CRITIQUE OF SOUTH INDIAN ART.

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In my paper on ‘The Development of Hindu Iconography’ (J. R. A. S., 1918, p. 526) I mentioned the three principles of interpretation of Indian art as explaining iconographical details. Symbolism is one of these principles. The artist’s vision of life is that of a moving picture—a flowing stream, not a standing pool—of which one could catch but a fleeting vision in a moment of supreme significance; but which could not be compelled to stay awhile to render a scientific analysis or clear-cut expression possible. This vision could be communicated to others not from brain to brain through words, but in a language of joy unto which words fail to reach (Yato vācho nivartante). The impression the artist wants to convey works on the sensibility of the beholder in the manner suggested by his intuition and according to the methods peculiar to his art. Life is an incessant activity, a ceaseless striving, an unfolding of destiny, as seen steadily and as a whole in aesthetic vision (Jagat, samsāra, anah, anilam, vāyu, kratu). The aim of the South Indian artist was mostly in the way of objectifying the supersensuous comprehension of Fact, with the help of stone and chisel, paint and brush. What the Aryan did in verbography, that the Southern genius essayed to do in art and iconography. The art-work of the latter is suggestive of a progressively higher sense like the Vedic utterances of the former. It is absurd to suppose that ‘ideas of symbolism grew up in South India in the present century’. Such ideas are quite common in Aryan literature from the
early Vedic times onwards. In this as in other respects, Indian culture is at once ancient, mediaeval and modern, North Indian and South Indian. There is a continuity of culture and persistence of traditions through the ages. The best introduction to the study of South Indian art is an introduction to the South Indian temple.

I. The Site of the Temple.

The temple of the South is not only a ‘house of eternity’ as in the North, but is the abode of the ‘Almighty Ruler of the world’ (cf. Koil with Devālaya). This rājasika conception resulted in the choice of elevated places and eminences as temple-sites, from which the soaring eye could take a sweeping glance of the regions round about. Where a temple had to be put up in the capital-city on a level plane, the same effect was sought to be produced by the erection of a tall tower (gopura) at the entrance to the temple. While loftiness, associated with eminence, was an all-Indian conception (ucchasthāneshu pūjyante), it was carried into execution in the architecture of the South. In the worship likewise, we have the rājopachāras offered to Divinity who is addressed as Sārvabhauma and Mahāprabhu. There is no need to expati ate further on the point. There is the stress on the conception of God as Might, as Omnipotence in the South, while in the North the emphasis is rather on God as Light, as Omnis cience. Hence the prominence of the tower in South Indian architecture.

II. The Form of the Temple.

The earliest temples are those cut in rocks by the Pallavas and in caves by the Chalukyas. Mahendra Varman, the Pallava king of the seventh century, tells us in an inscription near Villupuram that the idea was to preserve these ‘houses of Gods’ through eternity, by using imperishable material. In the Chola and the Chalukya styles this idea gave way before that of representing the temple as infinite space, inhabited by God as Eternal Time. The Chalukyas effected this by elaborate carvings, prominent among which are the various manifestations of Divinity, with which men steeped in Epic legends and Purānic lore had made them familiar. On the ceilings are carved the figures of the regents of the cardinal points, the Lords of Space in attendance on the God. The Cholas appear to have vertical as well as
horizontal ideas of space, and have sky-capped towers. Chola
imperialism and toleration are reflected in the dedication of a
temple to one principal God, and having in it subordinate
sanctuaries to other gods of the people. Every Chola temple
of Vishnu has a subordinate Shiva shrine in it; that of Shiva, a
Vishnu shrine. Traces of these invariably exist even now in
spite of the fanatic vandalism of unworthy descendants. The
temple-planning of the Hoysalas is symbolical of their fight
for dominion side by side with the imperial Cholas; hence
the peculiar architectural phenomenon of several equally
important cells—as many as four in Doddagaddavalli and five
in Govindanhalli. When the empire of the Hoysalas was
replaced by that of Vijayanagar, the several-cells-idea develops
into that of several temples, some founded, and all alike
patronised by the emperor, whose tutelary God was Virupa-ksha.
We have here the analogue to the political organiza-
tion of the empire, where the provinces enjoyed a real
autonomy under the aegis of the imperial sway. It has to be
remembered that even professed devotees of Vishnu among
the later emperors have the name Virupa-ksha as their sign-
manual.

