled’ nature of some mantras that are cloaked in secrecy. Another unexpected outcome in the production of these works was the very focussed meditative state of mind which was achieved whilst stitching the lettering backwards for the collograph prints. As discussed earlier in *Images of Meditation*, this state of ‘one pointedness’ was also experienced whilst painting the mantra text on the long woven shawls.

Book 10 – Fertility and Food (see slide 35) is related to Votive Site 2 (see slides 22 and 23), one of the *Images of Offering* as it uses a number of the letters to create two other Goddess names – Sakambhari and Annapurna. Sakambhari – she who bestows vegetables, and Annapurna – she who is full of food, are but two of the many goddesses in India associated with food and crops; Lakshmi, Gauri and Kansari are three others. Sakambhari and Annapurna are described in the *Devi Mahatmya*<sup>247</sup> the seven hundred versed invocational text devoted to the goddess Durga.

---

<sup>245</sup> Siddha Meditation Ashrams, The Nectar of Chanting. South Fallsburg: SYDA Foundation, 1984, p.68.

<sup>246</sup> The Purnamadah mantras are chanted in Hatha Yoga classes in both Siddha Yoga centres and ashrams and also Satyananda ashrams. Satyananda is the name of another path of yoga.

<sup>247</sup> See chapters one and two for further discussion of the *Devi Mahatmya*.



“Sakambhari is renowned as ‘the one of a hundred eyes;’ she is ‘Durga’....

Singing hymns to Sakambhari, meditating on her, uttering prayers, doing worship, reverencing her,  
One speedily obtains the unblemished fruit of food, drink, and immortality.”<sup>248</sup>

There is a separate letter on each consecutive page of the book so that the viewer may not be fully aware of the words in their entirety. Instead, each embellished letter is examined as an individual piece which also refers to the goddess – letter – alphabet associations discussed earlier in relation to Votive Site 2. The goddesses Kundalini, Kali, Saraswati and Vac all have associations with speech, writing and the alphabet. Food is a vital ingredient of offering, and food and fertility are perhaps the two most fundamental aspects of life. As such, they are attributed to most of the Indian goddesses, as well as their other more specific functions.

Book 11 – Prosperity and Abundance (see slide 36) also relates to one of the goddesses associated with food and plenitude, Lakshmi.<sup>249</sup> This book contains the Sanskrit verses of the ‘Sri Mahalakshmyastakam’, or ‘Hymn to Mahalakshmi’, which comes from the Puranas and is overprinted onto pages of the buttoned works of Daily Meditations (see slide 26). This hymn comprises twelve verses and the translations of verses 4, 5 and 8 are as follows.

“Bestower of intelligence and success, O goddess, bestower of worldly enjoyment and liberation,  
with the mantra always as your form, goddess Mahalakshmi, obeisance to you.

Without beginning or end, O goddess, primordial energy,  
great mistress born of yoga, Mahalakshmi obeisance to you.

Clad in white apparel, O goddess, bedecked with a variety of jewels, supporter of the universe,  
universal mother, Mahalakshmi, obeisance to you.”<sup>250</sup>

The book pages, which are bedecked with a variety of jewels in the form of pearly beads, buttons and artificial flowers, are attached to each other at both sides of the page and open out in a concertina fashion. This is a style of book which existed in India and is still in common use as a book of divination and magic amongst the Batak peoples of Sumatra.<sup>251</sup> I chose to use this format as the work can be spread out and viewed in a manner similar to the installation

---

<sup>248</sup> Coburn, T. op.cit. p.192.

<sup>249</sup> See chapter two for further discussion of Lakshmi.

<sup>250</sup> Siddha Meditation Ashrams, op.cit. p.188-9.

<sup>251</sup> Guy, J. op.cit. p.82.

format of Daily Meditations. This was the last artist's book that I made and it seemed appropriate to include the invocations to Lakshmi as an expression of gratitude.

## HEART MAT

Heart Mat (see slides 37 and 38) is the final thesis work, completed at a later stage than the other installation pieces and following the completion of the artist's books. It is a multi pieced work on a paper support and is developed from both the artist's books and the two latter installation works Three Hands and Daily Meditations.

Heart Mat represents a breakthrough and a culmination in the thesis works. It brings together many of the concepts, such as mantra repetition, the path of kundalini, offering and contemplation expressed through the earlier works. It also brings together a number of the physical construction techniques and visual design concepts and introduces some new ones. The work comprises forty nine individual sheets of rag paper which have been embellished in a variety of ways using stitching and printmaking methods. The fact that the work is on paper is a significant development from the previous installation works which are all on fabric. The use of paper signifies the merging of the artist's book with the installation, as an art form.

