Mapping the Sacred Universe: A Study of an 18th-Century Cosmogram from the Mehrangarh Fort Archive

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For the Indian mind, to gaze upon the universe was never a matter of curiosity alone; it was an act of reverence. The world was not seen as a lifeless expanse of matter but as a living rhythm, a breathing order where the divine unfolds in form and colour. This vision found expression not only in the hymns of the Vedas or the verses of the *Purāṇas*, but also in paintings, sculptures, and sacred diagrams, each becoming a visible prayer. Among these, the cosmogram stands as a profound attempt to visualize the structure of the universe and the journey of consciousness within it.

The present paper explores a rare and luminous artefact, a late 18th-century cosmogram from the Mehrangarh Fort archive, Jodhpur (see **plate 1**). It is painted in natural pigments on cloth by the artist Shivadutta, who mentioned his name near the *Uttarādika Aparājita Gaja*. The composition, though seemingly simple, consists of fourteen concentric circles and intersecting lines, embodying a deeply intricate metaphysical geometry. It expresses the Indian conception of the cosmos as not a creation made once and abandoned, but as an eternal process of renewal governed by the pulse of *ṛta* (cosmic order) and *kāla* (time). Each concentric ring and every hue of this painting serve as bridges linking the external universe to the inner realm of consciousness.

This cosmogram reveals a distinct Marwar's inflection of the universal Indian imagination. It may have served as a teaching chart for

explaining the *Purāṇic* universe, or perhaps as a meditative map guiding a seeker's inward journey. The visual field invites contemplation; the eye moves from the vast to the minute, from the multiplicity of forms toward the still centre, the *binduḥ*, symbol of the unmanifest.[1]

This study approaches the painting not merely as an artwork but as a sacred document where a visual theology is rendered in pigment. It combines iconographic observation, textual cross-references from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and the interpretive insights of thinkers such as A.K. Coomaraswamy, Stella Kramrisch, and Kapila Vatsyayan, who saw art as a form of realization. Through this trifold lens, the cosmogram at Mehrangarh archive will be read as a map of the sacred universe, a space where aesthetics, cosmology, and devotion merge into one continuous act of vision.

To study the Indian vision of the cosmos is to enter a world where metaphysics and art, philosophy and devotion, are inseparably woven. As the Indian art historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy often reminded in his writings and presents a profound framework in which art, when rightly understood, is the embodiment of cosmic order (*ṛta*).[2] Each line, color, and proportion mirrors the universal principles that sustain existence. The artist's act of drawing a circle or a lotus is, therefore, not an imitation of nature but a re-enactment of creation itself; it is a movement from the un-manifest (*avyakta*) to the manifest (*vyakta*).[3]

He interprets traditional Indian art as a bridge between knowledge and being a form of *jnana yoga* that transforms perception into realization. For him, the artist repeats the act of creation; his work is a microcosm of the macrocosm.[4] In that way, the diagrams like the *maṇḍala* or cosmogram are not decorative compositions but maps of

consciousness. They express what he calls "intellectual intuition," the vision of unity behind multiplicity. This insight becomes a foundational key for interpreting the cosmogram at Mehrangarh archive, where concentric forms reflect the cosmic rhythm of expansion and return, creation and dissolution, outwardness and inwardness, the eternal *spanda* of existence. According to him, such a diagram as "the geometrization of metaphysics" is a way through which invisible truth acquires visible structure. Thus, the painting becomes a site where philosophy and devotion intersect; where seeing becomes an act of knowing.

While Coomaraswamy revealed the philosophical essence of Indian art, Stella Kramrisch gave it architectural form. In her monumental work The Hindu Temple, she defines the temple as a cosmic diagram made of stone for a visible image of the universe and of man.[5] According to Kramrisch, every element of temple design, from the foundation to the *śikhara*, is governed by cosmological principles derived from the Vedas and śilpa-śāstras.

