The Mandalic Consciousness: *Sri Chakra* as Psychocosmogram

Swarnalatha Rangarajan

Swarnalatha Rangarajan is Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Madras.

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"

Introduction

Y.B. Yeats' prophetic poem captures the fragmented *Spiritus Mundi* of the twentieth century and humankind's straying away from the ancient and fundamental relationship to the center. The present times are also witness to a similar, if not a more severe, crisis engendered mainly by a world view that emphasizes fragmentation at all levels, especially in the human mind. This sense of disconnect in the human psyche has to be addressed in order to heal Gaia.

"The Great Turning," "Holonic Consciousness," "Ecological Consciousness" are terms used by deep ecologists and transpersonal philosophers to refer to the paradigm shift in vision that is required to change the world from man-in-the-environment to the relational, total-field image, that Arne Naess speaks of. Viewing "Sacred Gaia" as a

co-evolutionary process, writers like Anna Primavesi engage in deep questions: "Whatever we may say about our environment, or about God, will relate God, ultimately, to every process or organism seen within the evolution of life on earth. But how should I perceive and describe myself within this single evolutionary process?" Gaia's main problem is not merely radioactive dumps, greenhouse gases and climate change among a host of other irreversible damages. The problem mainly lies in the fact that the collective human consciousness has not yet entered the noosphere of the mind and has miles to go before it can reach the Omega point envisaged by Teilhard de Chardin, where the evolutionary unfolding of human consciousness can lead to a new state of peace and planetary unity. Ken Wilber astutely observes that, "Gaia's main problem is not exterior pollution but interior development, which alone can end exterior pollution."

The exploration and revival of the sacred traditions of religions that emphasize the sacred wholeness of the universe are seen as methods that aid this great paradigm shift. The true index of ecological consciousness is to *see* the universe as an all-pervading center and also as one's own body. The return to wholeness heals the mind and is mirrored macroscopically in healing the planet.

The Sanskrit word *mandala* primarily means "circle" or "that which surrounds"; however the word is also polysemic. The following meanings apply: a circle, round, globe, orb, ring, halo around the sun or moon, territory, province, country, multitude, group, collection, body, society and company, a period of forty-eight days.³ dictionary definition of the mandala would be a mystic symbol of the universe, in the form of a circle enclosing a square, used chiefly by Hindus and Buddhists as an aid to meditation. Although the circle may contain other figures like a triangle or be surrounded by lines and other shapes, the circle is of primary importance. The *mandala* has an ancient presence in Eastern and Western cultures in expressions of art, architecture, ritual forms of dance and religious motifs. A mandala can be constructed by drawing it on sand, paper, metal, or a piece of wood or by engraving it on metal; it can also be drawn in one's own mind. According to Italian Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci, the mandala represents "a geometric projection of the world reduced to an essential plan." Carl Jung considers the "squaring of the circle" to be the "archetype of wholeness" and the "synthesis of the four elements which are forever tending to fall apart."⁵ Jung's research revealed that the mandala archetype presents itself in the paintings of neurotic patients who are confronted with the problem of opposites in nature and in schizophrenics whose view of the world has become confused. In such

cases, the construction of a centre to which everything is related facilitates the union of the contradictory and opposite elements. In his Autobiography, Memories, Dreams and Reflections, Jung uses the term for the circular motifs that erupt in dream consciousness. For Jung, the "magic circle" became an archetypal symbol of progression towards psychic wholeness. Jung's own dream of the city of Liverpool provides a good example. In the dream, Jung finds himself in a broad square in the city in a dark, sooty rain-drenched night. A round pool lies at the center of the square with a small sunlit isle in the middle. On the island grows a single magnolia tree with reddish blossoms. The tree shone with a brilliant numinous light and brought Jung to the realization that: "One could not go beyond the center. The center is the Goal, and everything is directed towards the center." The tree of light is the axis mundi, the symbol for the center of the world as well as for the human psyche. It is significant that this dream of integration came to Jung as a mandala formation. Jung attributes an a priori factor to these mandalic archetypes which occur everywhere and exhibit conformity regardless of their origin in time and space. He concludes that this is evidently, "an attempt at self-healing on the part of Nature, which does not spring from conscious reflection but from an instinctive impulse."⁷