Heart Mat comprises components in multiples of seven, there are seven rows of seven sheets of paper totalling forty nine individual pieces and it is a work designed with two alternative display modes, either laid out on the floor or hung on the wall. Producing this work enabled me to investigate the previously unexplored method of monoprinting. Heart Mat also contains another printmaking method previously unused in the thesis works: screenprinting. While screenprinting is a much practiced and familiar technique to me, monoprinting was completely new territory.

The screenprinted components of the piece are images derived from my maternal grandmother's hand crocheted lace doyleys which I inherited about fifteen years ago. The images are photographic screenprints on tarlatan<sup>252</sup> in shades of pink and blue. These screenprints were actually executed in 1984 when I was a recent art school graduate and formed part of an installation examining the traditional female handicrafts of knitting, crochet and embroidery. I rediscovered these pieces of printed tarlatan recently whilst sorting through my studio and was astonished to find how closely linked they were to current trends in the thesis work. I decided to capitalise on these links and utilise pieces, albeit reworked in the current installation. Once again, the age old textile practice of reusing and recycling

---

<sup>252</sup> Tarlatan is an open weave stiffened cotton previously used in the artist's books.

fragments of fabric and haberdashery has come into play. This can be linked, quite specifically, to Indian textile traditions of kanthas and patchwork shawls.<sup>253</sup> Clearly, my interest in the themes of stitching and traditional women's handiwork has been evident for quite some time and illustrates the point that these themes are a common and ongoing thread in my work. Like a piece of sewing, they can be picked up and begun again many years later.

The doyley shapes, while coming from a western textile tradition, have an unexpected relationship to eastern features of the thesis work: they are mostly circular emanating from a central point in the same way that yantras and rangolis do. The crochet technique of these doyleys commences with a single slip knot which forms the centre and then the body of the doyley is created in a spiralling fashion outward from that central point. Yantras and rangolis are built up in much the same way. The lacy open stitching is also reminiscent of the lacy patterning on the henna hand stencils that have been used extensively in a number of the works, particularly Warm Chakras 1 and Three Hands.

The monoprints represent a certain loosening of technical style and imagery which is a useful counterpoint to the fine and intricate nature of the stitched components. Unlike the previously printed collographic book pages which were produced through a laborious method of plate construction<sup>254</sup>, the monoprinting was a very immediate method of simply rolling ink onto a plate and then painting into it with a finger wrapped in a rag, to create the plate. The immediacy and comparative speed of this method enabled me to capture the spontaneity of the mark and the moment. In addition to these hand painted prints, I was also able to run the plastic henna hand stencils through the press to produce a different type of monoprint. In some prints, three individual hand stencils have been overlaid to create a dark triangular central void. This technique has enabled me to further develop the images presented in the installation work Three Hands (see slides 24 and 25) which comprised separate padded shapes of hands, triangles and circles. The hand itself, as image, and the mark of the hand in the production of the image, are more specifically present in this final work. The monoprints within the work echo the stitched and buttoned components surrounding them. They also refer to the forms in earlier works such as the padded flowers and related shapes of Blue Pearl and Three Hands.

---

<sup>253</sup> Kanthas, a type of Indian quilt, and patchwork shawls are discussed on pages 60 and 47 respectively. See also Fig. 10.

<sup>254</sup> Each plate was constructed through a process of embroidering a piece of canvas which was then glued onto a small piece of masonite. This was then progressively coated in thin layers of PVA glue, a process which took a number of days before printing could take place.

The name of the work, composed of two words, Heart Mat, has a number of pertinent references to aspects of my spiritual practice. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the ‘mat’ reference to meditation and prayer mats. The mat itself has significance on a number of levels in Hindu and Buddhist traditions; on one level it represents the seat of the deity, and on a more concrete level it is the seat upon which the individual seeker sits to perform their daily practices. The mat symbolises a gathering in and centralizing of energy, and, like the shawl, it is believed to retain and store that energy, thereby assisting the meditator each time she or he sits upon it.

The Sanskrit prayer ‘Arati Lijo’ contains a particularly evocative line,

“Ghata ghata asana svayam vikasi”

which translates as,

“Every heart rolls itself out as a mat for you, O self-luminous one.”<sup>255</sup>

As well as the mat references, there are also the heart references. The chakra at the heart centre in the subtle body is known as ‘anahata’ and is thought to be the dwelling place of the individual soul.

“Within the heart is a space the size of the thumb, and here a divine light shimmers. The sages have spent their lives looking at this light. How marvellous is the heart centre! How magnificent is the light in the heart space!”<sup>256</sup>

The word ‘anahata’ actually means ‘unstruck’ and refers to a quality of sound which is heard in this realm. Most sounds are the result of one thing striking another, but the inner sounds heard in the heart chakra are said to be unstruck or self originating and to release great joy. The heart chakra is a significant one where many different yogic processes of purification take place and hearing the anahata-sabda, or unstruck sound, is one such process.