The temple, like the cosmogram, is a manifestation of the absolute through measure and proportion. Her reading transforms the Indian temple into a living *maṇḍala*, where sacred geometry becomes a language of divine presence. The temple and the cosmos are homologous structures; both reveal the same principal creation. She articulated how the cosmic order, when embodied in architecture or painting, manifests divine immanence through proportion, rhythm, and geometry.[6]

Kramrisch's ideas also illuminate the symbolic intent of the given cosmogram. The painting, though executed on cloth rather than stone, follows the same logic of sacred mapping. Its circular composition embodies the axis between heaven and earth; its chromatic

gradations echo the transition from the gross to the subtle, from *bhūloka* to *svargaloka*. Like the temple's sanctum, the *binduḥ* at the centre marks the invisible presence of the divine.

The significant source that has greatly contributed to the understanding and interpretation of this cosmogram is the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, translated and edited by Swami Prabhupada, particularly its Fifth Canto. This text serves as the fundamental philosophical framework for the present study, offering profound insights into the cosmological structure and symbolism represented in the cosmogram. It forms the essential basis upon which the subsequent detailed analysis and interpretations in this research are developed.

Later scholars such as Kapila Vatsyayan and B.N. Goswamy deepened these ideas by emphasizing the dynamic relation between the arts that how dance, architecture, and painting all share a common geometry of rhythm and space. Vatsyayan, in *The Square and the Circle of Indian Arts*, interprets the *manḍala* as a principle order of consciousness itself. She extended this discourse by recognizing it as a" metaphor of unity" where space, sound, and consciousness coalesce.[7] Goswamy, on the other hand, through his luminous studies of Indian painting, reveals how the miniature artists of Rajasthan carried this very cosmic sense of measure within their brush-strokes, even in their most delicate works.[8]

Together, these thinkers provide the intellectual ground on which this study stands. Their writings make it possible to read the given cosmogram not merely as a historical artifact but as a philosophical image. It is a window into the Indian way of seeing, where mapping the universe becomes an act of remembering the self. The Mehrangarh painting belongs precisely to this lineage of visionary realism, where the Universe is not represented but revealed.

Historical and Cultural Context: Rajasthan, 18th Century

The 18th century in Rajasthan was a period of vibrant artistic energy and complex cultural crosscurrents. Amidst the shifting political landscape of post-Mughal India, the princely states of Marwar, Mewar, Jaipur, and Bikaner emerged as important sanctuaries. Traditional knowledge systems continued to thrive in these regions, and sacred art flourished despite changing political conditions. Jodhpur, under the Rathore rulers, emerged as one of the foremost centers of artistic synthesis. Here, devotion, philosophy, and craftsmanship found shared expression in painting, music, and architecture.

The Mehrangarh Fort, perched upon the rugged hills of Jodhpur, was not merely a fortification but also a repository of culture. Within its archives and ateliers, artists, scribes, and scholars worked under royal and temple patronage to record manuscripts, illustrate cosmological diagrams, and prepare ritual paintings used in court and devotional settings. The discovery of the present cosmogram within these archives situates it within this rich intellectual milieu, a space where the boundaries between art, scripture, and meditation were fluid and complementary.

The painting's medium and material, natural pigments on cloth, are characteristic of the period's devotional art. Vegetable dyes, mineral colors, and highlights were applied with disciplined precision, often prepared according to traditional treatises. The choice of cloth, rather than paper, suggests possible ritual use, perhaps as a portable aid for visualization or instruction. Its worn edges and subtle pigment layers indicate repeated handling, implying that it was not merely decorative but an object of living practice.

During this period, the Marwar region also witnessed a confluence of diverse spiritual currents, *Vaiṣṇava* bhakti lineages, the

Nāth yogic orders, and temple-based ritual cosmologies all interacting in subtle ways. Maharaja Vijay Singh visited Nathdwara in 1766 CE to embrace the *Vaiṣṇava* faith.[9] Given the painting's association with the *Vaiṣṇava* tradition, it is therefore plausible to conjecture that it may originate from his period (1740–1800), during which he was a devoted follower of *Kṛshna*. The circular schema of the Mehrangarh cosmogram resonates strongly with the yogic conception of inner worlds (*lokas*) and subtle energy centers (*chakras*). Such overlaps point to a synthesis between philosophical abstraction and experiential mysticism, a hallmark of late Rajasthani sacred art.

