

JOURNEY WITH GANAPATI  
A Media Exploration and Analysis of  
Hindu Religious Ritual Components

by

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ABSTRACT

Applying modern and recent audio-visual technology to the traditional practice and performance of ancient Hindu religious ritual. To illustrate elements of the Indian Rasa theory of esthetics, the canons of Hindu iconography, the symbolism of mantra, yantra, and tantra with the tools of computer graphics, animation, high speed photography, and to entice the imagery in a cocoon of sound spirals with the mechanics of structural and layered sound. To attempt a marriage of the observed ethnographic ritual with the contrived experiential state that modern technological tools permit. The nature of the tape will be circular in time and confined in space. It is to be used repeatedly like an audio record so that the sound-image stimulus becomes more familiar with playing and a familiarity and recognition factor replaces the "only once to be seen and heard" phenomenon.

The written thesis will primarily serve as a background of ideas and theories employed and to help understand the technical, artistic or cultural traditions and the motivation for that use, with supportive sketches and drawings.

1. Use of the screen as stage/temple/space with the concept of yantra needs.
2. Use of traditional chant to create a captive sound environment.
3. Use of religious symbols and the inherent relationship between drawn pictures, dance, ritual performance and natural phenomena.
4. The appropriateness of computer graphics and other audio-visual technologies to serve and be extensions of traditional ritual components.
5. The insider-outsider dialogue concerning ethnographic film.

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## INTRODUCTION

My primary object in making this tape about Ganapati, an amalgam of Hindu deities of India, grew out of my past filmmaking experience and the observations gained therein.

All my work has been ethnographic. My motives have been to record events in the lives of minority cultures where traditional ways of life are threatened with extinction or drastic change. This change often is not wanted by the community, and the potential of this change often is not contemplated or anticipated. This change, in the final analysis, is thrust upon an unprepared community by an alien force.

The effects of this foreign invasion may be seen in the displacement of traditional relationships within communities by consumer goods. Traditional tribal areas are opened up by modern transportation. Swiftly following this development, a bureaucratic apparatus is established by the newly dominant culture. This bureaucracy is supported by a police force to ensure allegiance to the new order. On the positive side the dominant power introduces modern medical facilities into the tribal culture, and the dominant forces confer upon the traditional culture a gift, modern education.

Education is a mixed blessing, as it creates (a) an opportunity for the minority culture to integrate with the

modern culture, (b) a young, educated elite able to challenge the traditional tribal authority, and (c) perhaps most significantly, produces a national culture that replaces the isolated tribal culture in the eyes of the people, particularly the young people. All institutions, social, cultural and religious, are included in this transformation, which changes the thinking of the young student generation, the leadership component of the community for its future.

The loss of political and economic independence, the question of traditional social institutions, and a cultural awareness of vulnerability are all ingredients that lead to imbalance and social strife. Alcoholism, introverted depression, and radical politics are potentially the fruit of this situation.<sup>1</sup>

My efforts to record songs and music, religious and sacred events, and other communal activities on audio and video tape and on film grew out of the hope and belief that these were unique and valuable to those transitional cultures. In a sea of largely uncontrollable change, this cultural heritage would act as a beacon which all members of the community could recognize and value, particularly young leaders of the new society seeking their cultural roots.

To accomplish this task, I have sought support from universities, foundations, and other institutions both in and outside India. The traditional areas of Indian life do not have the resources for the documentation of their heritage,

and state and national governments, by and large, consider such activities reactionary. (These governmental bodies view traditional cultures as an impediment to progress and national integration; in certain situations, officials may deem such cultural documentation to be a source of subversive activity.) The support which has enabled me to carry on this work has also posed certain problems. Universities and other institutions have insisted upon the making of films discreetly addressed to English speaking audiences outside the national area. Considerations of translation, narration, dialogue, introduction, and subtitles have tended to simplify, summarize, and generalize the finished film. The individual, the topical, and the personal must be edited out in many cases, to insure that the resulting product satisfies the "outside audience." This problem of satisfying the alien audience without watering down the film was the principal object of making this tape.

The ethnographic film, with its western tradition, has produced two basic types of film. The first type has been termed "observational cinema" and the second "participatory cinema." Jean Rouch, John Marshall, Robert Gardner, Roger Sandall, the MacDougalls, and Tim Asch, in pursuing their individual styles, have elected to adopt one style or the other. Though Rouch, Marshall and MacDougall have acquired a certain "passable" fluency in the language of the people they are filming, this has often been the exception.

Observational cinema has tended to explore and celebrate the dramatic--sacrifices, dances, funeral rites, and war--while the participatory school has recorded the quieter moments of tribal life. The line dividing the two is not sharply drawn and, in many cases, is quite blurred. Whatever differences in style, the audience of these filmmakers has been the same: primarily the disciplines of anthropology and allied fields in the western world. Barring a few exceptions, there has been little attempt to visualize the use of this material for present and future use of the people filmed.

