

The Study of Śaivāgamic Treatment of Mahābhūtas Related to Maṇḍalas and Arts

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The two great master-scriptures which deal with science of space and forms are the Śaivāgamas and the Śilpa-Śāstras, corroborative and correspondent to each other. However, we can deduce an element of difference between these two scriptural streams. While the Śilpa works set forth the details concerned with structural forms alone, not disowning the concept of mathematical space and time, the Āgamic scriptures copiously deal with both the conceptual and structural forms based on the concepts of space and time.

According to the broader classification of the forms, as found in the Śaivāgamas, there are two kinds of forms, one conceptual and the other structural or sculptural. The conceptual forms are strictly meant for the purpose of meditation and intuition alone. They are not subjected to iconographisation. Most of the forms whose lineaments are described in the Śāktāgamas and in the Śaivāgamas pertaining to the Spanda or Trika system are conceptual alone. The Tantrarāja Tantra specifically states that the forms of Nityā Devīs and of other Deities except that of Śrī Lalitā or Trika system are conceptual alone. The Tantrarāja Tantra specifically states that the forms of Nityā Devīs and of other Deities except that of Śrī Lalitā or Rājarājeśvarī or Bhuvaneśvarī should not be sculpted and installed. These forms are to be mentally visualized or contemplated based on the respective dhyāna Ślokas. Even in the Śaivāgamas we have this kind of restriction. The Vātulāgama states:

Kartrādikam caturṇāṃ tu sthāpanam na kārayet

(Vātulāgama), 1.118

The forms of karṭṛ sādākhyaṃ, mūrti sādākhyaṃ, amūrti sādākhyaṃ and Śiva sādākhyaṃ are not to be sculpted and installed. These four sādākhyas are to be meditated upon by the sages and the yogins.

Śiva's Conceptual Forms

ADHVAN-MŪRTI

There are two kinds of conceptual form pertaining to Lord Śiva - one is known as adhvan-mūrti and the other is known as aṣṭa-mūrti. The concept

of adhvan is common to South Indian Śaivism, Kashmir śaivism and Śāktism. In a distorted pattern, this concept figures in some of the Pāncarātra texts also.² To dwell upon the philosophical significance and import of the concept of adhvan is to go beyond the scope of the present paper and therefore only relevant and important details concerned with the mahābhūtas are presented and discussed here.

Mantra, pada, varṇa, bhuvana, tattva and kalā are the six kinds of adhvan which constitute the cosmic-cum-amorphic body of Lord Śiva.³ In His adhvan form, Lord Śiva assumes Varṇādhvan as His skin; padādhvan as His head; tattvādhvan as His heart; bhuvanādhvan as His body-hairs; mantrādhvan as His blood, semen, marrow, bone, etc. and kalādhvan as entire limbs. The Makuṭāgama states:

varṇādhvā ca padādhvā ca tattvādhvā bhuvanādhvakaā |
 mantrādhvā ca kalādhvā ca sādākhyasya svarūpakam ||
 adhvāsthānakramaṃ vakṣye viśeṣāttu maheśvara |
 varṇādhvā tu tvagādhārah, padādhvā ca śirastathā ||
 tattvādhvā hṛdayaṃ caiva bhuvanādhvā tu romakam |
 mantrādhvā rudhirādhārah śuklamajjāsthi rūpakam ||
 kalādhvā caiva sarvāṅgaṃ itthaṃ sādākhyarūpakam ||

(Makuṭāgama), II.620-23

This cosmic-cum-amorphic form is the very basis of temple rituals. Of these six adhvans, kalādhvan is the foremost and dominating one because all other adhvans remain included and pervaded by this kalādhvan. Kalādhvan is constituted of five kalīs; tattvādhvan comprises thirty-six principles; bhuvanādhvan consists of two hundred and twenty-four bhuvanas; varṇādhvan consists of fifty-one letters; padādhvan consists of eighty-one words of esoteric significance; and mantrādhvan consists of eleven mantras, specifically known as saṃhitāmantras. The gross elements (mahābhūtas) are characterized by these adhvans and this characterization establishes the correspondence between the gross elements and the adhvan from of Lord Śiva. All the ritualistic activities concerned with the adhvan from have their direct interaction with the gross elements.

