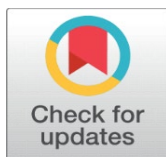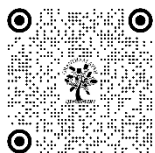# DEPICTION OF HINDU ICONOGRAPHY IN THE PAINTINGS OF THOTA VAIKUNTAM

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ABSTRACT

The history of a human being is also the history of who or why or how human beings have worshipped something that they believed was more powerful than them. The history of human being is also the history of artists as how they have imagined, depicted or visualized this superpower. For instance, in the Indus Valley Civilization, we find that humans made clay idols which may have been worshipped, for instance, in the form of Mother Goddess and Pashupati Nath. Across prehistoric, ancient and medieval periods, as the circumstances of human life changed, so did the nature of worshiping and the nature of art. This act of worship gave rise to some of the greatest religions in the world with their dedicated sacred text, rituals, followers, and patronage. Each religion had a distinct and unique equation with art and it was based on this equation that it became possible to study and interpret a work of art. This approach of study or interpretation was later classified as iconography. The present paper aims to locate the presence of Hindu iconography in modern India with special reference to the paintings of Thota Vaikuntam, who is known for drawing extensively from the iconographic representations of Shiva, Ganesh, and Krishna.

Keywords: Hindu Iconography, Hindu Art, Thota Vaikuntam, Modern Indian Art

1. INTRODUCTION

In Hinduism, the imagery of Vishnu, Shiva and Devi constitutes the primary visual imagery. Gods and goddesses are worshipped as a concrete image (murti) made, generally, in stone, terracotta, plaster, ivory, and metal ("Hindu iconography" 2021). Over the millennia of its development, Hinduism has adopted several iconic symbols, forming a major part of Hindu iconography, that are imbued with spiritual meaning based on either the scriptures or cultural traditions. The exact significance accorded to any of the icons varies with region, period, patronization and denomination of the followers. Over time, some of the symbols, for instance, the Swastika, have broader association while others like Aum are recognized as unique representations of Hinduism ("Indian Iconography and sculptural art" 2021). Other

aspects of Hindu iconography are, for example, the terms *murti* for icons and *mudra* for gestures and positions of the hands and body.

An icon, derived from the Greek word "eikon," refers to a representation of a God or Saint in a painting, mosaic, or sculpture that is intended for worship or is related to religious rites. While it shares some similarities with primitive fetishist signs used in simple rituals, it holds a clearer and more sophisticated meaning. This Greek term "eikon" finds its close counterparts in Indian terminologies like area, beta, and vigraha, which also refer to representations of deities or saints receiving the adoration of their bhaktas or worshipers. In some Indian works of literature, these icons are described as the actual bodies or forms (Tanu or Rupa) of the gods. Most often, these depictions are anthropomorphic or theomorphic, but they can also take the form of symbolic representations with no clear shape. Iconography is a specialized discipline that concerns itself with the study of these religious images. Banerjea (1956), p. 1.

In the realm of religious iconography, icons or images of religious figures and symbols hold importance in worship and religious rituals. These icons carry specific meanings and convey theological concepts to believers. Additionally, iconography encompasses the process of creating sacred images and the artistic techniques and conventions employed in their production.

The Hindu iconography is largely anthropomorphic, which implies the depiction of Gods and goddesses in humanized forms. For example, the artists depiction of ten heads of a human to represent Ravana, symbolizes that Ravana's mind was as powerful as the mind of ten humans. In Indian art there are examples of enormous scale of the statutes of Gods and goddesses made in order to demonstrate the superiority of God. In Hindu idols, each idol has two, four, six and sometimes eight hands. And in each hand, there is a different symbol or instrument or gesture denoting various meanings (Achar). Everything connected with the Hindu icon has a symbolic meaning; the posture, gestures, ornaments, number of arms, weapons, vehicle, consorts and associate deities (parivāra devatā). The symbolism or the iconic imagery has its origin in various sacred texts such as Brāhmanas and Aranyakas, and later the iconic symbols are explained in the various Purāṇas such as Srimad Bhāgavatam, Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Śiva Purāṇa; Upaniṣads such as Gopāla-uttara-tāpini Upaniṣad, Kṛṣṇa Upaniṣad and Āgamas and so on.