The 18th century also marked a transition in artistic vision from courtly miniatures to more contemplative and metaphysical themes. Painters who once depicted epics and royal processions began to explore cosmic and yogic imagery, inspired by both textual sources and esoteric teachings. The given cosmogram of the archive thus represents not only a visual document of cosmology but also a moment in history when art became a bridge between royal knowledge and spiritual realization. Seen against this backdrop, the painting stands as a testament to the Marwar's vision of harmony, where *śilpa, vidyā*, and *bhakti* converge. It reflects a time when Rajasthan was not merely producing art for aesthetic pleasure but creating visual theologies, painted universes that echoed the rhythm of the cosmos itself.

Visual Description and Symbolic Reading

The Mehrangarh cosmogram, rendered in natural pigments on cloth, unfolds like a *manḍalic* vision of the universe, a painted theology that bridges art, scripture, and meditation. Its circular geometry, concentric zones, and radiating axes reflect an effort to visually articulate what the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* describes in words as a universe both sacred and measured, both infinite and ordered. The universe is

divided like a lotus flower into seven islands, each surrounded by seven oceans.[10]

As per the visual structure and composition, at first glance, the painting appears as a sequence of interlocking circles, each representing a distinct level of cosmic reality. The central core forms the *Jambūdvīpa*, the innermost island described in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Fifth Canto), symbolizing the visible realm of the Earth. Surrounding it are alternating rings of *dvīpas* (islands) and *sāgaras* (oceans), painted in varying tonal densities echoing the *Purāṇic* structure where the seven continents are encircled by seven oceans.

In this cosmogram, four elephants are depicted in the four cardinal directions around the outer circle. The elephant positioned to the left of the central deity *Kṛṣṇa*, in the Eastern (*Pūrvadika*) direction, is identified as *Sarvato-Gaja*, the destroyer of enemies, and it is the same which is referred to as *Ṛṣabhā-Gaja*. In the southern (*Dakṣiṇadika*) direction appears *Puṣkara-Gaja,* while the western (*Paścimadika*) side features *Vāmana-Gaja*. The northern (*Uttaradikā*), named *Aparājita-Gaja,* which means undefeated, it is depicted slightly off from the exact opposite of the southern direction.

The iconographic references to these elephants are found in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which describes that atop the *Lokāloka* mountain reside the four *Gaja-patis* (lords of elephants), established in the four quarters of the universe by *Brahmā*, the supreme spiritual preceptor. These divine elephants, *Ṛṣabhā, Puṣkara, Vāmana,* and *Aparājita,* are said to sustain the stability of the planetary systems of the cosmos.[11]

The painting's delicate script annotations, though partially worn indicate terms such as *Lokaloka parvata, Sumeru parvata,* and *Ravi manḍala*, aligning it closely with textual cosmographies. The outermost boundary, inscribed as *Lokaloka parvata,* marks the

threshold between the known and the transcendental. A sacred mountain belt separating the realm of light *(Loka)* from the realm of darkness *(Aloka)*. Beyond this lies *Aloka varṣa*, described in the *Purāṇa* as the domain of liberation, a region beyond material modes, accessible only through divine realization.

A remarkable aspect of the painting lies in the figure of the *Śiśumāra Chakra* on the south-east, shape of a porpoise that represents the planetary system itself. As described in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the entire rotating system of stars and planets is visualized in the form of a celestial dolphin. In this *Viṣṇu* is seated in its heart and its tail bearing the *Dhruvaloka* (the Pole Star), its body coiled in spirals, and its head pointing downward, signifying the dynamic motion of time (*kāla*). As *Dhruva* revolves, it causes the sun, moon, and other planets to turn round also, and the lunar asterisms follow in its circular path, for all the celestial luminaries are, in fact, bound to the polar star by aerial cords.[12]

The Mehrangarh cosmogram faithfully mirrors this cosmic vision. The tail section adorned with small clustered motifs may symbolize the *Saptarṣi manḍala*, corresponding to the seven sages residing near *Dhruvaloka*. The coiling body, moving towards the right, delineates the flow of the fourteen constellations, from *Abhijit* to *Punarvasu* on one side and from *Puṣyā* to *Uttarāṣāḍhā* on the other, an iconographic correspondence rarely visualized with such precision in Rajasthani art.

Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada provides a detailed description of *Dhruvaloka*, which suits the given cosmogram. He explained that the divine abode of Lord *Viṣṇu* is within the material universe. It is said to be situated approximately 1,300,000 *yojanas* above the seven principal stars. Within the celestial realm of *Dhruvaloka* reside the planets of *Agni, Indra, Prajāpati, Kaśyapa,* and

Dharma, all of whom hold profound reverence for the exalted devotee *Dhruva*, who dwells upon the polestar. The entire cosmic system revolves around *Dhruvaloka*, much like bulls tethered to a central pivot, set in motion by the force of eternal time (*kāla*). Those who worship the *Virāṭa Puruṣa,* the universal form of the Supreme Being, conceive this vast, rotating system of planets as taking the form of a celestial being known as *Śiśumāra*, an emblematic representation of the Lord himself. In this cosmic configuration, the *Śiśumāra* appears inverted, with its head directed downward and its body coiled like a serpent. At the tip of its tail lies *Dhruvaloka*; along the body of the tail are situated *Prajāpati, Agni, Indra*, and *Dharma;* and at the root of the tail dwell *Dhātā* and *Vidhātā*. Encircling its waist are positioned the *Saptaṛṣis*, symbolically representing the harmonized order of the universe.[13]

Here we find the integration of yogic and cosmological Systems. In this, the *Śiśumāra* is not only an astronomical diagram but also a meditative symbol. As Swami Prabhupada explains, to concentrate their minds, yogis worship the *Śiśumāra* planetary system, which is technically known as the *kuṇḍalinī chakra*.[14] The painting thus transcends its cosmographic function; it becomes a tool for visualization, a yogic *manḍala* where the macrocosm (the universe) reflects the microcosm (the body).

Within this framework, the central *Jambūdvīpa,* corresponds to the *Mūlādhāra*, the root of existence, while the outer circles may symbolize ascending planes of consciousness. In the *Jambūdvīpa* there is a mountain known as *Sumerū,* which is made of solid gold and is the support of planet Earth. The rotation around *Dhruva* parallels the movement of energy around the *Suṣumṇā nāḍī*, hinting at the painter's deep awareness of *tantric* and yogic metaphors. This merging of *Vedic*

cosmology with yogic interiorization is what gives the given cosmogram its profound spiritual resonance.

However, in some aspects, there is a regional interpretation. One notable deviation from canonical *Purāṇic* charts is the placement of the *Saptaṛṣis* in the tail section, rather than the waist. This variation could represent a localized Marwar's interpretation, perhaps influenced by oral traditions or regional astronomical understanding. Rajasthan's temple murals and manuscripts often reveal such creative liberties, where textual fidelity coexists with local imagination.

The coexistence of *Purāṇic* references and regional visual grammar suggests that this cosmogram was produced in a Jodhpur atelier familiar with both Sanskrit cosmological treatises and the lived ritual culture of Marwar. The emphasis on balance and rotation, visible in the coiled symmetry, may even reflect indigenous astronomical practice, as seen in astrolabes and yantras of the period.

Ultimately, the Mehrangarh cosmogram is less a map and more a revelation; a *darśana* of the ordered cosmos as the body of *Virāṭa Puruṣa*. The concentricity signifies not only physical space but ontological depth. The journey from the periphery of material manifestation toward the luminous stillness of the center, where *Dhruvaloka* glows as the heart of divine consciousness.

"*Morning, noon, and evening, one should silently observe the form of the Lord as the Śiśumāra Chakra and worship Him... O Lord, who has assumed the form of time! O resting place of all the planets moving in different orbits! I offer my respectful obeisance unto You.*"[15]

Seen in this light, the shown cosmogram becomes a painted prayer, uniting art and astronomy, devotion and design. Its precise geometry and sacred language reaffirm the Indian belief that to understand the universe is to understand the self, that mapping the

cosmos is, ultimately, mapping consciousness itself.