Like the other chakras, it has a number of symbolic associations and qualities. Depictions of it vary somewhat in traditional painted imagery. The anahata chakra in the illustration in Fig. 2 depicts the commonly described red coloured lotus of twelve petals. Seated within this lotus is the god Isha, a form of Shiva, recognisable by the crescent moon in his hair, the kundalini

---

<sup>255</sup> Siddha Meditation Ashrams, op.cit. p. 186.

<sup>256</sup> Muktananda, S. Play of Consciousness (Chitshakti Vilas). p. 8

snake around his neck and the trident he is holding. Other depictions show anahata as a fourteen petalled lotus<sup>257</sup> with a white swan in the centre.<sup>258</sup> There is a connection between the white swan and the individual soul. The Sanskrit word for swan is 'hamsah' and the word 'hamsah' is also a specific two syllabled mantra associated with the breath. The first syllable 'ham' is Shiva and the inbreath representing bindu, the point into which everything is absorbed, and the second syllable 'sah' is Shakti, the outgoing breath of emanation and creation.<sup>259</sup>

In the centre of Heart Mat I have placed a symbolic image of anahata, a twelve petalled pink lotus. It is in fact a screenprinted image of a hand crocheted lace doyley which is a floral medallion with radiating layers of twelve petals. This central image draws together many of the threads in this body of research. It is an image of a textile artefact from a western textile tradition which has clear associations with the chakra and yantra images of eastern traditions and also originates from the matrilineal line within my family. It may also be read as a metaphor for the juxtaposition of myself as a westerner practicing an eastern form of meditation. My surface embellishment with the beads of the mantra connects all the threads and layers together, both literally and symbolically.

---

<sup>257</sup> See Sri Yantra (Fig. 3). This yantra is said to visually represent a condensed image of the whole of creation and is further discussed on p. 23. The nine circuits of the Sri yantra relate to chakras in the subtle body and the outer layer of fourteen triangles is representative of anahata.

<sup>258</sup> Rawson, P. Tantra: the Indian Cult of Ecstasy. Plate 51

<sup>259</sup> Kripanda, S. op. cit. p. 98

# CONCLUSION

“Spiritual art is finally about essence, about the intangible – and the sacred... It is about a dimension of reality occasionally glimpsed and not always fully realised, but which nevertheless conveys to the artist that a deep sense of Oneness – the ground of all being and awareness – underlies ephemeral physical appearances and extends well beyond individual, ego-based perceptions.”<sup>260</sup>

It was this “dimension of reality occasionally glimpsed and not always fully realised” that I set out to investigate at the commencement of this research.

An underlying feature of this research, and perhaps of much visual arts research, is its serendipitous nature. Rarely, as an artist, does one progress in a linear fashion from a starting point to a finishing point but rather in a much more circular and cyclical manner. This of course links very appropriately with the Eastern concept of time which I mentioned in the introduction and which is also cyclical. Certain paths that I followed and the resulting visual works were a direct outcome of this serendipity. The extensive use of the hand symbol was partly as a result of a gift from a friend who saw the similarities between the embroidered shawl designs I was working with at the time and the patterns on the henna hand stencils she had brought back from the Middle East. It is unlikely that I would have discovered this link or searched for these hand stencils of my own accord. Another friend, who saw that I had been using shell buttons from my grandmother’s sewing tin, gave me a great assortment of 1950s glittery buttons which were used in Daily Meditations. It is doubtful whether this artwork would have been as extensive or as detailed without this gift.

These and other inputs from friends, acquaintances and other artists occurred because sections of the thesis artworks were exhibited periodically throughout the research period. As with all my artwork, it was important to exhibit the work in the public arena and to invite comment and feedback. The discovery of local businesses that stocked unusual embroidery threads or were prepared to experiment with laser transfers onto canvas also influenced the direction of this research and its ensuing artworks. It is discoveries and developments such as these, which are difficult to quantify or analyse, that have had a significant input into the work.

The period of my candidature has seen greatly increased exposure, on the part of Australian arts audiences, to the contemporary art and artists of India. There have been a number of

---

<sup>260</sup> Drury, N. & A. Voigt, Fire and Shadow: Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art. Sydney: Craftsman House, 1996, p.13.

cultural exchange programs between India and Australia<sup>261</sup> and increasing visibility of the work by Indian artists in publications such as ArtAsia Pacific. In a recent issue of Art Monthly, Ken Scarlett discusses the sculptures of the Indian artist Ravinder Reddy seen in Singapore.