The research paper focuses on the paintings of Thota Vaikuntam who predominantly draws from Hindu iconography. The objective of employing such references is to convey ancient cultural aspects to contemporary society and to fulfill the purpose of Hindu iconography through the artist's work. Many modern Indian artists have incorporated, depicted or appropriated Hindu iconography into their artworks. Of the several reasons, the one that appears most common is that, by means of re-visiting iconographic themes the artists want to reconnect with the values that they hold to be significantly relevant to the contemporary society and reclaim as a perennial way of life. Investing each symbol and sign with a sense of profundity the artist brings the ancient Indian aura of divinity and spirituality back to life through these paintings. Some of the most recurrent examples of iconographic representation that Vaikuntam has extensively explored are, for instance, Krishna with a flute; Krishna shown lifting the Govardhan Mountain to protect Vrindavan's villagers, birds, and animals from Indra's wrath; Radha and Krishna and so on.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research paper, the researcher aims to explore and analyze scripts and artifacts that shed light on the fundamental dimensions of art, particularly focusing on the unexplored aspects within Hindu iconography. To achieve this, the researcher extensively examines relevant literature and thoroughly investigates the icons and symbols present in the artist's work concerning Hindu iconography. The study involves a comprehensive review of books written by prominent authors who specialize in Hindu iconography, along with a thorough analysis of the artist's body of work. Through this examination, the researcher uncovers confidential information pertaining to previously unexplored areas within the realm of iconography.

The research methodology relies on secondary data and draws from various sources, including books, journals, research papers, and artworks. By utilizing descriptive research methods, the paper documents and observes the multiple transformations in art forms facilitated by the influence of Hindu iconography.

Overall, this research paper delves into the lesser-explored dimensions of art and iconography by drawing from a wide array of data sources and using a descriptive approach to comprehensively understand the changes brought about by Hindu iconography in the realm of art.

3. OBJECTIVE

The focus of the present study is to trace and investigate the impact of Hindu iconography on modern art in India with specific reference to the works of Thota Vaikuntham. By examining the influence of Hindu iconography on modern artists, the research aims to shed light on how this rich traditional practice of the past has inspired and shaped artistic expressions in the present.

By closely examining contemporary artworks, the research seeks to identify how artists have adapted, appropriated and reinterpreted traditional iconography to suit modern sensibilities and societal contexts.

The research also focuses on understanding the transformative changes that Hindu iconography has brought to different art forms over time. By studying the evolution of artistic styles, techniques, and themes, the study aims to reveal the dynamic relationship between Hindu symbols and icons and their influence on the visual arts.

In essence, this study endeavors to present a comprehensive and detailed exploration of how Hindu iconography has left an indelible mark on the artistic landscape of India, from ancient times to contemporary art scenes. By tracing this influence and delving into the nuanced connections between icons, symbols, and art forms, the research provides valuable insights into the cultural and artistic heritage and its continuing relevance in the contemporary art.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholars hold the view that image worship was part of the Vedic culture, though there are many contrary views as well. One of the most cited book in the context of Hindu iconography is Elements of Hindu Iconography, 1912 by Gopinath Rao, (1872-1919), Indian archeologist and epigraphist. Gopinath Rao for instance, affirms that image worship in India to be a very ancient tradition citing examples from the period of Yaksa and Ptanjali. As mentioned by Ratan Parimoo, 'Ptanjali had

defined *dharana* as the process of fixing the mind on some object, well defined in space, while Panini (around sixth century B.C.) had explained the meaning of *pratikrti* as "anything made after an original"' Parimoo (2023): 19. As mentioned by Parimoo that Rao was clear in his methodological approach by 'listing postures of deities and *ayudhas* including their symbolism before describing the deities based on references from *Silpa* texts as well as Puranic myths. Rao's contribution in the field of Hindu iconography, especially his scholarship on Saivism and Saiva iconography, will form the basic framework in identifying and classifying the knowledge of Hindu iconography with respect to traditional Indian art. The classical scholarship on Hindu iconography will further guide in identifying, assessing and analyzing its impact on modern Indian art in general and in the artwork of select modern Indian artists in particular.

The references that Parimoo is hinting at are very crucial in developing a basic understanding as how Hindu iconography was formulated to interpret the ancient and classical art of India. For instance, Parimoo recounts that:

"Rao had incorporated Coomaraswamy's paper on Dance of Siva (1911) in his section on *nrtya-murtis*, the latter had acknowledged in a paper of 1920s that Gopinath Rao had quite rightly affirmed that the so-called Trimurti of Elephanta caves was essentially a Saivite image known by the nomenclature, Sdasiva or Mhadeva, citing references concerning the five heads and corresponding five powers attributed to Siva. He identified further Saivite images under this classification. He also discovered textual sources for the eight-headed images of Siva. This section paved the way for Stella Kramrich's paper on Siva Mahadeva at Elephanta (1946) and with the readymade textual sources available, enabled her to create an integrated prose, interweaving form and content.