The *mandala* structure presents itself in the diverse organization levels of life supported by the universe. Barreda refers to it as a "blueprint" of the cosmos since something about the structure of the *mandala* resonates with the contents of our unconscious: "Within the mandala is the center—every possible center—that has been lost from human consciousness, from our collective unconscious. It can be our focal point to reconnect with that center, which would reveal, at long last, our unity with the Universe. And therefore, finally, our unity with each other." ⁸

The "circle with a center" pattern is the basic structure of creation; from dense nuclei to spiralling galaxies we can perceive *mandalas* that are part of a bigger *mandala*. Nature presents us with primal *mandala* patterns in flowers, snail shells, snowflakes, and rings in tree trunks. Japanese researcher, Masaru Emoto's study established a vital connection between *mandala* forms and healthy sustainable patterns in nature. He observed that water from clear mountain springs has crystalline *mandala* formations whereas water from polluted sources or stagnant water in storage dams and pipes shows a distorted pattern. Emoto's study showed that water has a message and that it mirrors the environment through crystalline formations of wholeness or disintegration. Emoto added new dimensions to his research by offering a prayer of wellbeing to the contaminated water. This led to the re-

establishment of the crystalline *mandala* form. The water also responded to certain forms of music, positive thoughts, sacred chants and the like. Emoto's research pointed to the conclusion that there is an intrinsic vibrational pattern at the atomic level in all matter which is the smallest unit of energy, which he refers to as the *hado*. The *hado* is also the basis of the energy of human consciousness. "Hado creates words. Words are the vibrations of nature. Therefore beautiful words create beautiful nature, ugly words create ugly nature. This is the root of the universe." As Patricia Sherwood points out, this research has great implications for environmental health since the way we think or feel seems to impact the environment powerfully: "The mandala and its strengthening or break down becomes a mirror of the degree of contamination within the microcosm of our selves, which is then reflected into the macrocosm around us." 10

Contemplation of the mandala can produce a "source-seed" in the human evolutionary consciousness and a keen awareness of the principles of organicity, the interrelationship parts interdependence of systems. A deep experience of relational fields and higher gestalt perceptions are possible through this mandalic consciousness if mankind's conscious activities are seen as part of a larger ecological fabric related to the evolving matrix of the planet earth. A mandalic consciousness will confer the purity of perception wherein all experience would be apprehended as an organic whole, continuously proceeding from and returning to the one source; center of being. The present environmental dilemma is a result of losing sight of this center and the *mandala* can be used as an effective tool to recognize and open up the center. This paper will focus on "Mandalic consciousness" using the Sri Chakra as an example of a psychocosmogram.

The ancient Indian worldview also recognized the non-divisiveness between the phenomenal world and the perceiver. The five primary elements of earth, fire, water, air, and space (the *panchamahabhutas*) are not merely gross physical elements and cannot be separated from the *tanmatras* (the five subtle energies of sound, touch, form, taste and smell whose action puts the sensory consciousness in relation to the gross forms of matter) nor from the *pancha-indriyas* (the five sense organs) and the other subtler mental faculties. Bettina Baumer observes that, "Ecology in the modern Western sense is limited to nature and remains artificially cut-off from the mental and spiritual dimensions, whereas the system of tattvas contains everything..." Tattvas, which can be roughly translated as "Thatness" or the fundamental cosmic principles, are listed as twenty five in *Samkhya* philosophy or thirty six

in the *Agama* system. Bryan Mulvihill refers to the *Mahabhuta Mandala*, the iconic representation of the five elemental forces, prevalent in India during the time period, fifth to eighth centuries A.D. This *mandala* expresses the "meaningfulness of being as experienced and expressed through the elemental forces. Ma also means beautiful and la beautified.... The center is the primordial awareness of being itself surrounded by a circle of elemental forces. Thus being is enhanced, beautified by the awareness of understanding and appreciation of the nature of the elements." In this mandalic model, there is an interdependent relationship between human beings and nature. A distortion of this mandalic perception results in the solidification of the ego as an experiencing center in full control of the five *mahabhutas*.