“One of the most compelling works was *Devi*, an enormous head covered in gold leaf ... One could not escape the powerful gaze of this omnipotent goddess ... without any knowledge of the Hindu religion or the ability to read the symbolism, it was nevertheless possible to appreciate *Devi* and *Under the Tree* ... as they were both concerned with universal themes of female strength, fertility and the miraculous continuance of life.”<sup>262</sup>

As I continue to read and see more of the work of Indian contemporary artists I am searching for parallels and areas of commonality, albeit from a different perspective, with my own work.

One of the difficulties with this research is the fact that it has not drawn on a single body of knowledge but rather has spanned at least four distinct bodies of knowledge including philosophy, theology, archeology and anthropology. I have found that there is a relatively small body of knowledge examining the incorporation of mantras and invocations into Indian textiles but a larger source on the broader religious and ceremonial aspects of textiles in India and Southeast Asia. There are a growing number of western contemporary artists, discussed in the introduction, who draw on Hindu and Buddhist concepts in their work and there is a growing body of research about this very topic. There is, however, virtually no research addressing the use of mantras in textiles, or other forms of visual imagery, by western artists or in a western contemporary context. It is this very particular field that my research addresses.

As one of the primary sources of this research, my spiritual practice has certainly shifted to a different level over the years that I have been conducting this research. Meditation and mantra have expanded and permeated other aspects of my life rather than being primarily confined to prescribed periods of time or particular events. Spiritual practice, arts practice, research and life have merged into one and the ability to be self reflective, particularly in terms of the creative process, has become a part of this. The research process has provided the opportunity for me to celebrate and reveal the spiritual aspects of my life through my artwork. In doing so, I am contributing to the existing body of knowledge which encompasses the use of eastern

---

<sup>261</sup> For example the “Fire and Life” artist exchange program in 1996 and 1997 where five Australian and five Indian artists lived in each other’s cities and made work resulting in cross continent exhibitions.

<sup>262</sup> Scarlett, Ken, “Politics, spirituality and sexuality – Singapore celebrates the art of sculpture” Art Monthly, no. 126, Dec – Feb 2000, p.27.

mystical concepts by western artists. It is the visual expression of the spiritual aspects of my life through the very particular linking of mantra, image and stitch that makes this thesis unique.

Priya Mookerjee's comments, in discussing the interrelationship between art, life and spirituality, express the essence of my journey.

“ As with an artist whose conception evolves with each step until a clear picture emerges, and the final moment brings with it a sense of recognition and fulfilment, so the seeker struggles for inner transformation, until gradually a new realization unfolds... The process of creating a work of art is also an act of worship, one through which the invisible manifests as the visible, and the artist who ‘invokes’ the image gives form to the formless, seeking to discover the unknown through the known.”<sup>263</sup>

I believe that the work I have produced has demonstrated that it is possible to express the ineffable and the intangible in a meaningful way, both for myself and for others. The project has extended my visual language and offered me new and subtle ways of expressing the meditative state without the overt use of mantra. It has also offered me an avenue through which to reacquaint myself with, and pursue the age-old arts of needlework within a contemporary arts and academic context. The multi-layered nature of the project has been echoed in the physical layering and padding in many of the thesis works, the embroidery and the process of stitching have given voice to the mantras on the surface.

Am I, at the end, any clearer, or are my conclusions as transitory as the process itself, as meditation or mantra repetition is – the goal stays the same, but do things along the way change the process undertaken or alter the final conclusion. Is it in fact final, or does it just point toward a goal that is always just out of reach or being sought. You get close through the process, but as you do the goal keeps moving and so you keep striving but the process itself becomes your goal, as in meditation. Enlightenment may be the ultimate goal, but one begins to see the importance of the process and this process becomes the meditation, becomes the goal itself. The act of repeating a stitch becomes the meditation, and the quietude which naturally takes place through the concentrated repetition leads one to the still place which is sought.

---

<sup>263</sup> Mookerjee, Priya. Pathway Icons: The Wayside Art of India. London: Thames and Hudson, 1987, pp.4-5.