Decoding the Cosmogram Through the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Textual Correlations and Measurement Logic)

If the previous section revealed the Mehrangarh Cosmogram as a sacred painting, this part attempts to enter its internal logic. The numerical and textual intelligence that structures the visible image. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, particularly the Fifth Canto, offers a remarkably detailed cosmic measurement that reads almost like an architectural manual of the universe. These values, when interpreted carefully, unveil the profound geometry underlying the painted cosmos preserved at Mehrangarh.

According to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the universe is organized into concentric divisions, beginning with *Jambūdvīpa* at the centre and extending outward through seven *dvīpas* (continents) and *sāgaras* (oceans). The measure is expressed in *yojanas*, an ancient Indic unit roughly equal to approx. 8 miles. Though in the cosmological sense, it operates as a symbolic proportion rather than a fixed metric.[16]

Beyond *Puṣkara dvīpa* lies the *Lokaloka* mountain, the massive golden ring that separates the luminous world (*loka*) from the unmanifest (*aloka*). The *Purāṇa* states that the mountain known as *Lokaloka* forms the boundary between the world of illumination and the world of darkness; beyond it no light of sun or moon can penetrate.[17] This verse corresponds exactly to the circular golden boundary painted at the edge of the given cosmogram; a liminal threshold where geometry becomes theology.

On the southern side of *Ilāvṛta-varṣa* lie the mountains *Himavān, Hemakūta,* and *Niṣadha*, while to the north stand *Nīla, Śveta*, and *Śṛṅga.* On the eastern and western boundaries rise the grand mountains *Mālyavān* and *Gandhamādana,* respectively. Encircling

Mount *Sumerū* are four magnificent mountains: *Mandara, Merumandara, Supārśva*, and *Kumuda*, each measuring 10,000 *yojanas* in both length and height. Upon these mountains grow colossal trees, each about 1,100 *yojanas* tall, including which a mango, a rose apple (*jambu*), a *kadamba*, and a banyan tree. At their bases lie four divine lakes filled respectively with milk, honey, sugarcane juice, and pure water, all capable of fulfilling any desire. The region is further adorned with celestial gardens named *Nandana, Citraratha, Vaibhrājaka,* and *Sarvatobhadra*. On *Supārśva Parvata* stands a *kadamba* tree from whose hollows flow streams of honey, while *Kumuda Parvata* bears the sacred banyan tree *Śatavalśa,* from whose roots emerge rivers of milk, yogurt, and other auspicious liquids.[18]

Surrounding Mount *Sumerū* like the filaments encircling the whorl of a lotus are twenty mountain ranges, including *Kuranga, Kurara, Kusumbha, Vaikaṅka,* and *Trikūṭa*. To the east of *Sumerū* are *Jathara* and *Devakūṭa*; to the west, *Pavana* and *Pariyātra*; to the south, *Kailāsa* and *Karavīra*; and to the north, *Triśṛṅga* and *Makara.* Each of these eight mountains measures approximately 18,000 *yojanas* in length, and 2,000 *yojanas* in both breadth and height. A top Mount *Sumerū* stands *Brahmapurī,* the divine abode of Lord *Brahmā*, each of its four sides extending 10,000 *yojanas*. Surrounding *Brahmapurī* are the celestial cities of King *Indra* and seven other deities, each one-fourth the size of *Brahmapurī* itself.[19]

At the diagram's core stands Mount *Merū*, the vertical axis that connects all realms. The *Purāṇa* specifies that *Merū* rises 84,000 yojanas above the earth and descends 16,000 below it, forming a total of 100,000 *yojanas*, identical to the diameter of *jambūdvīpa.* The *Bhāgavata* describes it as being "shaped like an inverted golden cone, broad at the summit and narrowing toward the base.[20] In the

Mehrangarh cosmogram, this axial truth is not sculpted but implied; the radiating lines converging toward the centre suggest the unseen *Merū*, the axis *mundi*. Thus, the painter transforms the textual *Merū* into a geometric presence, it is invisible yet central, absent yet controlling the rhythm of the entire visual field.