Parimoo further cautions about the possibility of prejudices and biases that the implication of iconography can lead to, as he cites the views asserted by J.N. Banarjea, Indian historian and Indologist, in his book The Development of Indian Iconography, 1941:

The term 'icon' (icon, Gr. Eikon), figure representing a deity, or a saint, in painting, mosaic and sculpture, which is in some way or the other associated with the rituals connected with the worship of different divinities.

Banerjee's understanding of Hindu iconography, however, is limited in the sense that he perceived iconography as subservient to religion. His accounts on iconography also suffered due to his prejudiced response to pre-historic and tribal artists for treating them as fetishistic and crude. It is important to refer to and take into account all shades of scholarship in order to fully understand the significance of Hindu iconography and its relevance to modern Indian art.

In the western art history, the contribution of Erwin Panofsky is considered paramount in the development of iconography as a branch of study that deals with "exploration and interpretation of the subject-matter in a work of art". The term iconography has its origin in the Greek words where 'eikon, means "image" and graphe, means "writing". In this way iconography implies "the way in which an artist "writes" the image, as well as what the image itself "writes"—that is, the story". Taking into account both the approaches as applied by Rao and Panofsky, we can conveniently overcome the limited and prejudiced approach of the likes of Banerjee.

Panofsky formulated three broad methods of iconography: description, analysis and contextualized interpretation of the art object. As a comparative method, iconography will attempt to explore, analyse and interpret the content or subject matter of the artworks in a specific context, that is, to locate the impact or influence or presence of Hindu iconography in the selected paintings of modern Indian artists.

Further, Panofsky realized that iconography is limited as it is traditionally concerned with religious content, and thus, in an attempt to expand its scope, he introduced the term "iconology." Iconology, according to Panofsky, not only expands the scope of 'iconography' beyond religious content but also includes all possible aspects that would "illuminate the content of a work of art". The progression from "iconography studies" to "iconology" emphasizes the fact that mere "identification", "authentication" or even "stylistic analysis", attributes of "iconography studies", was not enough to grasp the holistic understanding of a work of art, hence a more rigorous approach is required to not only study the content of an artwork but also the contextual circumstances and temporal environment, historical purpose, cultural significance, political dynamics and so on.

In this way, methodologically, the present study will apply both 'iconographic' and 'iconological' approaches. 'Iconographic' approach will address the traditional/classical Indian art in the light of Hindu iconography with reference to the textual scholarship and visual sources. 'Iconological' approach will explore, analyze and contextually interpret, using qualitative interpretation, the selected art works in the light of the impact of tradition on Indian modernism.

The works of some of the prominent scholars that will play a crucial role in identifying and exploring various dimensions of Hindu iconography are: Bhattacharya, B.C. The Jaina Iconography, Chandra, Pramod, On the Study of Indian Art, Coomaraswamy, A.K. 'The Origin of the Buddha Image', Eck, Diana L., Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India, Flood, Gavin, An Introduction to Hinduism, Huntington, Susan, The Art of Ancient India, Sivaramamurti, C. Sanskrit Literature and Art: Mirror of Indian Culture, Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India.

Many modern and contemporary Indian artists have drawn inspiration from various aspects of Hinduism. Some inspirations are direct while some are subtle or metaphorical. The present paper may not be able to incorporate all such artworks. However, the artists who have been consistently drawing inspiration from Hinduism and whose works reflect a sustained aesthetic and conceptual engagement with Hindu iconography will find a mention here. There is a great possibility that not many artworks, that bear an explicit impact of Hindu iconography, will have been a subject of some serious research. This would imply that many relevant art works have hardly been approached with an academic investigation in the form of books, articles, curatorial exhibitions and so on. In this case various other methods, such as interviews, exhibition catalogue, newspaper reviews, dairies of the artist, letters and so on will compensate the absence of literature.

5. THOTA VAIKUNTHAM

Thota Vaikuntham was born in 1942 in Burugupali, Andhra Pradesh, in South India. He drew inspiration from rural areas of the state, with village men and women often being central characters in his works. In particular, women from Telangana have been the main subjects of his artworks. His earliest childhood sketches were largely based on the religious figures, Rama, Hanuman, Krishna, and Ravana, drawn

from the great Hindu epic Ramayana, the engagement that later set the tone for his works based on Hindu iconography. Born to a very modest family his parents understood his passion for art and allowed him to peruse it as a career, a very rare dispensation in a middle family. He joined painting department at the College of Fine Arts, Hyderabad and later had the privilege to continue his training at the prestigious Faculty of Fine Arts, M S University Baroda. Under the guidance of the great mentor-artist K G Subramanyan Vaikuntham was able to develop a sustained engagement with indigenous cultural milieu he was part of and, as a result, developed a distinctively unique pictorial vocabulary. Vaikuntham, today, is primarily known for his lifelong artistic engagement with the rural life of Telangana and rich and vibrant colour plate. However, he has exuberantly painted figures that explicitly draw from Hindu iconography, which doesn't find much mention, and thus becomes the focus of the present study.