III. Plan and Structure.

There are differences pertaining to different ages and
varying with the aims of the endowers. But there is agree-
ment in one respect. The temple is broad and grand, well-
lighted and decorated, even furnished with scenes from folk-
life, and amusements on the walls, as one enters it, in the
Mukha-mandapa and Kalyana-mandapa; but there is always
a progressive change as one enters the Holy of Holies, the
Garbha-griha, which is unadorned save in the drapery
of a dim religious light which only serves to make the
interior darkness visible. Students of artistic effect who were
observing till now the symbol of the Infinitesimal in scroll-
work and decoration, in myriads of artistic motifs, sculptures
and paintings, feel the transition to the Infinite, suggested by
the dim candle-lit universe of space and its name garbhagriha.
This is pointed out at Chidambaram as the veritable mystery
 rahasya.) The sensation is next of kin to what Shelley
longed to obtain ‘among dim twilight lawns, and stream-
illumined caves and wind-enchanted shapes of wandering mist’.
It is not possible to agree with Fergusson, therefore, that
‘the bathos of decreasing size and elaboration as one
approaches the sanctuary, is a mistake that nothing can redeem'.

IV. Animal Forms in Reliefs.

Fa-Hien (Buddha, I. 68, 69) describes a rock-cut monastery of the Dekhan as having five stages. 'The lowest is made with elephant figures and has 500 cells in it. The second is made with lion-shapes and has 400 chambers. The third is made with horse-shapes and has 300 chambers. The fourth is made with ox-shapes, and has 200 chambers. The fifth has dome-shapes and has 100 chambers in it.' It is not a mere coincidence that the same animals are used, whether in South India or Ceylon, and that they appear in the same order as in Hoysala and Vijayanagar temples. Here we seem to have a crystallization of the suggestive animal symbolism in Hindu scriptures. 'Indriyâni hayânâhuh' and 'Śarîram rathameva tu' in Kathopanishad would explain the horse-and-dome shapes. Later Vedantic literature has the mind compared to the bull, which would either rest or run astray but has to be driven along the steep road to human perfection (Râmyo balivardhah). It is not difficult to see in the elephant, which in Purânic and Tantric cosmology support the earth, a suggestion of the parthiva or annamaya kosa. This interpretation would apply to animals represented as vahanas or vehicles of Divinity also. Durga as prana sakti (the life-principle) is represented as riding on the lion (simha vahini). The crocodile is moha (nescience) whose capture is conquest of the self (cf. Sâvîlása mahâmoha grâhagrasai-kakarmane in the Panchadasî).

V. Symbolism in Number.

It will be seen on close scrutiny that the number of walls or corridors, cells or towers is not without symbolic significance. In the Hoysala structures, for instance, we have three or five or seven rows of friezes on the railed parapet (jagati). In Srîrangam we have seven-walled enclosures (prâkâras), which remind us of the seven paridhis of the Vedic sacrificial hall (saptasyasan paridhayah) and the seven lokas which, since the Upanishadic times, were held to constitute the visible world (saptâ ime lokâh). The suggestiveness is, by no means, distant or far-fetched, as the Vaikhānasa Sûtras begin with the analogy of the temple and the sacrificial hall. Number is as full of meaning in a temple, as in a sacrifice. The
thousand-pillared halls are the most interesting in this connection. Sahasram in Sanskrit suggests infinity.

The symbolism of number very often enables us to detect an originally Hindu building devoted in later times to other worship. This is the case not only in India but in Greater India. No scholar, so far as I know, has explained the significance of the ground-plan of Borobodur, for instance, in the light of Buddhist art. It is noteworthy, however, that no other stūpas exist in Java. Within the enclosing wall are five polygonal and three circular galleries, connected by staircases, and there are 504 figures in niches and cupolas, and numerous Buddhist bas-reliefs. It is noteworthy, too, that the square storeys are richly decorated, whereas the circular platforms are plain and unadorned. The number of figures in niches is 432, *i.e.*, 108 to each side, on the decorated platforms, and 32, 24 and 16 respectively in the three circular super-structures. Students of Tantra texts and of Śaktism will easily recognize the meaning of these numbers and of the decorative lines and motives associated with them. It raises the question whether the structure was originally planned in Hindu style or by Hindu architects. It has also to be remembered in this connection that the Buddhists copied Hindu symbolism in some respects, as in the grotto of a thousand Buddhas in Serindia.