An understanding of kalādhvan is essential in order to comprehend the significance of aṣṭa-mūrti form of Lord Śiva. Nivṛtti, pratiṣṭhā, vidyā, śānti and śāntyatīta are the five kalīs, each one pervaded by the succeeding one. Śāntyatīta kalī remains unpervaded and ultimate and it is known as primal space (paramākāśa) which gives rise to the emergence of śabda prapañca and artha prapañca. Each kalī includes in itself the constituents of other adhvans as has been shown pictorially.

AṢṬA-MŪRTI

Lord Śiva manifests Himself in the form of earth, water, fire, air, space, sun, moon and individual self. Since earth, water, fire, air and space are the last

five principles in the metaphysical scheme of Śaivism and since sun and moon are also considered to be the resultant products of the taijasa aspect of certain tattvas, it becomes obvious that the aṣṭa-mūrti form is directly related to tattvādhvan.

Adhvan form	Conceptual Form	Aṣṭa-mūrti form
kalī		Earth
tattva		Water
bhuvana		Fire
varāa		Air
pada		Space
mantra		Sun
		Moon
		Self

(The self, being one of the eight forms of Śiva, realizes and attains its inherent Śivahood or Śivatva through the methodic and effective contemplation of adhvan-form and aṣṭa-mūrti form)

Characteristics of the Gross Elements (Mahābhātas)

All things are the purposeful modifications of the pure and impeccable Śiva. The term Śiva itself denotes absolute and unsullied purity.

The Vātulāgama states (1.20):

śuddhatvāt Śivam ityuktam

Since all things are to be realized as the modifications of Pure Being, the presence of inertness in the worldly objects and creations is made to vanish during the course of visualizing them through the process of contemplation and synthesis. The scriptures train our mind to look at the worldly objects not as endowed with inertness but as supercharged with divinities.

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad (VI.4.4) teaches us how to look at the sun as composed of three primal forms: "Whatever red form the sun has' it is the form of heat, whatever is white, it is the form of water and whatever is dark, it is the form of earth. Thus vanishes the quality of the sun from the sun, the modification being only a name arising from common parlance, while the truth is, that it is of only three forms." "They knew that whatever appeared unintelligible is a combination of just these three divinities (of fire, water and earth)." (Chandogya upanisad VI.4.7)

Keeping this view in mind, let us now proceed to know the characteristics of the gross elements as set forth in the Śaivagamas. Each gross element has a particular form, pertinent symbol and colour. Each gross element is potentialized by a particular letter, activated by a deity and controlled by a supreme Lord.⁴

Gross Elements	Form	Symbol	Colour	Potentialising letter	Activising deity	Controlling Lord
Earth	Square	vajra	Gold or yellow	la	Brahmā	Sadyojāta
Water	Half-moon	lotus	white	va	Viṣṇu	Vāmadeva
Fire	Triangle	svastika	red	ra	Rudra	Aghora
Air	Hexagon	six dots	black/smoky	ya	Maheśvara	Tatpuruṣa
Space	Circle	point	pure crystal	ha	Sadaśiva	Iśāna

Each gross element is related to each one of the five kalīs as shown here under:

- Earth related to Nivṛtti Kalā
- Water related to pratiṣṭhā Kalā
- Fire related to Vidyā Kalā
- Air related to Śānti Kalā
- Space related to Śāntyatīta Kalā

It should be noted here that earth itself is not nivṛtti kalā (as some of the modern scholars of Śaiva Siddhānta have explained). The gross elements are not to be equated or identified with pañca-kalās. The gross elements are functioning regularly as pervaded and induced by pañca-kalās.

Concordance and Discordance between the Gross Elements

In the process of purification of the body characterized by the five gross elements, one has to realize the concordance, discordance and neutralism existing between the gross elements. These three modes are denoted by the terms mitratva, vṛddhatva and madhyastha, respectively.

The nature of concordance exists (i) between earth and water, and (ii) between fire and air.

The nature of discordance exists (i) between earth and air, and (ii) between water and fire.