6. ICONOGRAPHY OF KRISHNA

Krishna holds a significant place in Hinduism as the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu and is revered as the Supreme Lord in his own right. He is adored for his qualities of compassion, sensitivity, and love, making him one of the most revered gods in Indian culture. Hindus celebrate Krishna's birthday annually as Krishna Janmashtami. He is commonly depicted with a flute in hand. In paintings and sculptures throughout India, Krishna is portrayed in various forms. He has a beautiful blue body with four arms, holding a lotus flower symbolizing purity, a crescent moon above his head representing knowledge, and two wheels representing power. Vredeveld (2022)

In Indian tradition, Krishna is depicted in various forms, sharing common characteristics with dark, black, or blue skin colour, as the term Krishna means black in Sanskrit. In this incarnation, he, like Vishnu, has slain numerous entities, including his maternal uncle Kansa. His bride in this form is Rukmini. Dashavatar (2015). However, in ancient and medieval stone carvings and stone-based artworks Krishna is depicted in human skin color. In some texts, his body color is poetically described as the color of a jamun, which is a purple-colored fruit. Vredeveld (2022)

1) Krishna and Govardhan Mountain

Vrindavan is situated on the banks of the river Yamuna, and Mathura is a city near Vrindavan. Krishna's life, from infancy to adulthood, unfolded in this place, making it a significant pilgrimage center for Vaishnavism.

Figure 1

Figure 1 Krishna Lifting the Govardhan Hill

Sources https://openthemagazine.com/art-culture/thota-vaikuntam-rural-reveries/

Figure 1: "Krishna lifting the Govardhan Hill" In this painting, Vaikuntham depicts the story of Krishna lifting the Govardhan Hill, which was a mountain known as Govardhan Hill. The story behind this painting is that Krishna lifted the Govardhan Mountain on his finger to protect the Brajwasis from Indra's wrath. Krishna is portrayed in a three-fold posture known as the Tribhang Mudra, adding movement to the picture. He is adorned with jewels and a crown, holding a flute in one hand. The surroundings feature Brajwasis, animals (cows), and birds (parrots). Representations of Krishna (2023)

2) Krishna and the Gopis

The story of Krishna stealing the garments of gopis bathing in the Yamuna frequently appears in works of art. The folio from the Bhagavata Purana manuscript, received in the 16th century, contains its reference. Krishna's intention in stealing the clothes was to teach the gopis not to bathe half-naked in the water, as it exposes them to the water deity (Varun). After learning of this, the

Figure 2

Figure 2 Untitled 1942 Acrylic on Canvas, Size: 47.5 x 71.25
Source https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Radha-and-Krishna/7FF8BF98A4FC9F56

Gopis express regret to Krishna, who then returns the garments to them. The Gopis desired him as a spouse due to their affection for him. Representations of Krishna (2023)

Artists have portrayed Krishna and the Gopis more frequently, particularly depicting the gopis dancing and chanting around Krishna in what is known as Ras Leela. The artist positions Krishna at the center of this painting, with Gopis seated around him. Krishna is depicted playing the flute while dressed in a blue T-shirt and a white dhoti, symbolizing purity. A parrot sits on his thigh, and the gopis are shown engaging in various activities, with each of them having two or more parrots as a symbol of their affection. The painter effectively demonstrates that despite being involved in multiple activities, the gopis' focus remains on Krishna. Representations of Krishna (2023)

3) Krishna and Radha

Radha holds a special place among the Gopis and is frequently depicted with Krishna in various settings. The Vaishnava sect, centered around Rama and Krishna, gained popularity in western, northern, and central India as a Bhakti movement until the sixteenth century. After that, the movement spread throughout the Indian subcontinent, and Krishna came to be worshipped not only as a god but also as an ideal.