**VI. Line, Form and Figure.**

Most South Indian temples have some significant drawings on the floor, on the ceiling and even on pillars. These are to be explained with reference to the Tantra literature. The most common of these are those of the Śrī and Sudarśana chakras. The former represents the principle of eternity as illustrated by an infinitely recurring creative principle; and the latter the concept of oneness that lights on the soul after a series of integrations of manifold experience. The chakra is of two forms: infinity of space represented by Bhūmi-prastara, and infinity of time suggested by the Meru-prastara. The Borobodur temple apparently represents the latter. There is an elaborate discussion of the symbolism in works like Lakšmidhara’s commentary on the Saundaryalahari and Bhāskara Rāya’s on the Lalitasāhasri and Bhāvanopanishad.

The marks indicative of religious denomination in Vaishnavā and Śaiva temples are easily explained. The symbolical significance of these marks is based on Haṭha yoga and the plexus of the brain and spinal cord as represented in the
several Tantra schools. The marks are of practical value also, in differentiating a Vañagalai from a Tengalai temple of the Śrī-Vaishṇavas, for instance.

The most interesting to the art student is the symbolism of form and figure brought about by a few deft dashes, indicating a delicacy of gesture, a suppleness of limbs or serene beauty of face. Speaking broadly, austere simplicity, serenity and calm are denoted by straight lines and simple curves, the agility and energy of rhythmic motion by flowing curves, recurring floriations, ingenious spirals, and fluttering fussiness. A Naṭarāja figure or a dansuse decorating a door panel is sculptured or painted on a back-ground of drawing showing multifoil curves and epicurves. Numerous are such curved lines in the various dancing attitudes sculptured on the door panels at Chidambaram. They are as characteristic of art as the analogous Vakrōkti is in literary art.

Let us study, for instance, the simple and unpretentious figure of the lady at Sittannavasal. Mr. Mehta who has a beautiful reproduction of this (Figure 3) considers it the figure of an apsaras, but I would see in this and the next figure a pictorial representation of Gangāvataraṇam, the thrilling story of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Purāṇas, which was a favourite subject of the artist in the 7th century, as is apparent from the figures of Śiva as Gangādharamūrti carved on a side-wall of the Tirugokarnam temple and on the west wall of the famous rock at Trichinopoly.

The beauty of the figure breathes in every limb, and recalls the proud majesty of a Juno or the imperious charms of a Minerva. It flutters round her long eyes and beams forth in a self-conscious lovely smile shot from the deft curves creating the rosy lips. It heaves with the bosom, full and firm, uncovered to view by the easy throw of the left hand in pose. The curves that create the bosom and the waist do not show an over-accentuation of the one or an over-attenuation of the other. Tresses in wavy curls on forehead gay and round enclose watery lines on which floats the dim figure of a makara sporting in frolic flight. On the arms the curves are conspicuous by absence, lest they should suggest some ugly knot or obstreperous vein. But their narrow creeper-like length is punctuated by bangles which are shaded, though slightly, so as to leap to the eye. The dancing attitude is depicted by the easy curves of the left hand, and the snaky
charm of the fingers completes the picture of celestial Ganges in the rapture of unruffled ecstasy.

The disposition of lines in the next figure shows itself in contrast. No more do we have every nerve and sinew quivering with life and movement. Ganges has yielded to the importunities of Bhagiratha and consented to leave the abode of the blessed for a life of service among the mortals as mother Gangā. Her features show the resigned air, and the long lashes are almost closed with a sublimated love, their gentle curves concealing the subdued ecstasy of pleasing a parched-up world. Here is a modest retiring beauty, whose grace is sweeter because of unconscious charm. Close by are the fading outlines of a figure in invisible ecstasy lost in a plunge in the flowing waters, which line and shade represent as issuing from the left hand of the river-goddess.