The Mehrangarh artist seems to have internalized this concept; the planetary belts around the cosmic dolphin are rendered not as decorative rings but as rhythmic rotations, each embedded within a larger circle of time. The painting thus becomes a diagram of perpetual motion; *kāla-chakra*, the wheel of time turning through divine order.

In the *Purāṇic* cosmology, measurement (*parimāṇa*) is not merely mathematical; it is a sacred articulation. Each proportion, whether of *dvīpas, sāgaras*, or *Merū* expresses metaphysical equivalence. As Stella Kramrisch observes, in Indian thought, the measure of the cosmos, which is the measure of man; the microcosm and macrocosm are scaled by the same law of proportion.[21] Similarly, Coomaraswamy emphasizes that sacred measurement is a way of participation to build or paint the cosmos, which is to imitate the divine act of creation.[22]

Thus, the cosmogram does not seek to represent the universe; it re-enacts its formation through geometry, colour, and sacred number.

Theological Implication of *Lokaloka* Boundary

Beyond the *Lokaloka parvata*, the text describes a realm of utter stillness where material activity ceases. Here dwell the perfected beings (*siddhas*) and the liberated souls (*muktas*), untouched by time and death. In the Mehrangarh painting, this region is marked by a faint, almost translucent band of light, perhaps the artist's way of signifying the ineffable. In symbolic terms, crossing *Lokaloka* equates to transcending the cycle of *saṃsāra*. The cosmogram thus becomes a

map not just of worlds, but of states of consciousness, a pilgrimage from form to formlessness.

Cosmic Order as Visual Theology

When studied through the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the given cosmogram reveals a perfect synthesis of theology, geometry, and aesthetics. The *Purāṇic* measures provide not mechanical accuracy but spiritual proportion; the artist translates scriptural cosmos into a visible *maṇḍala*. The result is a painting that breathes, not as an illustration of text, but as its embodied experience. It stands as testimony to how medieval Indian painters were not mere craftsmen but cosmographers, translating divine architecture into pigment and proportion, merging revelation with measurement.

Comparative Analysis

The given cosmogram does not exist in isolation; it belongs to a long and continuous lineage of visualizing the cosmos in the Indian subcontinent. From temple plans and mural diagrams to Jain manuscripts and Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, Indian artists and philosophers have repeatedly sought to embody the structure of the universe through sacred geometry. By comparing the given diagram with a few representative examples, one can discern both its continuity and distinctiveness within this visual theological tradition.

The given cosmogram shares its concentric organization with Jain *lokapuruṣa* diagrams and Buddhist *maṇḍalas*. Jain manuscripts from Gujarat and Rajasthan, especially the *Samgrahani Sutra* illustrations (15th to17th centuries), depict the universe as a series of circular zones culminating in the realm of liberation (*siddha-śilā*). They employ strong color contrasts, reds, yellows, and golds to mark transitions between physical and metaphysical domains.

In Buddhist *maṇḍalas*, particularly the *Bhadrakalpika*

maṇḍala of Nepal and Tibet, the centre functions as Mount *Merū*, surrounded by circular oceans and continents. Both these traditions, though distinct in theology, visualize the cosmos as an act of meditation, a movement inward. The Mehrangarh painting follows the same inward centripetal movement, from the external *Lokaloka* ring toward the luminous centre of *Merū*, suggesting that the act of seeing is itself a spiritual pilgrimage.

Temple Architecture as Three-Dimensional Cosmogram

Indian temple architecture may be regarded as a raised *cosmogram,* a *bhū-maṇḍala* translated into stone. The architectural treatises, notably the *Mānasāra* and *Mayamata,* prescribe a square *vastupuruṣa maṇḍala* as the ground plan, where each direction and measure carries cosmic correspondence. Coomaraswamy notes that the temple is the cosmos in miniature; its building is an imitation of creation.