My work was initially observational and has moved through investigative cinema to the participatory. It has become more important for me to record what people think and feel than capture what they do.

I have recently made only films about people I have known for a long period of time. I find that the "cinematic experience" is only incidental to my long term relationship. The film is not the cause of the relationship. I will continue to have a relationship with those filmed well after the film is made, and the nature of this relationship will not differ from that before the film. This has allowed me a certain ease of access: I have been able to invite a dialogue on delicate and private matters, concerns or secrets; I have not needed to excavate information or extract ideas or pronouncements. Against this advantage, I have also had to self-impose a kind of censorship. I am acutely aware of the social ethic and the restraint that

must accompany it. I have therefore not explored certain ideas or activities that could be pursued by an "outside" filmmaker. This approach has made me realize that I make films about particular people and not about ideas and situations. I do not seek an idea, for instance blindness, and then go about finding an appropriate setting and person to film and thus illustrate the problem or idea. I work rather in the belief that the person whom I know--priest, jeweller, or cowherd--is basically interesting, and from his concerns the substance of the film unfolds. This then has been my approach to making films prior to undertaking my thesis film at MIT. It is an exploration of myself, the pictorialization of my thoughts, not those of another; it is not so much an explanation of various beliefs and practices as a stage from which to experience a mood or share an emotion.

To move from the stage and attitude of my earlier films, those that dealt with the observable, concrete and objective world, to the internal world of subjective fantasy, I have chosen as my vehicle the idol of the elephant-headed god of India called Ganapati.

The film, "Journey with Ganapati," is an attempt to convey to the western audience the spirit and mood of Hindu religious experiences. I avoid the props of narration and subtitles in an effort to create a Hindu experience that draws the viewer into the created environment. Narration, I believe, could conceivably draw the audience in initially



but, in itself, would become a fence preventing subsequent journeys into the body of the film.

My sources for the imagery and music of the film are taken from the canon of Hindu iconography, the Rasa theory of aesthetics, the ritual practice of Puja (individual daily prayer), Bhajan (the singing of devotional songs by a group), and the philosophy of the Tantra school of thought.

In the following pages I attempt to discuss the various elements employed.

#### GANAPATI

#### HIS WORSHIP, ICONOGRAPHY AND SYMBOLISM

Ganapati has many names. The main ones are Ganesa (lord of categories), Vighnesvara (lord of obstacles), Vinayaka (great leader), Gajanana (elephant-faced), Gajadhipa (lord of elephants).<sup>2</sup> He is venerated by all sects, and his cult is universal. One comes across his idols everywhere--in temples, schools, Chuttrams, public places, forts, on the high roads, near wells, fountains, tanks; in short, in all frequented places. It is taken into houses, and into all public ceremonies. Ganesa is always the first god to be worshipped. He is "god of obstacles, and by reason of this, a Hindu begins every serious undertaking by seeking to propitiate him."<sup>3</sup>

Ganapati, or Vighnesvara, may be represented in sitting positions or standing positions. The seat may be a padmaasana, a mouse or, in rare instances, a lion. He is figured in most cases with only two eyes; the agamas, however, prescribe three eyes to him in certain aspects. His image may have four, six, eight, ten, or even sixteen arms. The majority of images have only four arms. The belly of this god, Lambodara, as he is often called, has to be very capacious. On the chest must be drawn a snake in the form of the yajnopavita. He has the head of an elephant on the body of a man.<sup>4</sup>

In the Ganapati Upanisad, the image of the deity is described:

He has one tusk and four arms.  
Two of his hands hold a noose and a hook  
which two other hands  
Show the gestures of removing fear and  
granting boons.

A mouse is seen on his flag.  
Red, obese, he has ears like winnowing baskets.  
he is dressed in red; his limbs are painted  
with red sandal paints.

He is worshipped with red flowers.  
Unfailing, merciful, the origin of the worlds  
he appears at the beginning of creation,  
alone, beyond Nature, beyond the Cosmic Person.  
He who meditates on his form becomes great  
among the reintegrated.<sup>5</sup>

## IDENTITY AND ROLE OF GANAPATI IN INDIA TODAY

Ganapati is one of the gods of the Indian pantheon. Though he is worshipped everywhere, he is generally considered to belong to the rank of the lesser or intermediary deities. He is depicted in myth, song and sculpture as a scribe, patron of dance, remover of obstacles, and door keeper. However, there is a sect called the Ganapatyas and, to its followers, Ganapati is the supreme deity. It is the ideas, iconography, and imaging of this representation of Ganapati that I have adopted as the basis of the film and the depiction of various images extended from Ganapati being considered the cosmic head.