But the student is apt to be lost in the woods while yet admiring the trees. The curves and crooked lines are but the technique which serves the dominant design. From the dance of life and careless glee of even the highest enjoyment we have a change for the soft glow and spiritual joy of selfless service and self-forgotten sacrifice. The typical mother that gives herself away, the innocent child which sucks and knoweth not else,—She and It—what are they but transfigured heaven and earth great in their glory, but greater yet as pale reflections of the Light which descends on the pure uncrooked knotless heart, which swallows all up in the silence of all-encompassing Ānanda, the One without a second, the time-transcending Minute of time-lost seconds, the Infinite and infinitesimal all in one.

VII. Colours and Their Import.

There is observable in the Vedic texts a differentiation of colour in men and in objects. The krishna (dark) colour of the Dasyu stands in contradistinction to the fair colour of the Arya, in the Rig-Veda. There are also shades of colour observed in the heavens—bradhna, arusha, etc. In the Yajur-Vedic texts we have the sky-blue colour of Rudra’s neck contrasted with the white colour of the nape (nilagrīva and sitikamāṭha) and the tōmra, aruna and habhru colours of the Sun’s rays, and the grassy green of the meadow and the golden yellow of leaves in summer (saspinjara and harikeśa). In the Upanishads we have the clear use of colours in their
symbolical, apart from their pictorial significance (cf. *Nila-
toyadamadhyasthā vidyullekheva bhāsvarā nivārasūkavattanvi-
pita bhāsavyanāpamā tasyāssikhāya madhye paramātmā
nyavasthitah in the Mahānārāyana Upanishad).

The colours used in actual paintings will be found to
have their significance on these lines. The clear statement in
the *Sukranītisāra* that the white colour represents the śātvic,
the yellow and red, the rājasic, and the dark, tāmasic, finds its
illustrations in the Ajanta paintings and in those of Sittannava-
sal. The running visitor is struck with the contrast in
colours in cave 17 of Ajanta, for instance, where royalty is
coloured reddish, and the pages, dark. In Sittannavasal the
‘Apsaras’ which I really believe, is the Goddess Gangā, has
the yellow pigment on ear-lobes and ornaments, and slight
shade on forehead, armlet and wristlet. The Ardhanārī,
similarly, in the ‘Lotus tank’ has yellow ear-rings on a white
face.

Bharata shows how the colours express the various bhāvas
or sentiments. The dark-blue shows that of love; the pigeon
evokes compassion; the red, anger or passion; the black,
contempt; the dark, fear; and the white with a shade of
yellow signifies the heroic or chivalrous. The yellow excites
wonder; the indigo, disgust; and the black, laughter. Classi-
cal pictures are in accord with these general principles. The
chief difficulty was in respect of the yellow for which they
could not obtain the proper pigment, and which consequently
suffered a ‘sun-change’ into something strange, and yet more
wonderful than the sentiment of wonder evoked by the colour
itself. Hence the classical comparison of the inconstancy of
Love with the impermanence of the haridrā-rāga.