The *mandala* is not merely a cosmogram but a psychocosmogram wherein the scheme of disintegration from the One to the many and the reintegration from the Many to the one are played out. ¹⁴ It represents the fragmented seeker's yearning to surrender to wholeness. Contemplation of the *mandala* is said to activate the energies both within the inner space of individualized consciousness—*chittakasha*—with the outer space of the three-dimensional world, the *mahakasa*, in the comprehensive space of essential consciousness (*chidakasha*) which rejects the subject-object dichotomy altogether. ¹⁵

Sri Chakra



Sri Chakra बिन्दु-त्रिकोण वसुकोण दशारयुग्ममन्वश्र नागदलसंयुत षोडशारम् । वृत्तत्रयं च धरणीसदनत्रयंच श्रीचक्रमेतदुदितं परदेवतायाः ।।

The point, the triangle, the eight-cornered figure, the two ten-edged figures, the 14- cornered figure, eight petals, 16 petals, the three circles and the three squares - This is called the Sri Chakra of the Supreme Diety.

Picture courtesy of www.kirtimukha.com

The word *chakra* in Sanskrit means a wheel which represents the constant movement of the dynamis of cosmic consciousness and the word *sri* means the most auspicious. The *Sri Chakra* is a symbol of concentrated energies which gathers into itself all the various dimensions of existence and is called the king of chakras—*chakra raja*. The center of the *mandala* is the *bindu* which represents both the origin and the end; creation as well as dissolution. The universe extends and returns to this center. Jung refers to this ancient Tantric doctrine of the center as that which symbolizes the "One Existent," the unextended point from which all creation begins. ¹⁶ The nave of the *Sri Chakra* is the *bindu*. The word *bindu* translates itself imperfectly in English. It is the potent unmanifest form of all creation, the seed of all sound. It can

be considered as a "point-circle, not yet having a radius." The *bindu* is the point of infinite potential. It is the origin of the *mandala* and also represents the union of the ultimate male principle (*purusha*) and the ultimate feminine principle (*prakriti*). It is the union of the formless consciousness (*Siva*) and energy operating in the world of forms (*Sakti*). The *bindu* represents the forces of transformation, integration and harmony that lie in the *mandala* and also in the perceiving individual who uses it as an aid to realizing holistic being.

The manifestation of the world from the *bindu* begins the process of division and polarization into *Siva* and *Sakti* from the *Siva-Sakti* state of latent potency. These three *bindus* form the primary triangle, the manifestation which is the product of the three fields, *tripura*. Is Jung observes that creation begins with this act of division of the opposites that are united in the deity and that from this splitting arises the "multiplicity of the world." Hence Jung conceived of the self as "an extremely composite thing, a conglomerate soul" since it is the sum total of the center and the surrounding periphery consisting of field within field that accommodates the play of paired opposites. The contemplation of the dynamics of these nested fields helps the seer to "return from the illusion of individual existence into the universal totality of the divine state."

The primary triangle represents the triads of: srishti (Creation), Sthithi (Preservation), and Samhara (Destruction); the three states of consciousness namely Jagrat (waking state), svapna (the dream state), and susupti (the sleep state); the three gunas (qualities) of Nature namely sattva (equilibrium), rajas (kinesis), and tamas (inertia). The goddess herself is trifold (tripura). She is Bala (the young one), *Tripurasundari* (the beautiful) and *Tripurabhairavi* (the terrifying). ²¹ This primary triad again anchors the aspirant in a deep awareness that all life is embedded in the fundamental processes of nature. No state is exalted above the other; on the other hand there is the astute awareness of the multidimensionality of life and consciousness and the conceptualizing of the cosmic and individual consciousness in terms of prakriti. The goddess is clearly identified with the bhutas and her radiance assumes the threefold aspects of the sun, moon, and fire, when Lalita in the bindu becomes Kameshwari (associated with love and the moon), the lightning-swift *Vajreshwari* (associated with fire in space) and *Bhagamalini* (associated with the sun).²²

