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EARTH ALIVE IN ART AND SYMBOLISM

Religion which grew in an essentialistic tradition of thinking is facing unprecedented crisis and is seeking to renew itself by embracing the very ancient existentialist attitude to life. The essentialistic orientation to life tries to exclude new possible understanding of reality and emergent life-styles, and being totalitarian in its approach, it dominates and subdues what is earthly and bodily in human existence. Today the essentialist fortress of organised religion is showing serious cracks and the faithful, the people of God who nurture faith, are coming home to their original and existential life-springs of body and earth. If we speak in terms of the phenomenon of consciousness, the human being is becoming aware of himself as the *animal symbolicum* or rather as the 'religious animal'.

Man, the Symbolizer

It will be interesting to note that the sense of the symbolic and the religious originated and matured in the human being when he related to the earth in a special way. Till recently, earth was considered a profound mystery; it was thought to be unlimited, unknowable and indefinable. It was only about thirty years back, man soaring up in a satellite above in the space beyond, saw earth as a small blue globe. We could say, perhaps that one event finally drained out the remaining drops of earth's mystery. Man could rationally comprehend the earth almost totally by scanning the depths of the oceans, conquering tall mountain peaks and encompassing the sky travelling at ultrasonic speed, but by that feat the highly rationalistic and scientist human

1. The essentialistic attitude to reality has been ratified by Aristotle's rigid conception of the nature of ontic essence.
2. Psychologist Rollo May considers man as a symbolizer when he says: "... An individual experiences himself as a self in terms of symbols" arising from the archetypal, personal and cultural levels of being. cf. "The Significance of Symbols" in *Symbolism in Religion*, p. 81-82, quoted in Michael Amaladoss, "Symbol and Mystery", *Journal of Dharma*, II (October, 1977), pp. 382-396.

being lost his home, viz., earth steeped in mystery and simultaneously, we could also say that man lost his aptitude for the symbolic and the religious.

Works of art and symbols express the psychic and the spiritual experiences of the human being.³ Psychic experiences of the basic emotions like erotic love, wonder, fear, or grief are expressed through the works of art and their mystery is integrated into human existence through various symbols. By being conscious of the mystery of life through art and symbols, the human being finds wholeness and experiences bliss. These emotional and spiritual experiences are linked to the primal knowledge of the earth. The human being sees earth's wrath manifested in thunder-storms, flash flood waters, devastating tidal waves, all-consuming wildfires, and so on. Unless the human being experiences similar things, how will he, for example, express his fury with its mystery? It is our contention that the intimate experience of the earth's vitality aids human self-understanding and self-expression. For instance, we understand earth's unconditional care for the human being in the mango trees that give delicious mangoes in a mysterious fashion, year after year, in a surface well that provides unending springs of thirst-beating fresh water or in the skies that surround us every day with warmth and light. Through these primal experiences human being comes to know of love as something unconditional and names it the *divine*. The human journey towards greater self-understanding and self-expression is made possible when he is able to associate himself with ever deeper sources of human experience - the vitality of the earth.

When *man, the symbolizer* experiences the earth in its perennial vitality, he is inspired and induced to express his experience through artistic and symbolic means. Then the products of his consciousness - the works of art and symbols - are not to be seen divorced from the process of symbolization. More than the works of art and symbols, what is important to us is what the symbols do to the human being, or how the human consciousness is shaped through them. The human symbolizing consciousness, when intimately in contact with the vitality

3. Symbols anchored in concrete human experience of reality has at least two physical points of origin: the microcosm of human body and the macrocosm of the earth, the biosphere, and here we consider mainly the latter aspect.

of the earth, transforms the whole realm of mundane reality into a *human world*. Earth then, is no more the formless primal matter in the dark abyss, but a *world meaningfully set up*, where the human being feels at home and secure. Earth, with its different epiphanies through art and symbols, is one of the primary means of achieving human being's *at homeness* with himself.