# GLOSSARY

abhaya mudra	Open palmed hand gesture symbolising the bestowal of protection and fearlessness.
abhishek	Ritual bathing of a holy being or murti.
ajna chakra	Chakra or energy centre in the middle of the forehead in the region also referred to as 'the third eye'. Described as a two petalled lotus.
amlikar	Needle work embroidered shawls.
anahata	Chakra in the heart region of the subtle body said to be the dwelling place of the individual soul.
atman	The Self which exists in all. The atman is not different or separate from God or Ultimate Reality.
Bhagavad Gita	Literally the Song of the Blessed One. It occurs in the latter portion of the Mahabharata, the great Indian battle epic. It takes the form of a dialogue between Arjuna, a warrior about to enter battle, and Krishna, his charioteer. Krishna reveals himself to be the Lord or Godhead and presents teachings on the path of dharma and self discipline.
bhija	Seed mantra containing the potentiality of a particular deity.
bindu	Dot, or point containing the universe; the Blue Pearl.
Brahman	The highest reality according to Hindu philosophy.
buta	Urdu word describing the floral shawl motif known in the west as 'paisley'.
chakra	From the Sanskrit word meaning wheel or disc. Chakras are energy centres in the subtle body of which there are seven main ones along the spinal column.
chaitanya	Enlivened with the divine energy of an enlightened meditation guru, often used in conjunction with mantra, ie enlivened mantra.
Devi Mahatmya	Also known as 'Durga Saptashati' meaning literally seven hundred verses to the goddess Durga and occurs as part of the larger text the Markendeya Purana. The Devi Mahatmya remains the basic text for the worship of Durga and many other goddesses.
dharma	Essential duty, righteous action in accordance with the universal law.
dhoti	Long woven cloth worn by men as a lower garment.
diksha	Spiritual initiation.
Diwali	Indian festival of lights or New Year associated with the goddess Lakshmi.
gamcha	Pilgrim's shawl printed with mantras and other auspicious symbols.
ida	Ida is one of the two nadis entwining the sushumna in the spinal region in the subtle body.

japa	The practice of continual repetition of a mantra.
japa mala	A string of beads used for practicing continual repetition of a mantra.
kantha	A type of quilt made from layers of disused saris and dhotis (male garments) stitched together which is believed to have magical and protective properties.
Kashmir Shaivism	Kashmir Shaivism is a nondual philosophy that recognises the entire universe as a manifestation of Shakti, the divine conscious energy, and explains how the formless, unmanifest Supreme Principle manifests as the universe.
kum kum	A red powder used in offerings.
Kundalini	Meditation energy and life force which lies dormant in the muladhara chakra at the base of the spine in the subtle body. Once awakened, Kundalini rises up the central channel, the sushumna nadi, purifying the entire being. When She enters the sahasrara chakra at the crown of the head, the individual soul merges with the universal Self.
Mahabharata	The great epic poem in Sanskrit, composed by the sage Vyasa, which tells the story of the feud between the Kaurava and Pandava families over a disputed kingdom. The Bhagavad Gita occurs in the latter portion of the Mahabharata.
Mohenjo-Daro	An important archeological site in the Indus Valley near what is now Karachi in Pakistan. Site of the Harappa civilisation dating from around 3000 BC discovered in 1921. Evidence of a highly civilised society with drainage systems, fired brick houses and wide streets. An important source of seals, amulets, figurines and textile implements.
mudra	Sacred hand gesture denoting inner states.
muladhara	Chakra at the base of the spine in the subtle body described as four petalled. Kundalini is said to dwell there in her dormant form - coiled sleeping.
murti	Sculpted image of a deity or holy being which has been enlivened by mantric rituals and a 'breathing in' of the life force by Brahmin priests.
nadi	Channel in the subtle body which carries energy.
prana	Breath and life force of the human body and the universe.
prasad	A blessed or divine gift, often refers to food that has been offered to god.
pingala	One of the main nadis (channels) in the subtle body ascending the spinal region entwining around the sushumna nadi.
puja	Ritual worship, may also refer to a site of worship such as an altar or shrine.
Puranas	A group of eighteen texts containing legends and devotional chants written over a period of time from the third to the thirteenth century. Information is commonly presented in the form of a dialogue, either between deities or between deity and disciple.
Ramayana	One of the great Sanskrit epic poems. It tells the story of the god Rama, his consort the goddess Sita and their devoted servant Hanuman, the monkey god.
Rig Veda	See Vedas.