Krishna was regarded as the creator of the universe, while Radha symbolized the human soul. The devotion of the soul to the Supreme is beautifully portrayed in the Gita Govinda painting, showcasing Radha's self-sacrifice for her beloved Krishna. **Gita Govinda,** a remarkable composition by Jayadeva in the twelfth century, stands as a profound Sanskrit poem where the dominant Shringar Rasa, or the essence of romantic love, prevails. Within its verses, the spiritual love shared between Radha and Krishna manifests in a tangible, physical form, evoking deep emotions and devotion to its readers. Representations of Krishna (2023)

Figure 3

Figure 3 Radha and Krishna, 2006 Acrylic on Canvas Size: 48 x 72inches
Source https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Radha-and-Krishna/7FF8BF98A4FC9F56

Similarly, in the fourteenth century, **Bhanudatta** crafted the Sanskrit text **Rasa Manjari**, a literary masterpiece referred to as the "Bouquet of Bliss." This enchanting work not only explores the diverse rasas or emotions but also delves into the intricate differences between the hero (male) and heroine (female) characters. These distinctions are based on various factors, such as their age - encompassing childhood, youth, and adulthood - and their individual characteristics, aptly described through Angik Vaskasajja - categories like Padmini, Trani, Shankhini, Hastini, and more. Representations of Krishna (2023) Both Gita Govinda and Rasa Manjari hold a significant place in Indian literature, showcasing the depth of emotions and portraying the eternal love and devotion that has captivated the hearts of countless readers and devotees over the centuries. The richness of their poetry and the exploration of human emotions continue to inspire and resonate with audiences, making them timeless classics in the realm of Indian literature. Representations of Krishna (2023)

7. ICONOGRAPHY OF GANESHA

The name Ganesha is derived from the combination of two words - "Gana" and "Ish." "Gana" refers to a "host," "crowd," or "an army of deities," while "Ish" signifies "ruler," "lord," or "sovereign." Therefore, Ganapati, or Lord Ganesha, can be understood as the "lord of hosts" or the "Lord of the Gunas." His divine presence holds significant importance in Hinduism. Forms of Ganesha. (2020)

Lord Ganesha is known by an array of names and forms, each representing unique aspects of his divine nature. Some of his well-known epithets include Vighneshwar, the remover of obstacles; Ekdant, the one with a single tusk; Siddhi Daata, the bestower of success; Sumukh, the one with a beautiful face; Kapil, the reddish-brown one; Gajakarnak, with elephant-like ears; Lambodar, the one with a large belly; Vikat, the formidable one; Vighnanash, the destroyer of obstacles;

Vinayaka, the leader of all beings; Dhumraketu, the one with smoke-hued banner; Gandhakshya, the one with a fragrant aura; Bhalchandra, the moon-crested one; Gajanan, the elephant-faced; and many more. Each name encapsulates the divine qualities and attributes of Lord Ganesha, endowing him with diverse significance and symbolism. Forms of Ganesha. (2020)

In traditional iconography, Ganesha is often depicted with his consorts, Buddhi and Siddhi, standing alongside him. Buddhi, representing wisdom and intellect, symbolizes the power of knowledge and discernment. Siddhi, on the other hand, embodies success and achievement, representing the fruition of one's endeavors and spiritual accomplishments. Together, Buddhi and Siddhi are seen as the two powers of Lord Ganesha, signifying the union of wisdom and success, which are integral in navigating life's journey with divine guidance and blessings. Ganesha's divine presence radiates profound wisdom, auspiciousness, and benevolence, making him a beloved and revered deity among devotees across the world. Forms of Ganesha. (2020)

Elephant head: The iconic representation of Ganesha with an elephant head has a fascinating mythological background. When Ganesha's head was accidentally severed, Lord Shiva brought him back to life by placing the head of an elephant on his body. In recognition of his bravery and loyalty, Shiva blessed Ganesha to be worshiped before all other deities. There are three different versions of the story behind Ganesha's severed head. Murthy (2017)

According to the first story described in Varaha Purana, Shiva created Ganesha by mixing five elements. Because of this, he looked very beautiful and attractive. Due to this, there was panic among the deities. That is why Shiva increased the size of Ganesha's stomach and gave the shape of an elephant's head to his head, which would reduce his beauty and attractiveness. Saffronart (2023)

According to the second story, due to the sight of Shani Dev, the head of baby Ganesha was burnt to ashes. Brahma told the sad Parvati that whose head would be found first, his head would be placed on the head of Ganesha. The first head found was that of a baby elephant. In this way, Ganesh became 'Gajanan. Kishor (2019)

According to the third story described in Siva Purana, Mother Parvati created Ganesha from the dirt of her body. After making him sit at the door, Parvati started taking a bath. Meanwhile, Shiva came and started entering Parvati's house. When Ganesha stopped him, an angry Shiva beheaded him. Then, to please the sad Parvati, Shiva placed the head of an elephant on the head of the child Ganesha. From then onwards, Ganesh started being called 'Gajanan'. Unveiling the Symbolism of Ganesha (2023).