The nature of neither concordance nor discordance exists (i) between earth and fire, and (ii) between water and air.

The only element left out in this analysis is space. Since the space (bhūtākāśa) is the principle of accommodation and since it gives room for the movement and existence of all objects, space is in concordance (mitra svabhāva) with the other elements.

Śrī Nirmalamaṇi Deśika, the celebrated commentator on the Dīkṣā Vidhi (Kriyākramadyotikā) of Aghoraśivācārya explains this theory of concordance and discordance thus:

bhūmipavanayoḥ jalānalayośca eṣāṃ caturṇām bādhya-bādhaka
bhāvena parasparam avasthiteḥ śatrutā | bhūmijalayoḥ pavanā-
nalayośca anyonyāṃ poṣakatvān mitratvaṃ | jalapavanayoḥ kṣitya-
gnyoścāparasparaṃ na śatrutvabhāvamiti madhyasthvmeṣāṃ |
ākāśasya tu vārivāyusīkhikṣitīnām avakāśadāyatvena mitratvamiti |

Pervasion of the Gross Elements through Aṣṭa-mūrti

In his conceptual form known as Aṣṭa-mūrti, Lord Śiva assumes different forms and names.⁵

Prthivī-mūrti is known as Śarva
Jala-mūrti is known as Bhava
Vahni-mūrti is known as Paśupati
Vāyu-mūrti is known as Īśāna
Ākāśa-mūrti is known as Bhāma
Candra-mūrti is known as Mahādeva
Sūrya-mūrti is known as Rudra
Yajamāna-mūrti is known as Ugra

The gross elements are elevated to the higher realms of metaphysical principles by Śarva, Paśupati, Īśāna and Bhāma.⁶

The individual self, though it is bodily confined to impure māyā, is capable of being in touch with the principles of mixed and pure planes only through the grace of Lord Śiva, who manifests Himself as Śarva, Bhava, Paśupati, Īśāna and Bhāma correspondent to earth, water, fire, air and space respectively.

Gross Elements and Letters (mātrkā-akṣara).

It has already been stated that each gross element gets potentialized by a particular letter. Apart from this, the Vātulāgama provides an interesting classification of mātrkā-akṣaras in relation to the five gross elements.⁷

1. Letters belonging to prthivī varga (earth) (10)
kṣa, la, ha, sa, ṣa, śa, va, la, ra, ya
2. Letters belonging to jala varga (water) (10)
ma, bha, ba, pha, pa, na, dha, da, tha, ta
3. Letters belonging to vahni varga (fire) (10)
ṇa, ḍha, ḍa, ṭha, ṭa, ṇā, jha, ja, cha, ca
4. Letters belonging to vāyu varga (air) (10)
ṇa, gha, ga, kha, ka, a?, a?, au, o, ai
5. Letters belonging to vyoma varga (space) (11)
e, ī, ḷ, ṛ, ṛ, ū, u, ī, i, ā, a

The vowels are shared by the gross elements as follows:

Earth	-	aḥ, aṃ, au
Water	-	o, ai, e
Fire	-	ī, ḷ, ṛ, ṛ

Air	-	ū, u, ī
Space	-	i, ā, a

Irrespective of these classifications, the Vātulāgama expatiates the supremacy of the letter ha and of the space over the other letters and elements.⁸ That is why the sound of ha gets associated with most of the mantras during the ritualistic processes. The science of space, as dealt with in the Śaivāgamas has not yet been accorded due attention and diligent study.

Gross Elements under the Context of Rituals

Āsanas

In the ritualistic process of śivārcana, Lord Śiva is invoked and installed on a mystic pedestal known as śivāsana which itself is constituted of five āsanas known as anantāsana, siṃhāsana, yogāsana, padmāsana and vimalāsana. Each āsana, with an attributed form represents a gross element.⁹

Asana	Form	Element represented
1. Anantāsanam	triangle	Earth
2. Siṃhāsanam	square	Water
3. Yogāsanam	octagonal	Fire
4. Padmāsanam	circle	Air
5. Vimalāsanam	hexagon	Space

i. In the process of invocation (āvāhana) Lord Śiva is contemplated as seated on Yogāsana.