Co-existence with the Earth

To understand the mystery of the earth, we may look into the human being's ancient culture of co-existence with the earth, because life in ancient ages could be better described in one sentence: they lived harmoniously with the earth⁴. They lived knowing, revering and loving the earth as children would live the day-to-day life with their mother, and this is how we traditionally hear about the ancients. They had no agriculture; earth on her own gave them her fruits generously. There was no need to plough through her vitals to hurt it or force her in any way to yield an abundant harvest; the earth was free. Like the earth, people too were free; They were strangers to the army, courts, and punishments. Without laws binding them, they were transparent to their fellow beings, and they had no need of theft, extortion or deception.

In Greek mythology the primal man, Cronus was a child of the earth. According to the myth, in the age of Cronus, everything needed for sustenance was abundantly available from the earth; human being lived in the uncultivated paradise.⁵ The people were nomads who had no permanent settlement. The spirit of the earth was their main support and guide. They discovered the spirit of the earth in the total corpus of the plant and animal world and closely observing this biosphere, they registered its rhythms. The ever-changing seasons and the ever-moving planets showed forth their rhythms. By observing them and attuning themselves to them they lived a harmonious life of co-existence with the earth.

4. Heidegger speaks of the 'emerging world' when human beings encounter a work of art. cf. Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art' *Basic Writings*, David Farrel Krell, Harper and Row, New York, 1977, p. 170.

5. cf. John Michell, *The Earth Spirit - Its ways, shrines and Mysteries*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1975, p. 3.

The nomadic people of ancient ages moved on to new settlements in yearly cycles through the migratory paths created by gods and determined by the ancestors. During such divinely ordained journeys they discovered each place endowed with divine significance. For them, a place was not merely the space measured out empirically, but rather the dwelling places of gods and spirits. Time and seasons too, they felt as divine. The seasons of the earth and concomitant growth patterns of the living beings were seen as the perennial creative work of the Divine. They did not have a linear approach to history which holds that earth created at a moment will come to nought at another. Rather, they had more of a cyclic view of time: the life of the earth spawns new life-forms in diverse shapes and manners at all places for all time, defying absolute beginnings and dissolutions.

Earthly Paradise

During the yearly cycle of migrations, the ancients discovered that the sun and moon were rising and setting at certain positions on the horizon. These places were observed being related to certain seasons and specific configurations of the stars in the sky. Thus they developed a scheme in which each place is associated with a day of the year and a plan of the heavenly stars and planets. On particular days of significance, the local gods spoke to the ancients in dreams and intuitions and showed them the Path of Life leading to abundance on earth and peace with themselves. This is a picture of the paradisiacal life of the ancients.

When the earth and the human being were in such a golden bond in the paradise (even today there are aboriginals in India who live like this), they experienced earth as a living and sacred body; the different functions of the sacred body were the playful activities of different spirits. The single earth spirit fulfilled many functions for them but in many names and appearances. The human being needed to receive new life (fertility), to cure diseases and alleviate pains (medicine), and to be comforted by knowing god's will for them (prophecy/oracle) – all these needs were fulfilled by the earth. These were not achieved by the ability or skill of man, but received as gifts from the bosom of the earth.

The ancients disliked to bore and mine the earth for minerals and to till the earth to cultivate it. They would have felt such

actions as tearing up the sacred body of the earth. Psychologist Erik Erikson in his book *Young Man Luther* alludes to why Martin Luther turned out to be a rebel. Luther's father had been a miner who bored the earth to take out coal and slate and earned big money marketing them. This wounding and plundering the earth would have caused unbearable pain in the deep recesses of Luther's psyche and unconsciously wanted to repair the damage being a prophet and rebel. In the same manner, the Red Indian aboriginals of North America used to refuse to plough and cultivate the earth considered it a sacrilege. Their prophet Smohalla opposing the move to turn his people into cultivators, said:

My young men shall never work. Men who work can not dream, and wisdom comes to us in dreams. You ask me to plough the ground. Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's breast? Then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest. You ask me to dig for stone. Shall I dig under her skin for her bones? Then when I die I cannot enter her body to be born again. You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it and be rich like white men. But how dare I cut off my mother's hair?⁶