## THE BIRTH OF GANAPATI

According to the Siva Purana, once Siva's consort, the Lady-of-the-Mountain (Parvati), was disturbed by her lord, who entered the house while she was bathing.

Worried not to have a servant of her own to guard her door, she rubbed her body, and from some scurf she gathered a being was born whom she called her son and used as a guard. His name was Ganapati. When the boy attempted to prevent Siva from entering the house, the god sent his squires against him and in the battle Ganapati's head was cut off. On seeing Parvati's sorrow over this deed, Siva severed the head of the first living being that came his way and joined it to the child's body. This happened to be the head of an elephant.

In another myth (in the Brahma-vaiivarta Purana)

it is the evil glance of Saturn (Sani) which blew off the child's head.<sup>6</sup>

#### REPRESENTATION OF GANAPATI

Like every other Hindu deity, Ganapati can be represented through various symbols. There is therefore a mantra or sound representation, a yantra or graphic representation, and an icon or image of Ganapati.

The mantra or sound image of Ganapati is the monosyllable AUM, uttered at the beginning of every rite. Its meaning is also expressed in the sacred formula "tat, tua, asi" (Thou are That), which represents the fundamental identify of the macrocosm or the microcosm. Other mantras are Gam and Glaum.<sup>7</sup>

The swastika is the graphic symbol of Ganapati. He is also represented in a drawing of simple geometric shapes that individually symbolize the various elements of nature. Representative shapes are listed on the next page (Figs. 1 and 2).


A more elaborate diagram, called the Ganesa yantra, used for ritual worship, is represented on the following page (Fig. 3).

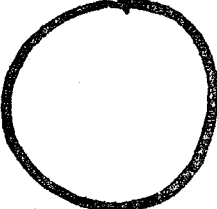
Fig. 1

Representative Geometric Shapes  
From Alain Danielou, Polytheism, pp. 351-354

<u>Shape</u>		<u>Element</u>
Diamond or Flame	=  =	ether

Crescent	=  =	air
----------	---	-----

Triangle	=  =	fire
----------	--	------

Circle	=  =	water
--------	---	-------

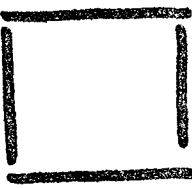
Square	=  =	earth
--------	---	-------

Fig. 2

From Alice Getty, Ganesa<sup>8</sup>

Geometric Synthesis Icon of Ganesa  
Depicting the Merger of Elements

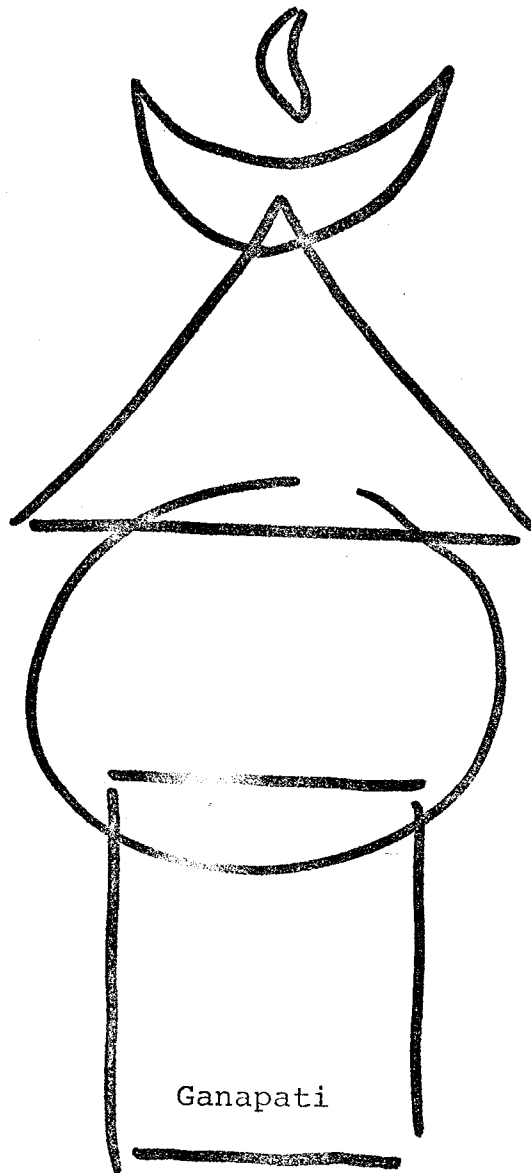
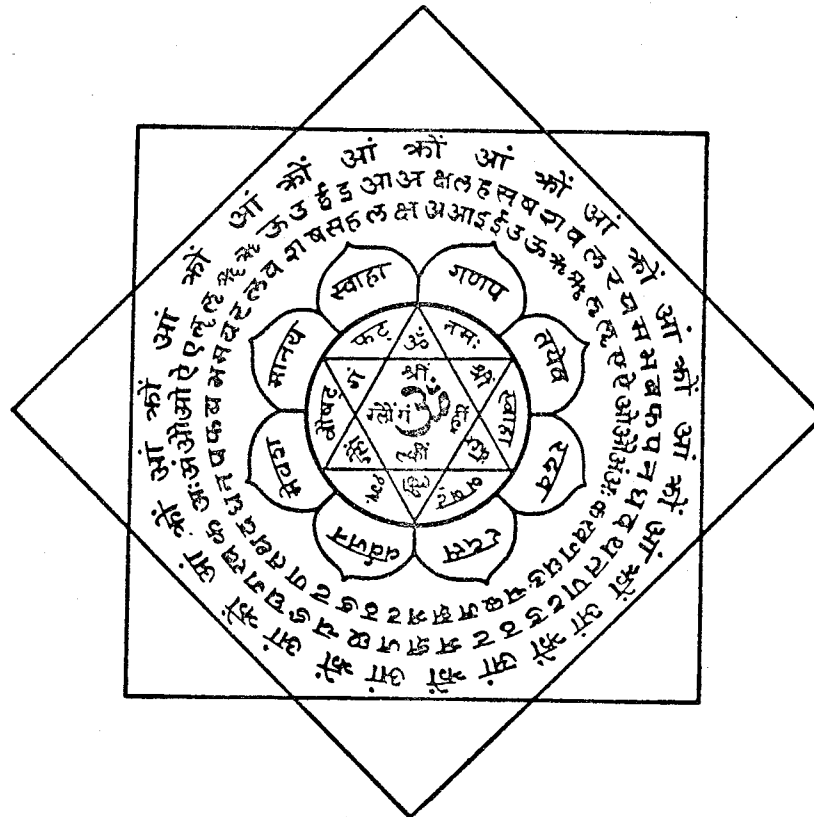