ii. In the process of holy bath (abhiṣeka) he is contemplated as seated on siṃhāsana.

iii. In the process of offering of flowers (arcana) he is meditated upon as seated on padmāsana.

iv. In the process of offering (naivedya) he is meditated upon as seated on vimalāsana.

v. In the process of praising, singing and dancing, he is contemplated upon as seated on anantāsana¹⁰

Basically, each āsana is composed of a tattva or a group of tattvas and on the whole śivāsana is nothing but a mystic pedestal composed of thirtysix principles (tattvas). The pīṭha part of Śivaliṅga is to be identified with śivāsana.¹¹

INSTALLATION

When an image is duly installed in a temple, it is imputed with the cosmic force through the process of nyāsa. The five gross elements are identified with the lower portion of the image.

YĀGAŚĀLĀ

Every construction is to be strictly based on vāstu puruṣa-maṇḍala. Lon-

gevity, auspiciousness, strength and beauty could be accomplished to any construction only through vāstumāṇḍala. Satish Grover seems too harsh in commenting that in the Vāstuśāstras there is much that is deliberate esoteric mumbo-jumbo.¹² He has utterly failed to realize the intrinsic validity and significance of the vāstu puruṣa-māṇḍalā, the confluence of cosmic forces.

Needless to mention that temple construction is based on vāstu māṇḍala. Yāgaśālās also are constructed at the time of consecration and of other auspicious functions based on vāstumāṇḍala (either maṇḍūka or paramaśāyi). These yāgaśālās represent both adhvan form and aṣṭa-mūrti form of Lord Śiva.

Śrī Pañcākṣarayogin, the author of Śaiva-Bhūṣaṇa states that the term maṇṭapa itself denotes the presence of five gross elements-*ma* meaning earth, *ṇa* meaning water, *ṭa* meaning fire, *pa* meaning air and *m* (*makāra* with bindu) meaning space.¹³ The eight fire-pits constructed inside the yāga maṇṭapa represent the eight forms of Lord Śiva.

The entire space covered by the yāga maṇṭapa represent the supreme kalī, namely śāntyatīta, the entrance in the east - śāntikalī; entrance in the south - vidyākalī; the entrance in the west - pratiṣṭhākalā; and the entrance in the north - nivṛttikalā. (Here again, confusion is to be avoided. Basically, nivṛtti (*sadyojāta*) is always to be ideated so as to be in the west and pratiṣṭhā, to be in the gross elements.)

Since pañca-kalās are related to pañca-bhūtas, it becomes evident that the gross elements are represented by the yāga maṇṭapa.

Gross Elements and the Fire-pits (kuṇḍas)

Inside the yāga maṇḍapa, nine fire-pits are to be constructed along the m?nu?apada of the vāstu māṇḍala, four in the main directions, four in the intermediate directions and the one (pradhāna kuṇḍa) between east and north-east.

- i. The fire-pit in the form of a square which is in the east represents earth.
- ii. The fire-pit in the form of a circle which is in the west represents water.
- iii. The fire-pit in the form of a yoni which is in the south-east represents fire.
- iv. The fire-pit in the form of a hexagon which is in the north-west represents air.
- v. The fire-pit in the form of an octagonal which is in the north-east represents space.

Gross Elements and the Maṇḍalas

With an emphasis on certainty, it can rightly be claimed that the most aesthetic aspect of Indian rituals is maṇḍala. Almost all religious systems of India are employing maṇḍala as a device in their ritualistic activities. In fact, in Buddhism, the science of mystic device-maṇḍala-has become the main core.

Being an artistic device, maṇḍala incorporates in itself all the signifi-

cant aspects of symbols, sounds, forms, colours and divinities, with a stronghold on metaphysical and ontological principles. The Śaivāgamas excel all other scriptures with their elaborate and effective details and descriptions of various maṇḍalas. In the Śaivāgamic group, the Kiraṇāgama is held in high esteem owing to its copious details and directions on the mechanism of maṇḍalas. Besides its separate chapter on maṇḍala-vidhi it prescribes vaktra-maṇḍala for the worship of Sarasvati and kalaśa-maṇḍala for the worship of Lore Mṛtyuñjaya, the details of which are not to be seen in any other Śaivāgama.