In the colour-pictures of Rāgas and Rāginīs we have the
technique based on the relation of sound and sentiment given
in the *Sangita-ratnākara*: *sari viredbhute raudre dhā bābhatse
bhayānake*; *karyau gaṇītu karune*; *hāsyaśringārayor māpau*;
which would yield us a chart of sound-pictures, based on the
parallelism of the spectrum and the octave as considered from
the standpoint of the subject.
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<tr>
<th>OCTAVE</th>
<th>COLOUR</th>
<th>SENTIMENT</th>
<th>SOUND</th>
<th>SEASON</th>
<th>RĀGA</th>
<th>IMAGERY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sa</td>
<td>Ri Gaura</td>
<td>Vira (mada)</td>
<td>Peacock</td>
<td>Grishma</td>
<td>Dipaka</td>
<td>Deva.</td>
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<td>Ri</td>
<td>Ri Pita</td>
<td>Adbhuta (lobha)</td>
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<td>Hindol (gurjarī)</td>
<td>Man.</td>
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<td>Ri</td>
<td>Ga Rakta</td>
<td>Raudra</td>
<td>Bull</td>
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<td>Meghamalari (gumkalika)</td>
<td>Gobijn.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ma Orange (kapota)</td>
<td>Karuṇa</td>
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<td>Madhamadāhari (bhairava)</td>
<td>Bodhisatva.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pa Śyāma</td>
<td>Hāsya</td>
<td>Varsha</td>
<td>Sarat</td>
<td>Hindola (malkosh)</td>
<td>Animal.</td>
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<td>Dha Śrīgūra</td>
<td>Śrīgūra</td>
<td>Vasanta</td>
<td>Vasanta</td>
<td>Kakumēhika</td>
<td>Asura.</td>
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<td>Dha Jugupsa</td>
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<td>Dha Bhayānaka</td>
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<td>Ni Karuṇa</td>
<td>Karuṇa</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<td>Śrīgūra</td>
<td>Vegetable.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In the external world as represented in art, white denotes the sātvic or heavenly purity and bliss, the colour of Umā, Śiva and Sarasvatī; red, the rājasic, of the Sun, Fire, Brahma and Subrahmaṇya; yellow, the symbol of humanity, the colour of the robes of the married couple, as well as of the ascetic, of Vishnu’s robes and of Lakṣmi; blue, the colour of the firmament, of Vishnu, Krishna, Rāma, Kāli or Durga; green, of the vegetable and animal kingdoms; black, of yawning space symbolised by Kāli, Kāliya, Maināka and a Sunless cloudy sky. Consistently with these symbols we have the colour given to the heroes and heroines in the Epic and other literature: Arjuna is white, Draupadi is dark, Balarāma is fair and Krishna is dark. Rāvana, Śakuni and the rest are painted black. Gandharvas and Apsaras are never painted green as they have no contact with terra firma and are regarded as aerial beings. They are rājasic and ruddy as in the Ajanta cave 17.

Symbolism of colours enables us to identify and interpret some otherwise difficult pictures. In Sittannavāsal, for instance, we seem to have not a ‘Gandharva sporting in the lotus-tank’, but Aruṇa who in his left hand carries a lotus-bud associated with Śūrya and his attendants, and the lower part of whose form below the waist is concealed by leaves, he being bodiless in mythology. His head rests against the lotus-leaf-
back-ground of the Moon-lit starry firmament painted white, with the opened filaments of playing lilies. The red orb to his right hand is the Sun whose glorious orb slowly rises into view.

We can trace an evolution of colour from the prehistoric outline drawings in red ochre in the antiquities described by Bruce Foote, to the red and crimson, as contrasted with the black and yellow of the Jogimara cave, the scene of colours of Ellora and Ajanta; and the colour octave (āśṭavāna) of Mahendra Varman, parallel to the sound octave set forth in his inscriptions of Kuḍumiyaṟṟamālai and Tirumeyyam.

Perspective.

A great deal has been written on the perspective or rather the lack of a proper sense of perspective in Indian art. It is often forgotten that Perspective depends on the angle of vision and the point of view of the beholder, and that some of the sculptures have been unseated from their original places.
Literary evidence shows, for instance, that different points of view struck the Indian artist and critic. A single śloka of Kālidāsa’s, for instance, shows how King Dilipa took a front, a back, as well as a side, view of the ground traversed in his chariot on the way to Vāsishṭha’s hermitage. How else are we to explain the śloka in the Rāghuvamsa: “That which was tiny to the view all at once assumes dimensions; that which was cleft in twain becomes soon after joined, as it were; what is by nature crooked or curved becomes in a moment apparently straight or regular to the view. I cannot tell what is near from what is far, as they change places every instant on account of the speed of the chariot.” In another canto of the same work he takes an ‘aerial perspective’ of familiar places, when Rāma after the Rāvana war returns to Ayodhya in an aerial car. It cannot, therefore, be assumed that the Indian artist always views things from a horizontal plane. On the other hand, the first condition of his success is to be able to depart from such a view as in the case of images viewed not only at an elevation, but at a distance, when the images are moved about in processions. The artist is here faced not with the possibility of criticism from an Iconographical standpoint, but with public criticism from the standpoint and viewpoint of the millions. In still other cases, though himself an outsider, he has really had to view a party from the standpoint of the principal figure in it. It is as if a king or a saint, the observed of all observers at a party, were making a picture or taking an X-ray photo of it, from where he happens to be seated. These considerations apply to most of our extant works of art, whether images or group representation in friezes. We have it on the authority of Emperor Asoka that exhibitions of images were common in his day—Utsava and Vimāna—in popular processions.