The Spirit of the Earth

Many aboriginal peoples recognized the spirit of the earth; they revered and loved her. The ancients described and depicted this spirit of the earth as a pregnant woman or as a mother. From ancient sites at Canaan, Sumeria and Harappa, clay and stone figures of mother-earth goddesses have been excavated. Many of these devoid of beautiful form depicted her with huge bellies and hanging breasts. The beautiful dancing figurine unearthed from a Harappan site in the Indus Valley has been considered a symbol of earth's femininity. In the Indian subcontinent the goddesses like Sīta, Kāli, Laksmi, Cāmundi, Pārvati, Ambikā, Durgā and Śakti are also earth-virgins or earth-mothers. The word Pārvati comes from the Sanskrit word 'parvat' which means 'mountain'; mountain is earth itself. So too, 'Sīta' means 'furrow in the earth' or 'ploughed land'. The ancient goddess Laksmi representing earth's

6. Ibid., p. 4.

abundance is an aspect of the goddess of earthly vegetation. Durgā, the cardinal mother-goddess of India is a mountain-dweller and she symbolizes the chthonic energy of the earth.⁷ At the end of Durgā festival in Bengal, the clay statue of the goddess is deposited in a river; it symbolizes her return to the earth after visiting her beloved people.

Not only the goddesses, male gods like *appan* and *muttappan* known to the Dravidian people of South India, too represent the spirit of the earth. The *appan* (father) of Trikkākkara near Cochin, is represented by a pyramidal fresh cold of clay installed ceremoniously in *pūkkaḷam* (flower-mandala) on Onam festival day in Kerala; it simply means that Trikkākkara Appan is the spirit of the sacred soil, the earth. The gods Yama and Bali are important Dravidian *muttappan* gods who dwell in the underworld to give away earth's chthonic energy for the sustenance of the world - they are earth spirits. So too are male *yakṣas* who are the guardian spirits of the earth. The leader (*pati*) of the *yakṣa* legion (*gaṇa*) is Ganapati represented as pot-bellied and elephant-trunked. In the Purāṇas, Ganapati is Kubera, the king of *yakṣas* and *yakṣiṣis*. Kubera and his army guards the golden metals, precious stones and the seed-sprouting energy of the earth.⁸ Kubera is in fact a guardian spirit of the earth. Likewise the Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa gods, being the life of the Milky Ocean, are too earth gods.

The ancients visualized the creative energy of the earth not only as the individual goddesses and gods, but also as the tension between the polar opposites. In the oriental Japanese and Chinese cultures, we find the symbol of Yin-Yang⁹ which represents the polar energies of the earth. Visually, it is a dynamic diagram with two drop-shaped halves of a circle, one bright and the other dark, chasing each other cyclically. In it, the masculine sun-power and feminine moon-energy coalesce and resolve endlessly keeping the tension of life alive.

7. cf. Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony A Comparative Study of Indian Mythology from the Vedas to the Purāṇas*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1988, p. 162-165.

8. cf. Subhash Anand, *Major Hindu Festivals - A Christian Appreciation*, St. Paul Publications, Bombay, 1991, p. 77., Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *yakṣas* 2nd ed., Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1980.

9. cf. Jyoti Sahi, *The Child and the Serpent - Reflections on Popular Indian Symbols*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980, p. 196.

The ancient Indian form of thought Sāṃkhya Darśana too refer to the earth's polar principles of life. According to Sāṃkhya the origin of life is in the relation between the male principle *Puruṣa* and the female, *Prakṛti*. The vision of Yoga too is based on this understanding. The highly distinguished Indian theology of Śaiva Siddhānta presents the divine as the harmony of the male, Śiva and the female, Śakti. In Tantric philosophy and art we see how the earth/body/feminine energy conjoins the masculine energy to give fullness to life.