Maṇḍala is an aesthetic and mystic design in which the combination and intersection of various forms related to the gross elements and to the deities concerned have their full play. The correspondence of colours, the distribution of letters (mātrkā akṣaras) and the esoteric significance enhance the mystic value of maṇḍalas. Each maṇḍala has its own principal deity and attendant deities directly or indirectly related to the five gross elements. So the rituals which involve maṇḍala-pūjā are highly efficacious in energizing and sanctifying the environment conditioned by the gross elements. Because of such importance, the Śaivāgamas have specifically set forth the details of maṇḍala-worship in connection with monthly festival.

In the month of meṣa (April-May), sarvatobhadra-maṇḍala should be worshipped.

In the month of bṛṣabha (May-June), svastika-maṇḍala.

In the month of mithuna (June-July), navanābha-maṇḍala.

In the month of karkāṭa (July-August), sarvatobhadra-maṇḍala.

In the month of siṃha (August-September), svāyambhuva-maṇḍala.

In the month of kanyā (September-October), subhadrā-maṇḍala.

In the month of tulā (October-November) gaurīlatā-maṇḍala

In the month of vṛścika (November-December) sarvatobhadra-maṇḍala

In the month of dhanu (December - January), svastika-maṇḍala.

In the month of makura (January-Rebruary), umākānta-maṇḍala.

In the month of kumbha (February-March), padma-maṇḍala.

In the month of mṛga (March-April), svastika-maṇḍala.

Apart from these, there are numerous maṇḍalas such as ananta vijaya, taṅka, prākāra, latāliṅga, etc.

In the Śaivāgamic texts, it has been declared that square is the basis for both, fire-pits (kuṇḍas) and maṇḍalas.

The symbolism and correspondence of colour is the essential aspect of maṇḍala. Ācārya or upāsaka is to be acquainted with the infallible knowledge of colour correspondence. In the science of maṇḍala, white represents water, kṛta yuga, sattvagūṇa, buddhi tattva; red represents fire, tretā yuga, rajogūṇa, kalī tattva; black represents air, dvāpara yuga, tamogūṇa, niyati tattva; yellow (gold) represents earth, kali yuga, śuddha vidyā tattva; pure crystal represents space, avyakta tattva and Śiva tattva.

Gross Elements and Kumbha

Inside the yāgamaṅtapa, especially at brahma-sthāna, the main altar (vedikā) is to be constructed. At bottom part of vedikā, and upavedikā is to be made. On the surface of the main altar (vedikā), paddy, rice, sesamum, parched-rice and other grains are to be placed in order.

Once arranged in this pattern, the vedikā becomes representative of sivasana which includes in itself five āsanās as has already been explained.

Upavedikā	anantāsana	prthivī-maṅḍala
Mahāvedikā	siṃhāsana	jala-maṅḍala
Paddy	yogāsana	vahni-maṅḍala
Rice	padmāsana	vāyu-maṅḍala
Sesamum	vimalāsana	ākāśa-maṅḍala

The kumbha which is placed on the grains represents Lord Śiva.¹⁴

Gross Elements and Five Causal Sounds.

The Ajitāgama (XX.259) lays down the rule in the fourth quarter (yāma) of the night, the great śabdās should be made with śankha and dundubhi. The Kāraṇāgama also enjoins that the five great causal sounds should be made at the termination of night. The five great causal sounds are related to the five gross elements.

Sound born of wooden instruments (dāruja)	-	Earth
Sound born of conch (śankha)	-	Water
Sound born of metal instruments (lohaja)	-	fire
Sound born of flute, etc. (vaṃśa)	-	air
Sound born of songs (geya)	-	space

rātrāntake viśeṣeṇa sarvadaivapriyārthakam |
 kuryāt - pañcamahśabdaṃ tato 'śubha nivṛttaye ||
 dāruja? pṛthvī jātaṃ śaṃkhajaṃ cāpyamucyate |
 āgneyaṃ lohajaṃ proktaṃ vāyavyaṃ vaṃśajaṃ bhavet ||
 geyaṃ gaganajātaṃ syāt pañcaite śabda ucyate |

kāraṇāgama I.31.34-37a

These five causal sounds related to the gross elements are to be sounded to ward off inauspiciousness and to please all the deities.