Ganesha's hands and feet: Ganesha is often depicted with four arms, but in various forms, he can be seen with 2, 6, 8, 10, or 16 arms, each representing different attributes. Symbolically, Ganesha's multiple arms signify his ability to overcome physical and spiritual obstacles. He is portrayed holding various objects, such as a conch shell, axe, rope, noose, and trident. Like other deities, Ganesha is often shown seated on a lotus, representing knowledge and divinity. One of his hands is usually seen in the Abhay Mudra, a gesture of fearlessness and protection. Furthermore, Ganesha's posture, with one leg on the ground and the other bent, symbolizes the balance between fulfilling worldly duties and recognizing our divine nature.

Left-facing trunk and Right-facing trunk: The direction of Ganesha's trunk also holds significance. When his trunk faces the left, it is called Ganesha Vastu, representing the peaceful aspect of Ganesha and is preferred for attaining inner peace. Conversely, when his trunk faces the right, it is known as Dakshinabhimukhi or Siddhi-Vinayak, depicting a more aggressive and powerful energy.

Broken tusk: In some depictions, Ganesha is shown with a broken tusk, earning him the name Ekadanta. According to legend, Ganesha used his tusk as a pen to write the Mahabharata, symbolizing his wisdom and intellect. The multifaceted symbolism of Lord Ganesha's various attributes reflects his profound significance as the remover of obstacles, the bestower of blessings, and the embodiment of wisdom and divine energy in Hindu tradition. Forms of Ganesha. (2020)

The meaning behind some of the characteristic symbols depicted in Hindu iconography:

- Big ears and small mouth: listen more and speak less
- Big head - think big, learn more, and use your intelligence to its full potential.
- Small eyes - concentrate, see beyond what you see, and use all senses.
- Rope - to bring you closer to the highest goal.
- One Tusk - Keep the Good and Throw the Bad
- Trunk - high efficiency and adaptability
- Modak - Reward of Sadhana
- Axe - To cut all the bonds of attachment
- Blessings - Blesses and protects on the spiritual path to the Supreme.
- Big stomach - digest all the good and bad in life calmly
- Prasad - The whole world is at your feet and begging for you
- Mouse: Desire, unless controlled, can cause havoc. You ride the desire and keep it under control and don't let it take you for a ride. Ganesh symbols and their meanings. (n.d.)

**Thota Vaikuntam has painted several forms of Ganesha in his paintings:**

Figure 4
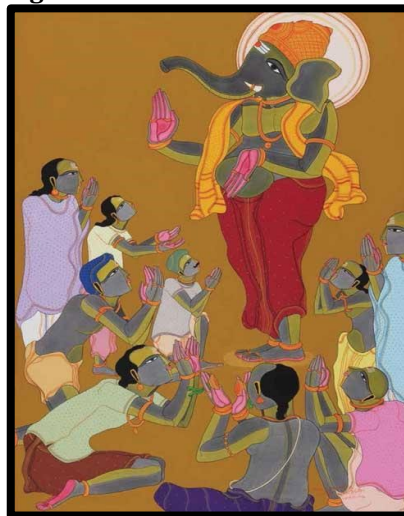
Figure 4 Ganesh Pooja by Thota Vaikuntam
Source https://openthemagazine.com/art-culture/thota-vaikuntam-rural-reveries

Figure 4 Ganesh Pooja: The painting depicts the ritual of Ganesh Pooja where Ganesh is in a standing posture. And his one hand is in Abhay Mudra. According to Hinduism the two-hand form of Lord Ganesha is known as **"Dwibhuja Ganapati"**. He has worn a crown on his head. There is a circle behind his head, which is called **Sahasrar Chakra**, which means thousand, infinite, innumerable Pawandevi (2023). He wears a red color, dhoti. We see Ganesha is surrounded by many people praying with folded hands. The sublime scale of Ganesha is shown by making him larger than the devotees.

Figure 5
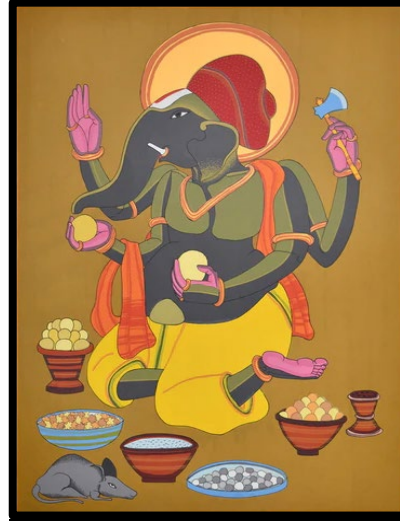
Figure 5 Ganesh | serigraph on archival paper | Paper size: 40 x 30 inches, Image size: 35 x 25 inches
Source https://laasyaart.com/thota-vaikuntam

Figure 5 Ganesha (2015): In this painting, the artist has shown the four hands of Ganesha.