Fig. 3

### *The Gaṇapati Yantra*

The Gaṇapati yantra points at the identity of the macrocosm and the microcosm. <sup>9</sup>



# THE SYMBOLISM OF THE ICON OF GANAPATI

Composite structure of the image and its relationship to the mosaic of episodic explanations used in tape

When constructed, Hindu icons do not attempt to portray the particular but rather the general, the essence or nature of the being, rather than a realistic rendering of the form. The model for the nose of a human figure could be a sesamuma flower, his torso the face of a cow, his calves fish, his thighs depicted as stumps of a banana palm. These motives are truer to the envisioned form than the idiosyncratic rendering of a single, incidental human model.<sup>10</sup>

A brief explanation of this icon's various symbolic meanings from the Hindu point of view will help illustrate the use and appropriateness of the mosaic of episodes used in the film.

Ganapati has an elephant head, and his vehicle is the mouse. The elephant represents the macrocosm, the outward, the galactic, while the mouse is the master of the "inside of everything." He is the invisible, the atomic, the intellect, and the internal states of meditation.

As the universal ruler, Ganapati has four arms, "symbols of the directions." He holds an ax in one hand; the ax is the symbol of fire, the instrument that removes obstacles. In his other hand he holds a trident, symbol of the trifold powers of creation, preservation, and destruction. On one hand he holds a bowl of sweet rice balls depicting him as



grantor of boons, the fulfiller of desires, while the other hand, allaying fear, shows that Ganapati is beyond the realm of time, of death, to which all fear pertains.

He is large-bellied, big-eared, one-tusked, wears a snake, has three eyes, and is red in color. All aspects of his representation are symbols and important to his representation.<sup>11</sup>

Rather than assert by way of voice-over commentary or subtitles that the snake means time or that the ax represents fire, I attempted to illustrate the nature of the symbol selected. It was not possible to render the entire iconography of Ganapati with these visual explanations, but the most important aspects of the Ganapati image, in fact, were illustrated.

For purposes of explanation here, it is best to talk about one motif, the stomach of Ganapati and the ideas associated with this. Of all the elements of the icon explained, this is the most exhaustively dealt with.

Ganapati is also called Lambodara, or fat-bellied. He is fat because he has consumed and contained all the desires of living things in his stomach. The stomach is the world of the present, of the time that is. It is the avenue of the present, in addition to its projections of the historical past and the prophetic future. The drawing presents the above: for instance, there is a snake (cosmic time) encircling the stomach (the world or stage), lined with yellow

(rice balls) faces representing human desires. Within this frame, an aggressive large male fish chases away little ones. The fish represent the tiny sperm, the tiniest force activated by desire. Fish also represent the principle of propagation, the fruit of desire. (See Fig. 4)

From the drawing described above, we cut to the next shot, that of a swirl of moving fish; desires flowing in at one specific time--now.