All over India we could see Tantric cult-objects and art-forms, especially in the Hindu temple. There the *liṅga-yoni* (phallus-vulva) figure sculpted in black granite is installed prominently at the 'womb-house' which is the most significant area in the temple. Womb-house is a dark room, a symbolic cave-space which has only one opening, normally to the east to receive the rising sun's warmth and light. There the *liṅga* is believed to have arisen from the earth, the *kṣetra* which is the tilled field. The *liṅga* does not stand alone, but clasped by the *yoni*.¹⁰ From this harmonious coalescence of earth energies, new life is created in the fields and in the human family. This ancient and basic conception of the union of polar earth energies is wide-spread in the Indian peninsula.

The ancients visualized earth's life also as the ever-flowing current; life flowed endlessly like a river; it is a process related to their own nomadic life. For the perennially travelling people, earth was wide expanse without boundaries; at each place, earth was a paradise and every river a sacred spring; earth's spirit extended all over.¹¹ But today leaving the nomadic life, the 'civilized' human being has adopted the settled life of the villages and towns and his experience of the living earth is dwindling. In the modern age, human beings having lost touch with the original sacred sites on earth, has opted to install them artificially in the village itself.

Kavu, an Artificial Paradise

For the ancient societies, forest was the world; the whole of uncultivated land was paradisiacal forest (*kādu*, in Dravidian languages).

10. cf. In Sanskrit, the root 'li' has the meaning 'to clasp'; from this *liṅga* gets the meaning: 'something clasped by *yoni*.'

11. cf. John Michell, *The Earth Spirit*, p. 7.

When forests were cleared to plant seed-lings, earth came to be known as 'field' (*nādu*, *kṣetra*). Then what we see are artificial and symbolic forests in the cultivated land. To allow the current of earth's life to flow into the field, patches of uncleared forests are allowed to stand because only in the pristine paradisiacal forest primal ethonic energies of fertility welled up. They are the *kāvus* or miniature forests found all over in Kerala till recently. In it, greenery like creepers, trees and shrubs and creatures like serpents, birds and insects had freedom to live unperturbed. In South Bihar, the tribal people are known as *sārna jan* meaning 'worshippers of sacred groves'. In Karnataka there are the *devaru kādu* meaning 'god's groves.' In the *kavu*, reigns the earth-goddess. In *sārna* it is the Sāla Paccho, the 'grand old lady of the sāl trees'; in Kerala, it is the feminine spirit of the Pāla tree. Pāla tree has milky juice flowing in its bark and milky trees are symbols of the mother-earth. They are grown in the *kāvu* and *ksetra* (here meaning temple) premises. The unploughed earth of these mini-forests are the sanctuaries of earth spirit.¹²

Not only the forest, but also a single tree can be symbolic of the earth. In the biblical paradise, there was the Tree of Life which bore fruits of immortality. It must have been a fig tree, a common Indo-Iranian symbol of the mother-earth.¹³ The other paradisiacal tree, whose fruit gives the knowledge of good and evil, must have been another aspect of the same tree. Actually it is the earth itself that is sprouting forth as tree; In India, the maternal fig tree that gave protection to the wandering 'Buddha-to-be' is the Holy Fig (*ficus religiosa*), the pipal tree. Some Buddhist *maṇḍala* designs depict gardens with the Enlightened One, Bodhisattva at the centre. The enlightened one is the *guru* of the forest-*āśrama* (hermitage), who imparts wisdom to the seekers. *Āśrama* is an Indian discovery meant to give the human being wisdom and wholeness of life which have been lost in the city life. Jesus regained his mental strength and clarity of purpose after praying in the Garden of Olive trees at Gethsamene. In India there are paintings which depict Krisna with his consort Lakṣmi beneath the kadamba tree. All these hint at how the tree, symbolic of the earth, brings together the polar

12. cf. M. Vannucci, 'Sacred groves or Holy Forests' *Concepts of Space - Ancient and Modern*, ed. by Kapila Vatsyayan, Abhinav Publications and Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, Delhi, 1991, p. 326.