The Chidambaram *Nāṭarāja* temple in Tamil Nadu offers a profound example. Its innermost sanctum, the *Chidambara Rahasya*, symbolically represents the void, the formless Brahman beyond the manifest world. Around it, successive architectural enclosures unfold like the circular worlds of the *Purāṇic* universe. The Mehrangarh cosmogram echoes this spatial theology on cloth, the invisible centre as the abode of divinity, surrounded by graduated layers of manifest reality.

In the living tradition of mapping the universe, through these comparisons, it becomes evident that the given cosmogram participates in an unbroken Indian vision of art and scripture. The idea of the universe as a measured yet sacred space runs like a golden thread through *Vedic* hymns, *Purāṇic* chapters, temple blueprints, and miniature paintings. The Mehrangarh painting thus stands not as an

isolated artefact but as a living node within the great chain of cosmological imagination.

As Stella Kramrisch reminds, "Indian art does not imitate the visible; it makes visible the invisible." In that sense, the Mehrangarh cosmogram is less a map of the heavens and more a mirror of consciousness, a visualization of the *ṛta*, the eternal order that sustains both cosmos and man.

The Artistic and Material Dimensions Through Medium, Technique, and Regional Aesthetic

While the given diagram operates as a theological diagram, its material and aesthetic language is no less significant. Painted on cloth using natural pigments and mineral inks, the work stands at the intersection of ritual art, manuscript illumination, and cartographic visualization. The physicality of the painting, its texture, colour, and rhythmic brush lines, reveals a world where matter itself becomes a vessel for the sacred.

The use of cloth (*paṭa*) as the painting surface recalls an old Rajasthani and Pahari practice, often associated with *yantras*, paintings, and ritual scrolls. Unlike paper or wall, cloth breathes; it absorbs and radiates pigment differently, creating a living, almost pulsating surface. The cosmogram's fabric bears fine creases and a faint warp line grid visible beneath the paint, signs that it was hand-woven and possibly consecrated before painting. In the Indic tradition, cloth often symbolises the body (*deha*) of the cosmos; just as the deity's garment carries divine presence, the painted cloth becomes a field for divine manifestation. Thus, this cosmogram may have been conceived not only as an object of study but as a ritual presence, unrolled and viewed in a meditative ceremony.

The preliminary examination suggests the use of natural

mineral and vegetable pigments. In that red ochre and cinnabar for energy and life (*rajas*), yellow orpiment and turmeric base for sanctity (*sattva*), and lamp black for the infinite (*tamas*). Each colour, rather than being decorative, encodes a cosmic principle. The concentric rings alternate between fiery and cool tones, suggesting the oscillation between creation and dissolution means *sṛṣṭi* and *pralaya*. In this way, pigment becomes theology and colour as cosmology, paint as prayer.

The artist demonstrates remarkable control over geometric proportion. The circles appear precise, revealing an internalized geometry; perhaps guided by the same *śilpa-śāstra* principles that governed temple architects. The radial symmetry, combined with subtle variation in brush pressure, generates a visual rhythm that seems to pulse like a *mantra*. Fine outlining in black ink (lamp soot), defines boundaries between cosmic layers, while delicate white highlights accentuate the luminosity of divine space. The brushwork is meditative, each line deliberate and devotional, echoing the rhythm of recitation. This technical precision transforms mathematical order into aesthetic grace.

Stylistically, the painting reflects the Marwar school's tendency toward intense chromatic saturation and disciplined composition. The use of flat colour fields, balanced with measured linear rhythm, aligns it with late 18th-century Marwar's visual culture, when court ateliers in Jodhpur and Nagaur were experimenting with hybrid forms between sacred mapping and visual documentation. This cosmogram seems to embody the visual clarity of a map and the devotional fervour. Its geometry, though universal, is rendered through a regional eye as firm, luminous, and deeply contemplative.

The technical and material features of the cosmogram reaffirm the Indian belief that art is a form of yoga. The artist's mastery over

proportion, pigment, and surface mirrors the inner discipline of meditation. To paint such a universe is to participate in its rhythm; each brush-stroke becomes a recitation of *ṛta*. As Coomaraswamy aptly observed, "In the East, art is not self-expression but self-realization."