The next shot is a rapid introduction cutting from a male to a female face, both of which are contriving conditioned emotion at the same time. It gives the idea of conflict. The desires of one must clash with the desires of the other. The male/female image represents the tension of opposites.

The image is succeeded by the live fish scattered by the computer graphic renderings of one fish eating another, the consequence of conflict. This is followed by a series of masks. Masks represent permanent cultural emotions.

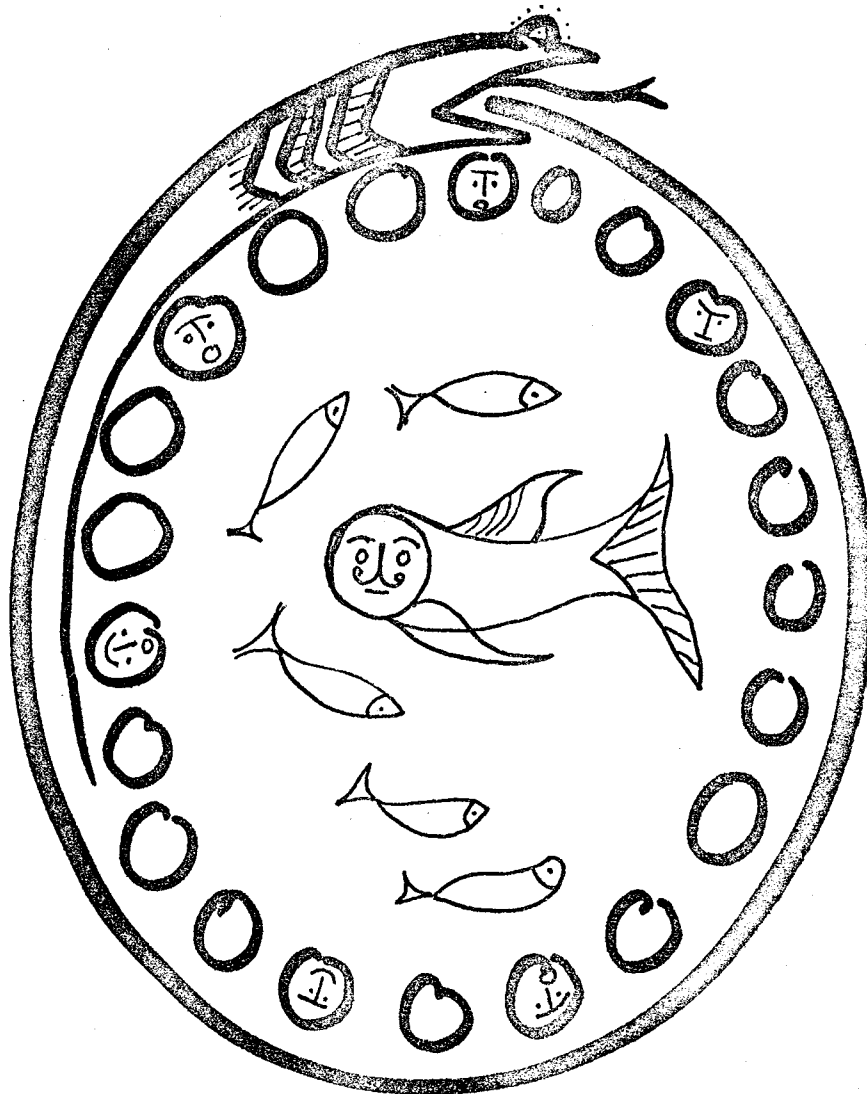
This is succeeded by the close-up of a dancer's face, dehumanized and made mask-like, which depicts the range of emotions, or the moods of life.

This depiction of individual emotive states rendered separately is next harmonized by the celebration of the dancer. There can only be cause for celebration if there are dragons of despair.

Ganesa is the lord of the dance. Dance represents in

Fig. 4

Detail of the Stomach of Ganapati



Indian thought the highest vehicle of human expression and excitement. In this particular rendering of the dance, the dancer's lack of polish, as well as the lack of our ability to make superimpositions of images, does not enable the "dancer" icon to transcend the human. The video effect is, by and large, an effect.

With the dance ending, this closes the pictorial explanation of Ganapati's stomach. All other renderings are done with the same basic approach.

#### BHAJAN

Bhajan is the worship of the divine spirit by a group of persons. These worshippers sing to the accompaniment of musical instruments, principally the dhol, the two-handed drum, or tablas, with support by a harmonium and manjiras (finger cymbals).