The triangle which is the seed symbol of the various schemes and orders of world-existences destroys the illusion of separation. The *Sri Chakra* is the configuration of interweaving triangles (*konas*): five *Sakti*

konas with downward pointing apices are superimposed on four Siva konas with upward pointing apices. This superimposition results in the formation of forty-three triangles and the bindu is also counted as a point-triangle which gives us a sum of forty-four triangles. The union of the Shiva and Sakti konas constitutes the body of the Sri Chakra. In the macrocosm, the Sakti konas give rise to the five primal elements of Space (Akasha), Earth (Prithvi), Fire (Agni), Water (Apah) and Air (Vayu). In the microcosm they give rise to the five elements of skin, blood, flesh, fat, and bone. Similarly in the macrocosm, the Siva konas give rise to the four principles of Maya (Siva's illusive power which manifests as mind and matter), Suddha Vidya (the principle of wisdom from which the activities of creation and preservation emerge) and the other generative and life giving principles of Sadasiva and Maheshvara. In the microcosm, the Siva konas constitute semen, marrow, vital energy (prana) and the self (jiva). The blissful union of Siva and Sakti encoded in the *Sri Chakra* emphasises the continuity of being.

In Sri Aurobindo's words:

"...all is their play: The whole wide world is only he and she. This is the knot that ties together the stars:"²³

The Sri Chakra leads to the contemplation of the texts of multifold universes and all the sentient and non-sentient creatures contained in them as powerful fields in which Siva and Sakti play. Lalita, one of the many names of the Goddess who resides in the bindu means "one who plays." The triple fields of Creation, Manifestation, and Dissolution are seen as the play of the Goddess. In the *Lalita Sahasranama*, a litany of thousand names composed on the presiding goddess of the Sri Chakra, the most significant description of the mother goddess are the adjectives of, "Kshetra svarupa, Kshetresi, Kshetrakshetrajna palini." Kshetra indicates the field in which the events of growth, decline and death take place. The holonic field of existence is the body of the mother goddess (kshetra svarupa) who, as the presiding deity (kshetresi), protects the field as well as the knower of the field, the kshetrajna, who is the witnessing awareness in the manifold fields of creation. Ken Wilber refers to this divine kenosis in which the Sprit "forgets" and "loses" itself and takes on the "magical façade of manyness" (maya) to have a grand game of hide-and-seek with itself."24 Wilber describes this collective gestalt as the "Great Nest of Being" and points out that in the various levels in the Great Nest (Spirit-as-mind, Spirit-as-body, and Spirit-as-matter) are all forms of Spirit although they are less aware of their Source, they are nothing but "Spirit-at-play." The Sri Chakra is

a representation of the process of the descent of the Divine into the diversity and multitudinous forms of the universe. It equally provides the space for return of the individual consciousness into the plenitude of the Fundamental consciousness, the Ground of all being.

The Sri Chakra can be approached in two ways. The first method involves the contracting of dimensions till the point of dissolution is reached. This is the way of enfoldment referred to as samhriti — the withdrawal or reabsorption of the world. In this approach, one begins at the *Bhupura* — a square field in which the entire *yantra* is situated. On each side of the square is a portal or gateway (dvara) leading to the four directions. On its outer fringes are three lines signifying enclosures. These thresholds of potential are the residence of: the powers of accomplishment (siddhis), minor 'mother deities' (matrukas) who represent a wide spectrum of states of consciousness and the feminine guardian deities of the ten directions (dikpalakas). The second enclosure is a sixteen-petalled lotus structure (shodasa patraka) and the third, an eight-petalled lotus (ashta dala padma). The lotus petals represent the latent powers of being and also the awakening to the light of cosmic consciousness. All these three enclosures constitute the outer group, the emanation "srishti" aspect of the mother goddess.

The aspirant then moves on to the contemplation of the middle group which consists of three enclosures: a figure of fourteen triangles (the *chaturdasara*), a figure of ten triangles (called "outer" or *bahirdasara*), and another figure of ten triangles (called "inner" or *antardasara*). This group symbolizes the activity of preservation or "*stithi*."

The culmination of the journey lies in the progression through the inner group to the *bindu*. The group consists of the enclosures of the *bindu* (the central point, symbolizing the transcendental aspect of the mother goddess), the primary triangle with the apex downwards (also called *kama-kala* which represents the fundamental manifestations of the mother goddess), and the figure of eight corners surrounding the primary triangle which contains eight triangles, the *ashta kona*.