Rudraksha	Literally 'the eyes of Rudra' (a form of Shiva). Seeds from the fruit of the tree <i>Eleaocarpus ganitrus</i> which are strung into prayer beads, or japa malas, and used to practice japa, or continual repetition of the mantra.
sadhana	The discipline of sustained spiritual practice.
sahasrara	The uppermost chakra at the crown of the head described as a shimmering thousand petalled white lotus.
shal	The Persian word from which the English 'shawl' originates.
shakti	The active principle which creates and maintains the universe; may be defined as the goddess Shakti.
shaktipat	Literally the descent of shakti, or spiritual energy, from an enlightened meditation master to the student.
sushumna nadi	The main nadi in the subtle body running up the centre of the spine. This is the channel which connects all of the seven chakras and through which Kundalini travels upward when awakened through spiritual practice.
sutra	A concisely expressed spiritual teaching which was originally passed down orally. Sutra is from the Sanskrit word for cotton thread.
stupa	A sacred site in Buddhist and Jain religions which consists of a constructed mound containing ashes or relics of a great teacher. Worship is performed by circumambulating the stupa.
tallis	Jewish prayer shawl.
tantra	An esoteric spiritual discipline which worships Shakti, the female principle, as the divine creator of the universe through rituals, mantras and yantras. The goal of tantra is awakening the Kundalini in order to attain Self-realization. The body of texts from this discipline are the Tantras.
tilikar	Brocade loom woven shawls.
Upanishads	A group of spiritual texts that form the end part of the Vedas, the oldest of which were composed between 800 and 400 BC. Some were written as late as the fifteenth century.
Vedas	The four ancient Hindu scriptures regarded as divinely revealed. The four Vedas are the Rig (sometimes expressed as Rg or Rik), the Yajur, Sama and Atharva.
yantra	Visual form of mantra, mystical diagram used as a tool for meditation and worship, synonymous with mandala.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alper, H. P. (ed) **Understanding Mantras**. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.
- Aryan, K.C. **Basis of Decorative Element in Indian Art**. New Delhi: Rekha Prakashan, 1981.
- Askari, N. & L. Arthur. **Uncut Cloth: Saris, Shawls and Sashes**. London: Merrell Holberton Publishers, 1999.
- Atkinson, B. (ed) **Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau**. New York: The Modern Library, 1965.
- Barber, E. W. **Women's Work: the First 20,000 years - Women, Cloth and Society in Early Times**. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994.
- Barber, E. W. **Prehistoric Textiles: the Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages**. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Barnard, N. **Arts and Crafts of India**. London: Conran Octopus, 1993.
- Bhattacharya, B. **Towards a Tantric Goal**. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1989.
- Blair, L. **Rhythms of Vision – The Changing Patterns of Belief**. London: Croom Helm, 1975.
- Blair, M. **The Paisley Shawl and the Men Who Produced It**. Great Britain: Alexander Gardner, 1904.
- Brand, M. **The Vision of Kings - Art and Experience in India**. Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1995.
- Brand, M, ed. **Traditions of Asian Art: Traced through the collection of the National Gallery of Australia**. Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1995.
- Brennan, Anne “Running Stitch and Running Writing: Thinking About Process.” In **Craft and Contemporary Theory**, edited by Sue Rowley, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997.
- Burnard, Joyce. **Chintz and Cotton – India's Textile Gift to the World**. Sydney: Kangaroo Press, 1994.
- Caillat, C. & R. Kumar. **The Jain Cosmology**. New Delhi: Kumar Gallery, 1981.
- Catalano, G. **The Bandaged Image: a study of Australian artists' books**. Sydney: Hale and Ironmonger, 1983.
- Chidvilasananda, Swami. **Enthusiasm**. New York, 1997.
- Coburn, T. **Encountering the Goddess: a translation of the Devi-Mahatmya and a Study of its Interpretation**. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.
- Coomaraswamy, A. K. “The Origin and Use of Images in India.” In **Art, Creativity and the Sacred**, edited by Diane Apostolos- Cappadona, New York: Crossroad, 1984.

- Cook, R. **The Tree of Life: Symbol of the Centre.** London: Thames and Hudson, 1974.
- Day, C. **A Spiritual Journey.** (MA thesis) Warrnambool: Deakin University, 1995.
- Dehejia, V. **Yogini Cult and Temples - a Tantric Tradition.** New Delhi: National Museum Janpath, 1986.
- Devenport, Rhana "From Calcutta to Brisbane ...From Home to Home" **Eyeline**, no. 34, Spring 1997
- Dhamija, J. (ed) **Living Traditions of India: Crafts of Gujarat.** New York: Mapin International, 1985.
- Dhamija, J. & J. Jain. **Handwoven Fabrics of India.** New York: Mapin Publishing, 1989.
- Drury, N & A. Voigt. **Fire and Shadow - Spirituality in Contemporary Australian Art.** Sydney: Craftsman House, 1996.
- Dubin, L.S. **The History of Beads: From 30,000 B.C. to the Present.** London: Thames and Hudson, 1995.
- Duncan, J. **Marianne Baillieu - Morphic Fields.** (cat.) Melbourne: Monash University Gallery, 1997.
- Dysart, D & H. Fink, eds. **Asian Women Artists.** Sydney: Craftsman House, 1996.
- Edgerton, F. **The Bhagavad Gita.** New York: Harper & Row, 1964.
- Eliade, Mircea "The Sacred and the Modern Artist." In **Art, Creativity and the Sacred**, edited by Diane Apostolos-Cappadona. New York: Crossroad, 1984.
- Gablik, Suzi. **Conversations Before the End of Time.** New York: Harper & Row, 1989.
- Gernsheim, A. **Victorian and Edwardian Fashion - a Photographic Survey.** New York: Dover, 1981.
- Gertsakis, E. "Words of Love - folk heterotopias." In **Craft and Contemporary Theory**, edited by Sue Rowley. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1997.
- Gillow, J & N. Barnard. **Traditional Indian Textiles.** London: Thames and Hudson, 1991.
- Guest, T & G. Celant. **Books by Artists.** Toronto: Art Metropole, 1981.
- Gupta, S.P, ed. **Costumes, Textiles, Cosmetics and Coiffure in Ancient and Mediaeval India.** Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1973.
- Guy, J. **Palm-leaf and Paper: Illustrated Manuscripts of India and Southeast Asia.** Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1982.
- Guy, J. "Cloth for the Gods: The Patola Trade to Kerala." In **Asian Art and Culture**, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Smithsonian Institute, Spring/Summer 1996.