13. cf. Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1983, p. 308.

opposites of good/evil and the feminine/masculine to provide wholeness to life.

The earliest flowering of Buddhist art was at the sepulchral *stūpas*. The famous *stupa* at Sānchi has granite railing enclosure with gateways to the four directions, decorated with exquisite sculptures. One interesting figure there is of the swaying *yakṣī* with one hand on a tree-branch.¹⁴ This *yakṣī* is the guardian of the tree and her touch makes the tree bloom; *yakṣī* represents the generative powers of the earth. She is one of the poles of earth's fertility and so she longs to be united with the other pole. When her longing is not fulfilled, she will be passionate and fierce. In Kerala, there is the belief that *yakṣī* will suck the blood of those travellers walking by the feminine trees like ezhilampāla. If she is agitated, she has to be appeased by 'poking a nail' (a fertility rite) on the tree. This rite makes her whole by the male principle uniting with it. Her peace and wholeness, heals the earth and makes the community prosperous.

The union of earth's polar energies is achieved in the village through the sacred trees grown on an earthen platform. In Kerala, there is the traditional planting of the pipal with the mango tree. In Karnataka, it is the banyan (*ficus Bangalensis*) or pipal with the neem tree. Pipal is a feminine tree with milk in its veins and with leaves in the shape of equilateral triangle pointing downwards, the symbol of femininity. Mango and neem trees with their astringent and bitter tastes represent the masculine energy of the earth. Again this symbolism is repeated in the installed stones under the trees. They are the *nāgakkals* (snake stones) representing the union of *nāgakannika* (serpent-virgin) and the *liṅga*. These consecrated trees impart their blessings, viz., earth's fertility to the village and its fields.

In Bengal, there is the worship of Vanadurga or the 'Grand old lady of the tree' who dwells in the Sheora tree.¹⁵ It has very crooked and thorny branches and the souls of the dead find repose on it. This tree-mother when worshipped, the rites are performed by women. To ensure safe delivery by the mothers, the tree is clothed with rags dipped

14. cf. Stella Kramrisch, *The Art of India - Traditions of Indian Sculpture, Painting, and Architecture*, Motilal Banarsidass, plate no. 24.

15. cf. Pupul Jayakar, *The Earth Mother*, Revised ed., Penguin Books, Delhi, 1989 p. 161.

In the yellow turmeric juice, and its exposed roots smeared with red vermilion. Fearing the curse of the Mother, people refuse to cut its branches. In Banares (Uttar Pradesh) and Trichinapoly (Tamil Nadu) too people worship tree-mothers in a similar manner. If by chance milky juice flows out of the tree, they clothe the tree-trunk with great religious fervour. At Guruvayoor (Kerala), famous for its Viṣṇu temple, Nair women who goes for the 'vision of god' at the temple, first go to a small shrine nearby, dedicated to a sacred Aśoka (*saraca Indica*) tree which represents Śakti (Goddess-Energy). The tree is within a walled enclosure and under the tree there is an aniconic stone to represent the earth energy. All these show how earth is revered in its symbol, the tree.

Soil, an Earth Symbol

Besides forests and trees, soil, stone and hill too symbolize the sacred energies of the earth. Swelling prominence of the earth is symbolic of the breasts, and the burrowed or furrowed earth, the pubic zone. In such places, earth's energies are believed to be concentrated. Two years back in Bangalore near Dharmaram College at the Bannerghatta road junction, I saw a worship newly started. In the earthen pavement, a metre high ant-hill had come up. It had round holes of about one inch radius suitable for snakes to dwell in. The local Kannada people began to worship this holed earth offering flowers and smearing red vermilion. Now four granite pillars are erected to put a roof on it. Evidently earth's *śakti* is worshipped here. In the same manner, hills are worshipped. In Kerala the Malayatoor hill has the presence of Mar Thoma Muttappan (The great grandfather St. Thomas); Sabari hills has been consecrated to Ayyappan. Mallīśvaran (Lord of the mountain) of the Wynad forests of Kerala and Annapūrna Devi (Goddess of abundant food-supply) of Annapūrna peak of the Himalayas are all pointing to the same phenomenon. For native Nepalese, Mount Everest is the tallest breast of the earth and it is called 'Chomo Lungma', the 'Mother mountain of the universe'.