The cosmogram at Mehrangarh thus becomes a meditative act, the painter dissolves into his measure, and the universe re-emerges through his disciplined hand.

Conclusion

In its geometric vision, this work distills the soul of Hindu philosophy; one of the deepest metaphysical contemplations ever shaped by the human mind. Its sacred geometry traces a subtle bridge between matter and spirit, leading thought from the tangible to the transcendental, where the essence of all spirituality finds its fullness in *Kṛṣṇa*.

It is no mere artefact of pigment and cloth, but a visible meditation, a universe made contemplative. Through its concentric *manḍalas*, and radiating symmetries, it performs the ancient act of placing the self within the cosmos. Every circle, every axis breathes the rhythm of becoming; from the seen to the unseen, from the gross to the subtle. What seems a map is in truth, a *manḍala* of meditation. The spiralling oceans, the luminous pole of *Dhruva*, the turning form of the *Śiśumāra,* and all pulse with the cadence of *ṛta*, the eternal order. Here, geometry unfolds as revelation, and the act of measurement transforms into worship. The artist, in tracing the cosmos, becomes a participant in its recreation. A moment where art and devotion unite in radiant harmony.

The cosmos of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, as imagined here, is not a chart of distances but a journey of consciousness. It calls the viewer inward, across layers of being, toward the unmoving center, the still

abode of *Viṣṇu*, axis of all motion. The *Śiśumāra*, the cosmic dolphin, breathes as the universe itself. It is turning eternally around the Pole Star like a *yogi* in ceaseless meditation. Thus, this cosmogram stands as scripture and image, geometry and prayer. It transforms philosophy into vision, revealing that in the Indian imagination, beauty and knowledge were one. Here, *darśana* becomes *upāsanā*; seeing becomes worship.

In an age when digital maps and rational grids define our sight, this eighteenth-century cosmogram recalls a time when to measure space was to align with consciousness itself. A bridge of color and form between the finite and the infinite. To encounter such a creation is not merely to study it, but to enter its living field, to feel the breath of an ancient mind that saw no boundary between astronomy and theology, between science and surrender. Mapping the sacred, then, is not conquest but communion. A reminder that the cosmos, like this painted cloth, remains forever both veil and revelation.

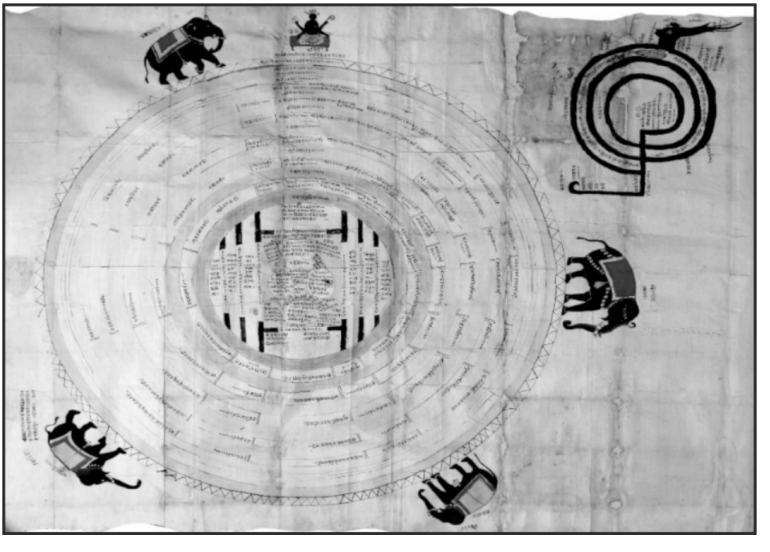

Plate 1: ***Cosmogram.*** **3 ft. 7 in. × 3 ft. 6 in. Preserved in the Archive of Maharaja Man Singh Pustak Prakash, Mehrangarh Fort, Jodhpur, Rajasthan**

The message conveyed through this diagram is that material structures like the physical world belong to the realm of *māyā*, the transient illusion that must ultimately be transcended. It signifies that beyond these temporal manifestations lies the supreme and enduring reality is *Kṛṣṇa* himself.

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