- Hacker, K. & K. Turnbull. **Courtyard, Bazaar, Temple: Traditions of Textile Expression in India.** Seattle: University of Washington, 1982.
- Harper, K. A. **Seven Hindu Goddesses of Spiritual Transformation - the Iconography of the Saptamatikas.** New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989.
- Hesse, H. **Siddhartha.** London: Picador, 1991.
- Hildegard of Bingen (trans. Bruce Hozeski) **Scivias.** Santa Fe: Bear and Company, 1986.
- Holtzman, S. R. **Digital Mantras: The Language of Abstract and Virtual Worlds.** Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1994.
- Hughes, R. **Amish, the Art of the Quilt.** New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Callaway, 1990.
- Hume, R. E. **The Thirteen Principal Upanishads Translated from the Sanskrit.** 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1931.
- Huyler, S. **Painted Prayers: Womens' Art in Village India.** New York: Rizzoli, 1994.
- Irwin, J. **The Kashmir Shawl.** London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1973.
- Isherwood, C. **The Wishing Tree.** San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986.
- Introduction to Kashmir Shaivism.** Oakland: SYDA Foundation, 1975.
- Jayakar, P. **The Earthen Drum: an introduction to the Ritual Arts of Rural India.** New Delhi: National Museum, (n. d.)
- Johnson, B. **Lady of the Beasts: Ancient Images of the Goddess and Her Sacred Animals.** San Francisco Harper, 1988.
- Jones, Dorothy. "The Floating Web." In **Craft and Contemporary Theory,** edited by Sue Rowley. Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1997.
- Jung, C, ed. **Man and his Symbols.** London: Aldus Books, 1964.
- Kandinsky, W. **Concerning the Spiritual in Art.** New York: Dover, 1977.
- Khanna, M. **Yantra: The Tantric Symbol of Cosmic Unity.** London: Thames & Hudson, 1979.
- Kidd, C. "Fire and Life: Kindling Cultural Exchange" **Art Asia Pacific** no.18, 1998.
- Kinsley, D. **Hindu Goddesses: Vision of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition.** New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986.
- Kripananda, Swami (ed) **Darshan Journal** no. 41-42, 1990.
- Kripananda, Swami, **The Sacred Power: A Seeker's Guide to Kundalini.** New York: SYDA Foundation, 1995.
- Krishna Warriar, A.G. **The Sakta Upanishads.** Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1967.

- Kronenberg, S. **The Sublime Imperative.** (cat.) Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1991.
- Lawlor, R. **Sacred Geometry: Philosophy and Practice.** London: Thames & Hudson, 1982.
- Levi-Strauss, M. **The Cashmere Shawl.** New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987.
- Losty, J.P. **The Art of the Book in India.** London: The British Library, 1982.
- Lynton, L. **The Sari - Styles, Patterns, History, Techniques.** London: Thames & Hudson, 1995.
- Madhavananda, Swami. **Minor Upanishads.** Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968.
- Mascaro, J. **The Upanishads.** London: Penguin, 1965.
- Maxwell, R. **Textiles of Southeast Asia: Tradition, Trade and Transformation.** Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia, 1990.
- McDonald, Anne. (curator) **A Stream of Stories: Indian Miniatures from the National Gallery of Australia.** Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1997.
- Mitchell, A.G. **Hindu Gods and Goddesses.** London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982.
- Mookerjee, A. **Kali the Feminine Force.** Rochester: Destiny Books, 1988.
- Mookerjee, A. **Ritual Art of India.** London: Thames and Hudson, 1985.
- Mookerjee, A. **Tantra Art: its Philosophy and Physics.** New Delhi: Ravi Kumar, 1966.
- Mookerjee, P. **Pathway Icons - The Wayside Art of India.** London: Thames & Hudson, 1987.
- Morrell, A. **The Techniques of Indian Embroidery.** London: B.T. Batsford, 1994.
- Muktananda, Swami. **Play of Consciousness (Chitshakti Vilas).** New York: SYDA Foundation, 1978.
- Muktananda, Swami. **Kundalini: The Secret of Life.** New York: SYDA Foundation, 1979.
- Muller-Ortega, P. **The Triadic Heart of Shiva: Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-Dual Shaivism of Kashmir.** Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.
- Myers, D & S. Bean, eds. **From the Land of the Thunder Dragon: Textile Arts of Bhutan.** London: Serindia Publications, 1994.
- Narayanan, V. "Saraswati: stream of knowledge, source of song" **Darshan Journal.** no. 66, 1992.
- O'Flaherty, Wendy D. **The Rig Veda: An Anthology.** London: Penguin, 1981.
- Oki, M. **India - Fairs and Festivals.** Tokyo: Gakken Company, 1989.
- Pals, Daniel L. **Seven Theories of Religion.** New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