Earth's power is stored up in *yantra* designs (magical diagrams, literally fetter, lock or machine) drawn in front of Indian houses. In different parts of India they are known differently as *kolam*, *arican*, *ālpānā*, *dhulicitra*, *rangoli* and *rangavalli*.¹⁶ This is a very primitive tradition of

16. cf. Pupul Jayakar, *The Earth Mother*, p. 124; Jyoti Sahi, *The Child and the Serpent*, p. 96-98.

art and ritual. *Yantra* is a dam to store earth's protective energies. In Tamil epigraphies this is known as *kotta* (fort) which fortifies and guards life-forces of the earth. In primitive times, fort was designed to fend off evil spirits rather than enemy people. The same principle is applicable to *kolam* or *rāngoli yantra*; it is drawn at the front outer door of the house. All have to enter the house through the fortification and if evil powers try to enter, they are doomed to be fettered or restricted as if in a maze. It is interesting to note that these are drawn early at dawn by the mother of each house. Daily a new design is done with white rice powder, after erasing the previous one with cow-dung slurry.

In Kerala, these *kolam yantra* has evolved into a more complicated design called *kalam*. There are many types of *kalams*, mainly *devi kalam* of the goddess and *pāmbin kalam* of the serpent. It is an elaborate ritual often lasting as long as a full day, done in the village elder's house, mostly in the months of February and March. During the day, Maṅṅāns (a local priestly caste, literally 'people of the earth') complete an elaborate *maṅḍala* design with several knotted serpents or the goddess with multiple limbs, decorated all around with banana-tree stems. In the late evening, the whole village comes together around the *kalam* and then the Puḷḷuva families (musicians) sing praises of the local god and narrate the history of village. The Maṅṅān priest performs several rituals like worshipping the painted image on the ground, sprinkling holy water and swallowing fire. Then he dances to the beat of the drums till he is possessed by the goddess or the serpent-spirits of the *kaḷam*. Then through his oracles, he gives prophetic answers to the various problems experienced by several individuals, and blesses the people and by that time, he would have erased the *kaḷam* done in vegetable powder colours. By this ritual of *kaḷam* painted on earth's bare surface, the village gains fertility of the families and fields.

Stone too is a symbol of the earth's vitality. In Kerala, the pre-Dravidian and Dravidian *dalit* people have in their houses or villages aniconic granite stones installed beneath a tree or in front of the houses. They worship it offering flowers and marking it with red vermillion. The earliest gadgets like the grinding stone, would have been objects of veneration. Tamils call the bigger flat granite stone *ammikkal* meaning 'mother-stone' representing the feminine principle of the earth and the smaller pestle-like roller, *kuzhavikkal* meaning 'child-stone' or the 'he-stone'. Snake-stones and *liṅga*-stones are also energy symbols. The idea of the *virakkal* (hero-stone) of Karnataka is probably inspired

by the Indus Valley seals which depict earth-goddess guarded by tigers on either sides. The person who guards the earth and its fields by fighting against enemies is considered to be a *vira* (chivalrous man), the masculine principle of the earth and the saving event is celebrated by the rite or erecting a stone post/slab. Memorial stones at the ancestral sepulchral sites too are common in Karnataka.¹⁷

Caves and Springs of the Earth

Caves and fissures in the rock are special symbols of the earth. Through the spirit of the earth can descend to the underworld and ascend towards the sky in the form of water or steam. The spirits of the earth like Hades and Tartaros, the Greek titans and Bali and Yama, the Indian lords of the nether world have passage through the caves. In ancient Greece, there was a famous sacred spring at Delphi. At a time in the yearly cycle, people gathered there to receive oracles from the earth. It is at the temple-gate there the famous maxim is written: "Know thyself." Originally, there was only a cleft in the rock from which warm water and steam gushed forth. In Greek, it was called 'Delphi' meaning *yoni* of Sanskrit.¹⁸ Human beings daring to enter the naked and awesome precincts of the sacred earth received wealth, life, healing and oracles for the future. To those who revere the earth, she tells her secrets.