One hand is in Abhaya Mudra, while the other is holding a Modak. He has a snake tied around his stomach. There is also a mouse sitting near him, which is his vehicle, which is a symbol of Ganesha's abilities. The mouse is also called *Mooshak*.

The mouse represents wisdom, brilliance, and intelligence, which is presided over by Ganesha. The mouse symbolizes the ego, which can gnaw at all virtues and must be tamed. There are some *laddoos* (sweets*)* in the basket. Two utensils are also kept near them. And two other hands are in different postures. He is wearing a blue dhoti. Ganesha's vaahana. (2020)

8. ICONOGRAPHY OF SHIVA

Shiva, a Sanskrit word meaning 'auspicious,' is one of the three main deities in Hinduism and is worshipped as the supreme God. He is also known by several names, such as Shambhu (gentle), Shankara (benevolent), Mahesh (great Lord), and Mahadeva (great deity). Shiva is represented in various forms, alongside his wife Parvati and son Skanda, as the cosmic dancer Nataraja, as a naked ascetic, a mendicant, a yogi, with a dog (Bhairava), and even with a body that is half male and half female (Ardhanarishvara), symbolizing the union of Shiva and his consort.

Shiva embodies diverse aspects, including being a great ascetic and the Lord of fertility. As a bisexual deity, he holds dominion over both poison and medicine. His

multifaceted nature makes him a significant and revered figure in Hindu mythology and spirituality. Doniger (2023)

There are explained some symbols and their meanings:

- **Moon**: Shiva is the element where there is no mind and the moon is the mind's symbol. Without meaning, 'mindless' cannot be expressed or understood. No-mind, infinite consciousness requires a mind to express itself in the manifested world. So that little mind (crescent) is on the forehead to describe the indescribable. Wisdom is beyond the mind, but it needs to be expressed by the touch of the mind, and the crescent moon symbolizes this. Knowledge is beyond the mind, but it needs to be expressed with the color of the mind and is symbolized by the crescent moon. Symbolism Behind the Form of Shiva (2023)

- **Snake:** In the state of meditation, when the eyes are closed, it appears as though the individual is unconscious, but he is awake. A serpent is depicted around the neck of Lord Shiva to signify this state of consciousness. To demonstrate Shiva's attention, they wrapped a serpent around his neck. Therefore, the snake represents alertness. Snakes are also very sensitive to certain energies. There is a snake around Shiva's neck. Vishuddhi stops the poison, and the snake carries the poison. The center of Shiva is considered to be Vishuddhi, the word Vishuddhi meaning "filter." Hence, he is also known as Vishkanth or Neelkanth, as he filters all the poisons. Purohit (2015)

- **Third Eye:** The third eye of Shiva, also known as the mystic eye, differs in appearance from the actual eye. Typically, the third eye remains closed, because as soon as it opens it unleashes destruction. The third eye symbolizes Shiva's karmic memory. Generally, Shiva's third eye is viewed as a symbol of power and destruction. People recognize the third eye as the innate wisdom and knowing eye. His third eye also symbolizes the rejection of desire. Purohit (2015)

- **Trident (trishul):** Shiva's Trishul represents life's three most important aspects. These are the three basic dimensions of life. They are also called *Ida*, *Pingala*, and *Sushumna*. These are the three mains basic nadis referring to the state of energy in the human body system. These nadis are left, right, and central. Seventy-two thousand nadis emanate from these three basic Nadis. The balance between Pingala and Ida makes us influential in the world; it helps us handle life's aspects. Pingala and Ida symbolize the basic duality in existence. Shiva's adornments – the symbols and symbolism of Shiva. (2015)
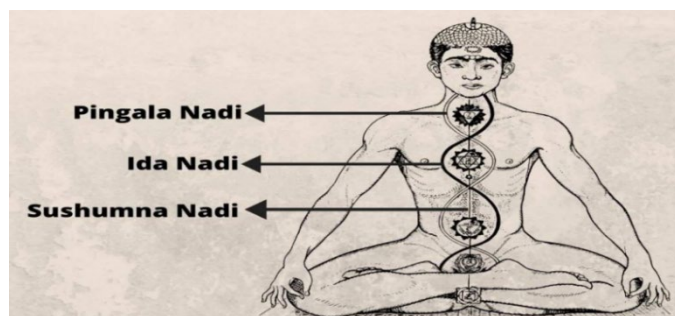
Source (Sushumna Nadi), Ida and Pingala Nadi crisscross
https://www.fitsri.com/yoga/nadis