Gross Elements in Relation to Music and Dance

There are sixteen kinds of upacāras offered to the Lord at the end of the pūjā-process. These upacāras are classified into five in relation to the five gross elements. In the course of these upacāras, the fourteenth is reya or music and the fifteenth is dance (nṛtya). These two are related to the space element. Just as there is no greater element than space so also there is no upacāra more effective and auspicious than music and dance. The Śaivāgamic scriptures prescribed particular rāgas for the particular divisions of a day.

In the early morning, songs set on gāndhāra rāga
 In the next division, songs set on mālava rāga
 In the midday, songs set on takka rāga
 In the next division, songs set on kauśika
 In the evening, songs set on indola
 In the night, songs set on pañcama

These songs should be followed by nāṭya as enjoined in Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra.¹⁵ The following varieties of nāṭya and their appropriate time and place of performance are mentioned in the Śaivāgamas.¹⁶

samapāta, bhujāṅga, maṇḍala, daṇḍapāda
 bhujāṅgaatrāsa, kuñcita, bhujāṅga lalita.
 ākuñcita, urdhvapāda

(from bhujāṅga to urdhvapāda -from east to north east)

Here we see how the Temple rituals give rise to aesthetic and fine arts. Impressed by the early and significant development of ritual behaviour in Greek life, Jane Harrison concludes that art had its origin only in rituals. This theory is equally applicable to Indian Arts also.

Conclusion

The way in which the gross elements have been explained and inter-related in the Śaivāgamas, seems to be unique and significant. In order to restructure ourselves, we are trained to destructure the gross elements in such a way as to look at them as not invested with inertness but as invested with divinity and as charged with symbols, colours and sounds. All the ritualistic activities have their direct effect on the gross elements. The study of Śaivāgamas and Śilpaśāstras is sure to award the reader with a sound knowledge of the interaction between the rituals, images and the elements.

References:

1. This sort of conceptual form, designed for meditation alone, figures largely in Buddhism also. "Instead of multiplying and projecting Buddha images, the goal of the adept is often to 'visualize' them" -W.Randolph Kloetzli, Buddhist Cosmology (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1989) p.107.

2. For example, see the Padma-Saṃhitā. They postulate kālādhvan dealing with time and its fractions, omitting the kālādhvan.

3. There are some references in the Vedas to this advan concept. "Adhvanām pataye namo namaḥ" "Pathinām pataye namaḥ", etc., occurring in the Rudrādhyāya of the Yjurveda refer to the adhvanmūrti.

4. See Kāmikāgama, IV. 66b-76.

The rationale behind the correspondence between the gross elements and their form, symbol, colour etc., has been explained in my commentary on the uṇmaivīlakam.

5. For further details with regard to the descriptions of the forms of Śarvā, Bhava, see the works Pratiṣṭhā Aṣṭādaśa Kriyāvali and the Śivaliṅga Praiṣṭhā Vidhi of Aghoraśivācārya.
6. See the Siddhānta Śārāvalī, IV.33.
7. See the Vātulāgama, Ch. 2 and Ch.4.
8. Ibid., IV.22-30 for the varied theories of relationship between the gross elements and the letters, proposed in the system of Kashmir Śaivism, see Abhinavagupta's Parātrīśikāvivaraṇa.
9. Sakalīgamasāra Saṅgraha, p.81
10. Kāraṇāgama, pūrva, 30.53b-55.
11. Anantāsana which is in the form of triangle represents earth. But, we have already seen that earth is represented by a square maṇḍala. These theories are not to be confused. These are to be understood against the background of esoteric significance.
12. Satish Grover, The Architecture of Indian Buddhist and Hindu, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1980 p.172.
13. See the Śaiva-Bhūṣaṇa of Pañcākṣarayogi, verse, 192.
14. Ibid, verse, 229.
15. See the Kāraṇāgama, pūrva 31.102b-104a.
16. See the Mohotsavavidhi of Aghoraśivācārya. ẽ