In the other method, the meditator begins from the dimensionless bindu and moves outward to the bhupura thereby tracing and exploring the myriad dimensions of the ever-expanding world of forms that emanate from the cosmic womb. This is the way of unfoldment, shristi. The ascent and descent through these enclosures leads to an awareness of the great fullness of being. Expansion, maintenance of creation, and its withdrawal are not seen as opposite principles but as the loop of the universe where the beginning is the end and the end the beginning.

The entire Sri Chakra is visited as a city (pura) or an island (dvipa) and is also represented as the mythical *Meru*, the gem-studded, resplendent, golden mountain which is supposed to be the mythical abode of gods. It is considered to be the mansion of the mother goddess. The nine enclosures are guarded by numerous guardian deities and attendant deities. The progress through the nine enclosures is considered to be highly esoteric and bestows on the meditator several powers (*siddhis*). According to the tantra of Sri Chakra, whatever exists in the macrocosm also exists in the microcosm and the meditator is asked to establish the identity between the Sri Chakra and his/her own body. The aspirant learns to recognize within himself the internal mandala which is situated in the *chakras* (the spinning wheel-like vortices) which are situated at the crown of the head, forehead, throat, heart, navel, sacral area, and the root of the spine. Each of these chakras is identified with the enclosures of the Sri Chakra. On grasping the personal-cosmological dimensions of the mandala, the aspirant is stripped of the ego-illusion of separateness; the guardian deities that guard the portals of these liminal points often make the aspirant come face to face with the fragmenting forces buried deep in the subconscious like lust, anger, egotism to impart the knowledge that all polarities spring from the selfsame unifying substratum. The iconic representation of the mother goddess who holds a sugarcane bow (symbolizing the mind) in one hand and a quiver of five flower-arrows (the five tanmatras of sound, touch, form, taste, and smell which are the subtle forms of the *Panchmahabhutas*), a goad (repulsion), and a noose (attachment) represents perfect equipoise. The mother goddess resides in the *bindu mandala* and is the bestower of prosperity and bliss. The culminating point is the complete absorption into the very body of the body goddess, which is freedom from all duality. Another term for this process is "samasthi" or wholeness.

Grace Cairns observes that the *mandala* symbolism of the east is a graphic representation of the human need for a unitive cosmic philosophy and also an expression of the collective unconscious' need to understand human nature from an evolutionary point of view. ²⁶ To understand we are made of the same stuff as the dust of the stars calls for a keen awareness of the genetic continuity that is shared by the totality of life on this planet. The *mandala* of the *Sri Chakra* leads to the recognition that all life springs from the *paramasya nabhih*, the navel of the Mother Goddess and in this affirmation we learn to trace our kinship with every speck and mote of creation.

Integral philosophy speaks of the new paradigm of the Great Holarchy of Being in which the reality is not composed of things or processes but of whole/parts (holons) "which being a whole in one context, is simultaneously a part in another."²⁷ In the Great Nest of Being, holons always co-evolve and therefore Wilber points out that it becomes almost impossible to define the word individual in the first place: "there are no individuals anywhere in the Kosmos. There are only holons or dividuals."28 Entering the mandala of the Sri Chakra, we become aware of each field being an intrinsic whole that is simultaneously part of a larger Whole and the series of fields that are nested in the paramasya nabhih. The mandala confers the econoetic vision that: "no holon, whether conventionally considered high or low, sacred or profane, simple or complex, primitive or advanced, is closer or father from Ground...All forms are primordial Purity."²⁹ Meditating on the Sri Chakra mandala or finding the inspiration to construct a personal mandala is a creative process; it aids the process of assimilation and transformation of pathological forces in one's psyche and this correspondingly effects a change in the greater holonic fields of society and the world. In the *mandala* one beholds a dazzling mosaic worked by the great elements both within our bodies and in the fields of nature. The bindu mandala vasini (the goddess who resides in the center of the bindu) is the ultimate creative life force that unfolds itself moment by moment in the play of existence, affirming the *mandala* of creation. Fontana rightly observes that meditation on a *mandala* is an exercise in self discovery since a suitable mandala is already a reflection of something deep inside ourselves that simply reveals "things as they are."30 Strengths and weakness are seen as an integral part of the pattern and are upheld in the mirror of the mandala without any prejudice or deception. Pure contemplation of the mandala without reducing it to a set of concepts and a willing engagement with the flow of its symbols and its colours and deities, confers on the aspirant an entry into the deeper aspect of nature that is often marred by the demands made by the fragmented "self." The mandala embodies the vision of the psychosynthesis model developed by the Italian psychiatrist Assagoli. In this model, there is an affirmation of the transpersonal self, seen as the source of wisdom, inspiration, and unconditional love which heals the primal wounding of an unresolved past and integrates the dynamics and patterns of the unfolding present. "The concept of the Higher Self expresses the presence of an inner guiding principle, the genius within, the divine spark to which the "I" aligns in cooperation with the unfolding and evolutionary process."³¹ We can see a similar psychosynthetical model in the symbolism of the triangle in the Sri Chakra mandala. The triangle represents the three primordial qualities (gunas) of sattva, rajas, and tamas which compete