As regards anatomical details which, by commonly accepted criticism, are considered suppressed from ignorance, it has got to be urged that the artist may have had to sacrifice them deliberately in the interest of expression. Not only was a contortion necessary to express the rasas of Bibhatsa and Bhayānaka already referred to, but an accentuation for expressing the hāsyas, as when we put a Falstaff on boards. Again the effects of anatomical accentuation or attenuation in the figure must be considered along with the usual drapery and bejewelled ornamentation taken for granted whenever the premier image was presented to the view. The expressions
of moving images in processions may be the real reference in otherwise obscure passages which abound in the entire range of our early literature. 'Images of gods appear to smile in joy, to dance in merriment betimes, to laugh in glee; at other times to weep bitterly in pain, or quake with fearful portent.' The 'sentiment artistique' has always been regarded in Indian Art as much more important than 'maistre de facture'.

It has sometimes been assumed that 'local colour' accounts for the variations in the drapery of images. It is true that in representing his divine or ideal man or woman the artist is naturally guided by the forms with which he is familiar in life. But there is also a symbolical significance. We can easily distinguish the flowing and folded costumes of the Kandahar matron from the swinging and fluttering lines of drapery of an apsaras or Indian coquette, and the weight of jewellery on the Benares bosom from the bejewelled elaboration of danseuse ornamentation.

**Symbolism in Iconography.**

The symbolism of Iconography is a subject in itself, and cannot be attempted within the limits of this short article. In the first place, there is the position and pose of the Mūlasthāna to be considered, then those of the utsava vigrahās and parivāra beras. Next come the decoration of the images and their background, the symbolism of the mudras or delicate and expressive finger-poses, of the āyudhas in the hands considered in connection with the conception of the deity in the light of Epic or Purānic traditions, the number disposition and relative functions, as thus conceived, of the arms of the deities represented; the vāhanas or vehicles and lesser auxiliaries of divinity when engaged in the work assigned to each both in the mythological, ceremonial or ritualistic and the spiritual, philosophical or sociological aspect; and the place of the deity as properly conceived, in helping the sublimation of the infinitesimal into the infinite, by repeated processes of transvaluation of values. I propose in this article to touch only on the last of these aspects.

The figure of Nāṭarāja has elicited universal praise as a work of art. Even more beautiful it would appear when considered in the light of Hindu symbolism. There is much more than meets the eye in this melody of moving loveliness, this rhythm of dance and dynamic movement, this monument
of radiating beauty evolved out of the convulsions of the cosmos for those whom the eddies of life leave no leisure for innocent joy. He is cloaked in daintiness and delight, an array of flickering flashes of memory floating on the face of dark oblivion (āpasmāra), which is crushed under the ecstatic beating of his foot. His spouse (Śivakāmi) is Rapture unalloyed, free from the vesture of flowing, flapping draperies and cloaked in the transparent fabric of her (lāśya) magnetic and mastering smile. The oblivion is the mystic silence men call death, which sheds its terrors when it is realized that it is but an entrance to a new life. The couple dance in the perfumed darkness beneath the star-bespangled heavens, filled with the scent and savour of the music of the spheres, which sets young life about laughing and leaping in glee; they dance with the dew on the crest of the moon-beam, whose silver streak is tinged with liquid fire from the constellation Ārdra. They dance with the Sun, ruddy and lotus-handed, in fast pursuit of gold-haired rosy Dawn. Dawn flees before the Sun, with flying hair and fluttering hem, on the wings of the breeze blowing fresh and free. But Life and Nature are in deathless yoke. Life shoots up like the Sun, its heavenward leg in Īrdvaca-tāndava pointing to regions before which Lady Beauty bows with resigned air and wondering awe, as Tillai Amman did at Chidambaram. So goes the round of dying and deathless life.