Lastly, the earth spirit is symbolized as a spring of water. In certain crypts of the cathedral churches of Europe, there are ancient water springs preserved as wells.¹⁹ Earlier to Christian worship, the ancients would have worshipped the earth at those springs. The feminine energy of the earth is concentrated at the spot of the well and it is complemented by the towering spires of the churches which represented the masculine pole of the earth's vitality. In Bihar, the Jharkhand tribals conserve their *sārṇa* forests beside a spring. In Kerala, temples are built near springs commonly preserved as large tanks. The St. Thomas Church of Palayoor (Trichur, Kerala) is beside an ancient water-hole,

17. cf. S. Settar, *Memorial Stones - A Study of their Origin and Variety*, Institute of Indian Art History, Karnataka University, Dharwad, 1982, p. 48.

18. cf. John Michell, *The Earth Spirit*, p. 11; Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia*, p. 218.

19. cf. J. Michell, *The Earth Spirit*, p. 76.

a tank. On the Śivarātri festival night, people worship Śiva, lord of the mountains and rivers, at the banks of the river Periār at Āluva. The supreme example in this genre will be the worship of Gaṅgā (river Ganges) itself.

Gaṅgā is the mythical milky river of the sky and sage Bhagiratha's penance brought it down to the parched earth to give it life. The mighty Gaṅgā would have crushed all life on earth if it had not received on the matted hair of Śiva and allowed to cascade down the Himalayas to the plains. Gaṅgā is an earth goddess who lives in the legends and art of India, and several rituals and festivals are connected to her. Every twelve years, people congregate at Prayag, Allahabad where river Yamuna meets Gaṅgā and celebrate *Kumbhamela* meaning 'fair of the pot of immortality.' People collect Gaṅgā water in pots to be used throughout the year to sprinkle on people and land. Old people living thousands of kilometres away in South India go to bathe in Gaṅgā even to die bathing in it at the end of their life to gain immortality. For millions in India, Gaṅgā is simply 'Mother'. She is immortalised in some of the finest sculptures of Indian temples. Gaṅgā is variously represented as *pūrṇa kumbha* (the full pot of the nectar of immortality, Cālukya style, 6th c., Aihole, Karnataka) as Gaṅgādhara Śiva (Damsel Gaṅgā flying downwards, head first, with folded hands, to the matted hair of Siva, 10th c., Nepal), and as descent of the Gaṅgā (Pallava style, 7th c., Mahabalipuram).²⁰

We have been examining briefly the development of the relationship of human beings with the earth and how it leads to the development of symbolic consciousness in them. The symbolic significance of earth's spirit has been named at various times by different people as 'serpent current,' telluric force,' *anima mundi* (alchemy), *kuṇḍalini* (Tantra philosophy), 'Satan, the old serpent' and finally the 'Bride of Christ'. To the ancients, it was a poly-morphous experience, often of polar opposites, at times life-giving and oracular, and at other times, death-dealing and delusionary; at any rate, to the ancients earth was intimately real.²¹

20. cf. C. Sivaramamurti, *Gaṅgā*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1976.

21. cf. John Michell, *The Earth Spirit*, p. 22-23.

The growth of urban civilization which relies heavily on empirical observations of science has weakened human being's capacity for feeling in order to understand the mysteries of life. With that loss of awareness of the spirit in and around him, society has lost the original founts of meaningfulness in the world. Having lost symbols that hold together the world, he turns crazy, bigoted and fascist. Then rituals become empty, art corrupted, and nature devastated. Perhaps, if we look forward to the revival of our civilization, we may need to make a *new covenant* with the earth.