All over India small groups of people, ranging from five to fifteen, sometimes of the same caste, sometimes of the same community, sometimes of the same work environment, will gather to sing at a fixed site or a revolving site, the home of one of the participants, to sing devotional songs. The singing begins at 10:00 pm and goes on until the early hours of the morning.

The group usually seats itself on the ground in a semi-circle facing a portrait or sculpture of one of the gods or

goddesses of the Indian pantheon. An oil lamp, incense sticks, a bowl of flowers and a tray of sweetmeats, or "prasad," is placed before the image. During the course of the evening the oil in the lamp is replenished and the incense sticks replaced. At the end of the Bhajan, the offering of sweetmeats is distributed among the singers. Some of the sweetmeats are consumed in the presence of the deity, and the rest are taken to be shared by the singer's family.<sup>12</sup>

Depending upon the group and the singing skills of the participants, the singing proceeds. The first singer establishes the lead by reciting a couplet of poetry, following that by the first verse of the song, the refrain, or sometimes the repetition of the entire verse. Those assembled join the singing. The next song is started by another person and the lead rotates during the course of the evening. When both men and women are participating, the sexes are divided into two adjacent groups in Saurashtra India.

The songs address the deeds of gods and saints and range from the instructional to the submissive. No matter what the composition of the group of songs, the first song of the evening is always an invocation to Ganapati, the elephant-headed god, Vighesvara, the remover of obstacles. The mood of the events is neither solemn nor frivolous. The mood is casual and light-hearted at the beginning of the evening,

rising to a crescendo toward the end, when the singing pace is rapid. It is not unusual for the participants to go into trances, get up and dance, or slip off into quiet silent meditation in the midst of the singing, clanging cymbals, and reverberating drums.

The Bhajan, clearly expressive of the Bhakti Marg, is the most popular path of meditation, as it neither requires religious education nor the Yogic training for meditation. Release is sought through the action of singing, and the vehicle for transport is created by the singing of the groups and the sensations quickened in the devotee.

The use of the Bhajan in the film is to bring a climax to the movement in which elements of Hindu devotional practice are fused, for example the mantra, yantra and tantra, and as is seen by the seating arrangement and participation of the singers.

#### PUJA

Puja is the act of daily prayer by the Hindus of all stations and castes. At its most common it is worship by an individual in his or her home, before an icon installed in a niche or cupboard that faces east. The worshipper must not eat anything prior to prayers and should have had a bath. The length of time spent in prayer depends upon the

inclination of the devotee and may be as short as a few minutes or ranging up to a few hours each day. First the worshipper decorates the shrine and then greets the residing deities. The devotee then chants mantras, or stutis, prayers of praise, which are followed by a period of Dhyan, or quiet contemplation.

All the steps from evocation to Dhyan are a journey taking the worshipper away from the real world toward the ideal repose. The use of mantra (sacred chants), yantra (sacred diagrams), and tantra (use of gestures, ritual articles, and ingredients) involves and requires all the attention of the devotee to conduct properly. This combination of voice and gestures in a ritual place lit by oil lamps and incense concentrates the worshipper's thoughts toward the one supreme deity to the exclusion of mundane concerns. The concerted effort of the ritual has prepared the mind of the individual by the time he reaches the time for Dhyan or meditation. Sitting cross-legged or in the lotus position, the devotee attempts to fix his thoughts on his concept of the creator, leaving the lands of sight, smell, touch, and sound behind.

What the worshipper experiences during Dhyan, sounds and color, are considered to be outside the realm of the senses and belong to the so-called supersenses. The vortex of

ritual left behind reverberates as an echo.<sup>13</sup>

## MANTRA

### The Use of Sound and Sound Effects

Mantra (sacred sound thought forms) is like Yantra (magical diagrams) and Tantra (ritual gestures), a component of Hindu religious ritual.

Hindu life is pervaded by mantras. The entire existence of a peasant or prince is related by them. The purposes of the mantras are numerous. They are used for (1) attaining liberation, (2) worship of the manifest forms of divinity, (3) worship of the lesser gods and genii, (4) communication with deities, (5) acquisition of superhuman powers, (6) the feeding of ancestors and gods, (7) communicating with ghost spirits, (8) warding off evil influences, (9) exorcising devils, (10) the cure of diseases, (11) preparing curative water, (12) destroying plants, animals or men, (13) eliminating poison from the body, (14) influencing other thought, (15) bringing men, lesser deities, beasts, and ghosts under control, and (16) purification of the human body.<sup>14</sup>

From the above it is plain that mantra is potent in almost all aspects of a Hindu's life. The sound used in the film "Journey with Ganapati" is entirely religious and specific to the worship of Ganapati. Basically, it can be



divided into the following parts: (a) a mantra of a thousand and eight names of Ganapati, (b) a mantra of the eleven names of Ganapati, (c) a collection of oblatory verses during his worship, and (d) the devotional singing of songs about Ganapati by a group of associates which are called Bhajans.