Corresponding to the conception of Śiva as master-dancer we have that of Vishnu as Ranganātha, the ‘Lord of the stage’ which is this phenomenal world, represented by the dragon Ananta, which is not so much ‘eternity imprisoned in time’ as space-time clinging to eternity, and anxiously awaiting its manifestation. There is some reason to believe that the Ranga-maṇḍapa of Ellora means the hall of Ranganātha rather than a ‘hall of colours’ as it has been interpreted. The conception was that of the lord of the stage resting at the end of a period of involution and witnessing the evolution of fresh forms of life as Ranganātha witnesses the dance of Naṭārāja at Chidambaram. In at least one instance we do have the Stage-Manager in rock-sculpture hidden under a thick screen of plaster, and a story of creation—Vishnu as Kshirābdhi-Nārāyaṇa—painted in red and green on the plaster. This is in a rock temple of the later Pallava period, at Malayāḍippatti in the Pudukottah State.
The most important point for the student of Hindu iconography is to remember that he is dealing not with the worship of idols but of principles of spirituality enshrined as crystallized conceptions. The rationale of Hindu image-worship is thus explained by the school of Chaitanya: ‘Those who say that God has no form, either material or spiritual and again imagine a false form for worship, are certainly idolatrous. But those who see the spiritual form of the deity in their soul’s eye, carry that impression as far as possible to the mind, and then frame an emblem for the satisfaction of the material eye, for continual study of the higher feelings, are by no means idolatrous.’ Abul Fazl has explained in the Ain-i-Akbari that ‘Hindus worship images only as representatives of celestial beings to whom they turn while at prayer to prevent their thoughts from wandering.’ Numerous texts in the Purāṇas help to bring out the symbolism not only of the mūrti-bheda, the crystallizations of spiritual images—but of minute details down to the weapons in the hands of deities.

To cite one or two instances, from the Varāha Purāṇa: Chakra of Vishnu is explained here as symbolising the cycle of time (Kāla-chakra)—whose whirling brings in its consolations as well as its revenge (Nichair gacchatyupari cha dasā chakranemi krameṇa). Sankha, the milk-white product of the milky brine, is the sātvic destroyer of avidyā the form of which is darkness and dreadful silence. The sword (Asi) cuts the inextricable tangled knot of samsāra which the individual has woven for himself out of the moss he has gathered in his rambles through the æons. It is the weapon of detachment (asanga śastra) held firmly in the hand for cutting asunder the undecaying aśvattha tree of which the Vedic texts are redolent in numerous passages. Similarly the lotus in the creeping convoluted tendrils is the Mother Earth eternally at work on her spinning wheel of creation. As regards the perplexing forms of Durgā the same Purāṇa explains them as symbolising the hounds of passion let loose in the strife of eternal spirit struggling for victory over deadening matter,—love, hate, greed, vanity, illusion, contempt, envy and jealousy—which are finally sublimated into eternal Goodness and Light, as these energies are described as finally entering the body of the Goddess.

But the highest step in Hinduism is reached long after the idol is regarded even as a stepping stone to higher things,
a scaffolding framed by feeble spirituality in its fitful efforts at subjective evolution. In abysmal darkness dwell they, who worship concrete images as ends and not as means to the end, says the Ṣāvāśya; and one has to demolish the images of his heart and those after his heart, as did Rāmakrishṇa Paramahamsa in modern times after the image of Kāli had ceased to be of use for him. In still more pitiable eternal gloom, says the same Upanishad, are those intent on destroying idols (as Mahmuds of Ghazni and India have done in modern times,—the idolators of abstract divinity, whose hearts might enshrine many an unworthy idol but who could ill brook the sight of an image in stone or in bronze). The voice of discretion, audible through indistinct, finds in Sambhūti and Asambhūti alike means to an end; iconolatry and iconoclasm being regarded at different stages of spiritual evolution, as fulfilling their function as stepping stones to the pilgrim, or beacon-lights on his progress, eclipsed like every other sādhana, when the Light of the Universal dawns on the longing soul and there is the realization of the One Reality.

\[\text{Aum pūrṇam adah pūrṇam idam pūrṇāt pūrṇam udbhayate} \]

\[\text{Pūrṇasya pūrṇamādaya pūrṇamevāvasishyate} \]