- Parker, R. **The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine.** London: The Women's Press, 1984.
- Parker, R. & G. Pollock. **Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology.** London: Harper Collins, 1981.
- Pastor-Roces, M. **Sinaunang Habi: Philippine Ancestral Weave.** Manila: Nikki Coseteng, 1991.
- Prabhavananda, S.& C. Isherwood. **How to Know God: The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali.** Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1981.
- Rawson, P. **The Art of Tantra.** London: Thames & Hudson, 1973.
- Rawson, P. **Tantra: the Indian Cult of Ecstasy.** London: Thames & Hudson, 1973.
- Richards, D. & R. Maxwell. **Woven Magic: Indian Textiles and their influence in South East Asia.** Adelaide: The Art Gallery of South Australia, 1996.
- Rojas, P. **Domestic Objects: Vessels of Meaning** (cat.) Melbourne: Craft Victoria, 1998.
- Saraswati, S.K. **Indian Textiles.** New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1961.
- Sen, Geeti. "A New Iconography" **ArtAsia Pacific.** no.18, 1998.
- Sen, P. **Living Traditions of India: Crafts of West Bengal.** New York: Mapin International, 1994.
- Scarlett, Ken. "Politics, spirituality and sexuality – Singapore celebrates the art of sculpture" **Art Monthly Australia.** No. 126, Dec. 1999 – Feb. 2000.
- Shamdasani, S (ed). **The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1932 by C.G. Jung.** Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Shoeser M. & K. De Jardin. **French Textiles from 1760 to the Present.** London: Laurence King, 1991.
- Singh, C & D. Ahivasi. **Woollen Textiles and Costumes from Bharat Kala Bhavan.** Varanasi, 1981.
- Siddha Meditation Ashrams. **The Nectar of Chanting.** New York: SYDA Foundation, 1983.
- Stoler Miller, B, ed. **Exploring India's Sacred Art: selected writings of Stella Kramrisch.** Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.
- Stone, M. **The Paradise Papers.** London: Virago, 1976.
- Tacey, D. **Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia.** Melbourne: Harper Collins, 1995.
- Terlouw, W.J. **The Hand of Fatima – Moroccan Ceramics.** Leeuwarden: National Museum of Ceramics, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands, 1996.



- Thomas, D. "The elder Bea Maddock" Art Monthly Australia. no. 112, 1998.
- Thursby, G. "Real Knowing" Darshan Journal. no. 51, 1991.
- Tuchman, M. The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 - 1985. New York: Abbeville Press, 1993.
- Varadarajan, L. South Indian Traditions of Kalamkari. Ahmedabad: National Institute of Design, 1982.
- Waterlow, N. & R. Mellick. Spirit and Place: Art in Australia 1861 - 1996. Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996.
- Werner, K. Symbols in Art and Religion - The Indian and the Comparative Perspectives. Curzon Press, London, 1990.
- Wilson, H. Analysis of the Purans. Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1979.
- Winsor, Jackie. "Concrete Bliss" Darshan Journal. no. 97, 1995.
- Woodroffe, J. Introduction to Tantra Sastra. 4th ed. Madras: Ganesh & Company, 1963.
- Woodroffe, J. The Garland of Letters: Studies in the Mantra - Sastra. 5th ed. Madras: Ganesh & Company, 1969.
- Woollacott, M. (ed) The Devi - Darshan Journal. no. 66, 1992.
- Yefimora, L. & R. Belogorskaya. Russian Kerchiefs and Shawls. Leningrad: Aurora Art Publishers, 1985.
- Zimmer, J. "The wonderful resilience of the non-objective ideal" Art Monthly Australia. May 1997.