The recitation and singing of devotional songs is a device to enter the world of meditative calm. They are a ladder from the mundane to the spiritual. It is believed that the chanting and singing creates an echo and a reverberation within the worshipper that is self-perpetuating, called "Dhvani." Like the gradual emergence of the sound generated by rubbing the rim of a wine glass, Dhvani grows and multiplies, so that simple words and phrases acquire greater and greater complexity.

We have tried to manifest this intensely growing sound in the tape. Essentially, a simple phrase is multiplied until it reaches a climax where four tracks of the same refrain combine. The effect is that of many people chanting and many sounds being dispersed over a large area, while in reality there were but two voices.

The four evolutionary types of sound in the tape are controlled by the regular and emphatic repetition of the bija, or seed mantra Aum. The drawn-out sound that initially creates a flat monotone changes into a circular spiral. Time ceases to be linear. This suspension of the headlong dash of time is crucial for the contemplation

of forces outside the ordinary which, of course, is the objective of this tape.

## MUDRA-TANTRA

### Gesture, Posture and Action

The making of the ritual gestures, dancing and singing are complementary to mantra (sacred sound) and yantra (magical diagrams) and form the third necessary component of Hindu religious practice.

The offerings of incense, sandalwood paste, the lights of the fire, water and flowers are symbolic gestures by the devotee that deal with the deity on all planes.

At the elementary level, these offerings are those of an individual to an honored guest. The deity is invoked, welcomed, bathed, fed, clothed, rested and exalted by these offerings.

On another level, the devotee seats the power of the deity in his or her person, and the offering then takes on a cosmic scale. The primordial focus of the universe whose gross manifestations are the elements are then offered. There is neither contradiction nor tension in these rather different interpretations of the same gesture.

Just as the mind is prepared by a strict regime of prayer and yoga to enable it to approach various religious states, the act of dancing and singing prepares the devotee

for the same purpose.

By mantra (incantation), yantra (magical diagrams), and tantra (posture, gesture and action), the devotee concentrates all his physical and mental powers to the act of worship. This interdependence of audio-visual stimuli with the invisible meditative process has been recognized in India since ancient times. Each sound has a corresponding color, and all yantras have their associations with the musical modes of the "raga" system of Indian music. It is this interrelationship of light, sound, and movement that drove me as a filmmaker to attempt to render on film this ancient philosophical concept using modern tools of video, computer graphics and sound engineering devices.

#### YANTRA, OR MAGIC DIAGRAMS

##### The Use of Yantric Canon for the Treatment of the Screen and Camera Practice

Yantra, or magic diagrams, is one of three parts that make up the Hindu ritual practice. The other components are mantra and tantra. Yantras are geometrical figures made from linear elements intended to represent, in a symbolic form, the basic energies of the natural world. They are the visual equivalents of the mantras, or thought forms.<sup>15</sup>

All the elementary geometrical figures--point, straight line, cross, circle, triangle, etc.--have a symbolic value

corresponding to basic notions. They can be combined in more or less complex figures to become the representatives of particular forces or qualities embodied in some aspect of creation. There is no shape, no movement which may not be reduced to a combination of these elemental forms.<sup>16</sup>

Yantras, though drawn flat, must be conceived as solids. The flat drawing is a mere suggestion of the three-dimensional figure which the yantra is. The three-dimensional yantra is itself but a static image of the moving living combination of forces represented in a particular deity.<sup>17</sup>

It is unnecessary here to dwell in detail about the constituent elements of the yantras, so a short note on two should suffice to illustrate. I shall use the Point and the Triangle.

The point is an all pervading spatial concept. Any movement, any shape, can be conceived as made of points. The nature of space, of ether, is location, that is, the possibility of defining particular places or point. The all pervading mathematical point thus expresses the nature of ether. The point can also represent the limit between different orders of existence and the origin of manifestation. When a nonmanifest stage of existence becomes manifest, its manifestation must begin somewhere, in some point of space, at some point of time. There must be an instant when it has not yet any extension but has begun to have location. The first instant when a thing does not yet exist and yet has already begun is adequately represented by the point, which can be defined as the "limit of manifestation."<sup>18</sup>

## THE TRIANGLE

This development assimilated to a rising or a movement in an upward direction can be represented by a vertical arrowhead or tongue of fire. The triangle with its apex upward is also taken to represent fire, identified with the male principle, the linga or phallus, symbol of Siva, the Progenitor or the Cosmic Person (purusa). All upward movement is characteristic of the fiery element of which mental activity is a subtle form.