- **Damru:** Damru represents his relationship with Shiva. The two triangles in the Damru symbolize Purusha and Prakriti and their union, which results in the creation, motion, speech, and sounds, or Shabda. When they are separated, everything ends and the mind becomes mute. Damru also represents the Jiva, the embodied soul, who is helplessly entangled in Shiva's drama and acts based on his own will and strength. The two triangles in the Damru represent the mind and body, whereas the Jiva represents its connection to birth and mortality. Rudralife. (2022)

- **The Holi River (Ganga):** Ganga is also called the most river and the goddess of the river; this represents the water coming out of Shiva's head through the matted hair and falling to the ground, hence the name Gangadhara, which means "the bearer of the river Ganges." Shiva is not only the god of destruction but also the bearer of peace and purity. The Ganges is also considered a symbol of knowledge. Surabhi (2020)

- **Nandi (the bull):** Shiva's vehicle Nandi symbolizes eternal waiting; waiting is considered the greatest virtue in Indian culture. One who knows to sit and wait. he knowns the true essence of meditation. Nandi does not expect Shiva to come out tomorrow. He doesn't expect anything. He'll stay forever. This quality is the essence of receptivity. Before going to any temple, it should have the qualities of Nandi. Purohit (2015)

- **Figure 6 (Shiva, 2008)** In this painting, the artist has painted Shiva in Nataraja form. ('Nataraj' translates to 'monarch of dancers" in Sanskrit (nata = dance, raja = king). It is a unique form of Shiva. In this form, Shiva is dancing. Therefore, this form is also called a dance of Shiva (Tandava). According to this form, Shiva is the lord of the dance. In this Tandava pose, his hair has spread all around. The unusual form of Shiva as Nataraja is beautifully displayed in this painting. This pose of Shiva is a wonderful result of artistry. Shiva is dancing in the Tandava dance style. The lower left hand comes across the chest in Gajahastha Mudra, pointing to the feet in the air; the lower right hand represents Abhaya Mudra as a blessing. The Secret Behind Lord Nataraja form of Lord Shiva. (2023)

Figure 6

Figure 6 (Shiva), 2008 Medium: acrylic on canvas, Size:181.6 x 151.2 cm. (71.5 x 59.5 in.)

Source https://www.artnet.com/artists/thota-vaikuntam/untitled-shiva-owXWhNbV71KlF7YKbsD_hQ2Untitled

The Tandava represents the rhythmic motion and dynamic energy of the universe. According to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Nataraj is "the clearest representation of God's activity that any art or religion can claim." It would be hard to discover a more fluid and dynamic depiction of a moving figure than Shiva's dancing form." This cosmic dance of Shiva is called 'Anandtandava,' meaning dance of bliss, and represents the cosmic cycles of creation and destruction and the everyday rhythm of birth and death. The dance is a visual allegory of the five principle manifestations of eternal energy – Creation, Destruction, Preservation, Moksha and Illusion. According to Coomaraswamy, Shiva's dance also represents his five activities: 'Srishti' (creation, evolution); 'status' (protection, support); 'Samhara' (destruction, development); 'Tirobhava' (illusion); and 'Anugraha' (release, liberation, grace).

9. CONCLUSION

In Indian culture and art, Gods have been revered and worshipped in various forms since ancient times. These divine beings hold a significant place in society and religion, with each incarnation teaching unique qualities, virtues, and morals. As a result of their distinct characteristics, they become the subjects of iconography. The artist, Thota Vaikuntham, has skillfully incorporated Hindu iconography into his artworks, evoking timeless emotions of love and sacrifice for the contemporary society.

Vaikuntham portrays Krishna as the epitome of love and Ganesha as a symbol of renunciation. Krishna as an iconic symbol of love is beautifully articulated in paintings based on Krishna and Radha and Krishna and gopis. Krishna is also depicted as a protector, for instance in the painting titled as *Krishna and Gobardhan Mountain*, in which Krishna is protecting the cowherds and animals by lifting the mountain on one of his fingers. In the Ganesh Puja artwork, the artist has portrayed the people's faith and devotion to Lord Ganesha. In the depiction of Shiva doing the *tandav*, Shiva is recognized for his abilities as a destroyer and conservator. Each icon in Hindu iconography holds its own identity and significance. The artist wants to convey a powerful message to art enthusiasts and fellow artists that, despite the numerous representations of Ganesha and Krishna abundantly available in the long history of Indian art, an artist can still revisit, re-think, re-appropriate these perennial symbols of love and sacrifice with renewed energy and great enthusiasm. More importantly, Vaikuntam's diverse articulations, interpretations, appropriations and adaptations based on Hindu iconography reflect a deep emotion to make these iconic divinities strike a chord with the present world order and inspire the contemporary man to distance from the greed of materialistic yearnings and seek peace in the spiritual way of life taught by the great Hindu religion.

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