for supremacy in all beings. When *sattva* dominates, there is a quest for illumination of knowledge, when *rajas* predominates greed and striving appear, and with *tamas* comes darkness, inactivity, and delusion. These *gunas* are a part of *prakriti* and are responsible for projection and presentation of the worlds of existence. The goddess in these aspects is referred to as the Deluder (*mohini*). The way to wholeness is the transformation of the *rajas* and *tamas* into the positive *sattva* and finally transcending even *sattva* to identify with the non-dual aspect of the goddess residing in the *bindu*.

The mandala provides a model for evolutionary psychology emphasizing on qualities like compassion and wisdom which are needed in the times of planetary crisis. As in a labyrinth walk, again a mandalic form, circling to the center involves a total acceptance of the meandering back and forth along different circuits, focusing awareness on the unicursal path that leads to the center. A mandalic consciousness has a spontaneous ethic of care and compassion. To quote David Fontana again: "Kindness is not an artificial quality grafted upon life, but something that arises of itself once we stop thinking of life as fragmented and individualistic, with each person concerned only for himself and with no thought for others."32 To conclude, the *bindu* of the Sri Chakra also referred to as sarvanandamaya (that which is full of bliss) is a symbol of the love that is the innermost essence of all things, a life-enhancing force whose warp and weft unifies all the dyads of existence. Centered in the bindu, we know ourselves as perfection and hence all ensuing action is rooted in mindfulness and the holistic vision of this ancient Sanskrit prayer for peace:

> Sarvesam Svastir bhavatu (May wellbeing be unto all) Sarvesam Shantir bhavatu (May peace be unto all) Sarvesam purnam bhavatu ((May fullness be unto all) Sarvesam mangalam bhavatu ((May prosperity be unto all)

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Notes

¹ Primavesi 2006, p. xvii.

² Wilber 2000, p. 525.

³ Monier-Williams, p. 775-776.

⁴ Tucci 2001, p.39.

⁵ Jung 1972, p.4.

⁶ Jung 1963, p.224.

⁷ Jung 1972, p.4.

⁸ Barreda 2008, p.23.

⁹ Emoto 2007, p.1.

¹⁰ Sherwood 2006, p.3.

¹¹ Arguelles 1972, p.13.

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<sup>12</sup> Baumer 1995, p.2.
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¹³ Mulvihill 1995, p.169.

¹⁴ Zinn 1973, par.10.

¹⁵ Rao 1990, p.100.

¹⁶ Jung 1972, p.72.

¹⁷ Shankaranarayana 2002, p.30.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.25.

¹⁹ Jung 1972, p.73.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 73.

²¹ Shankaranarayana 2002, p.38.

²² Ibid., p. 36.

²³ Aurobindo 1950, p.63.

²⁴ Wilber 2009, par.11.

²⁵ Ibid., pars. 6, 11.

²⁶ Cairns 1962. p.228.

²⁷ Wilber, 2000, p 26.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 72.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 544.

³⁰ Fontana 2005, p. 34.

³¹ Brown 1991, par.9.

³² Fonatana 2005. p.36.