The triangle pointing downward represents the force of inertia which pulls downward, and tends to suppress activity. It is associated with the element water, which always tends to come down to equalize its level. It is the passive aspect of creation and thus is represented by the Yoni or female organ, the emblem of energy (Sakti) or Cosmic Nature.<sup>19</sup>

The yantra is a religious diagram, a deity, a formula of contending forces, a geometric landscape for metaphysical states of meditation, a signpost and finally a stage. Once we know the traditional meaning of their geometrical elements, we can easily read the outward meaning of all yantras. The inner meaning is, however, difficult to grasp, and can only be gained through the practice of yoga.

In the tape these yantric concepts are used in three ways. First, the uses of the four edges of the frame constitute the idea of yantra as a stage. The predominant movement of images in the tape is not from left to right, but up

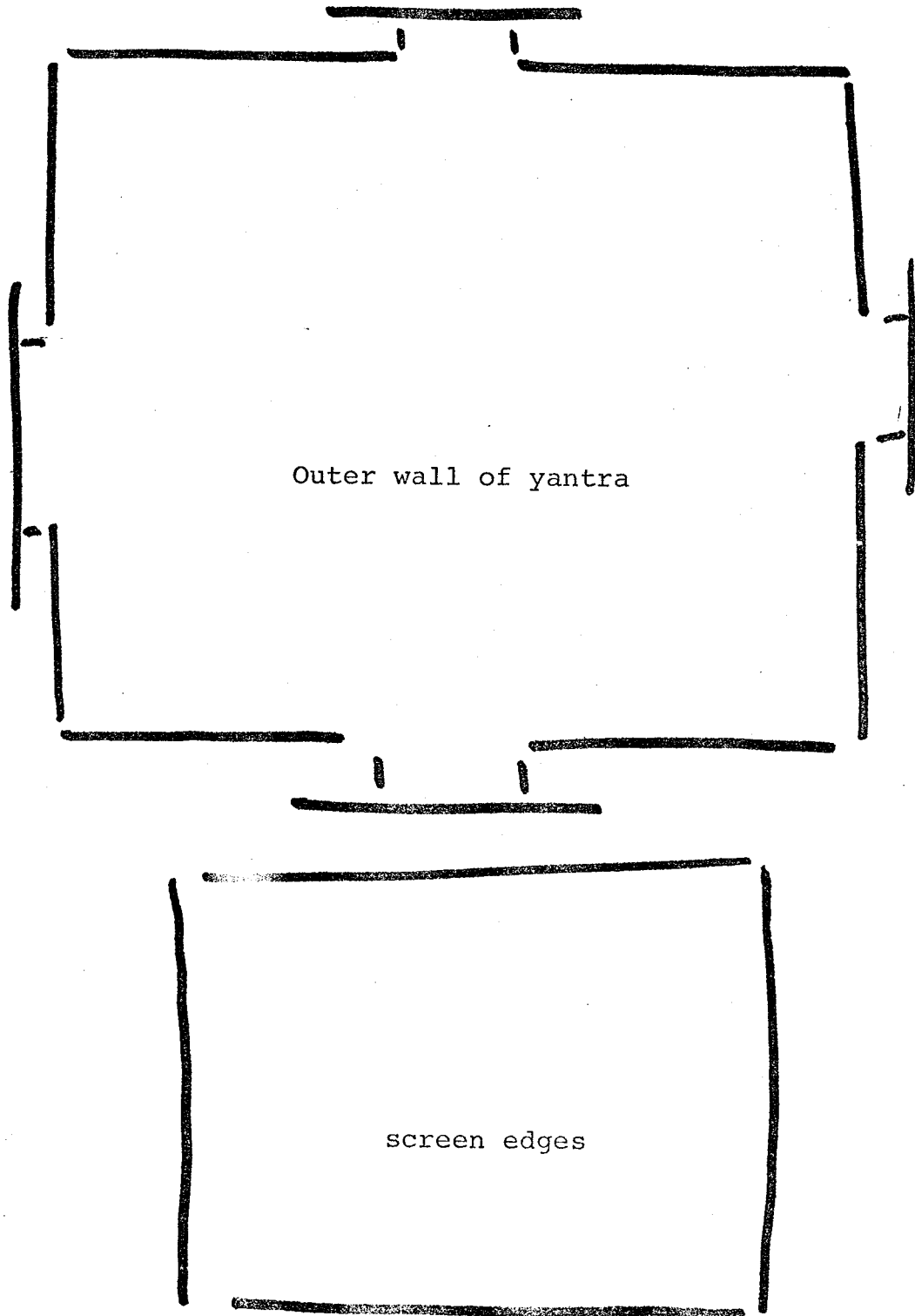
and down. The scene is not a window looking onto a larger world and representing a selected portion to the audience. There is no idea of action moving into and out of the spotlight of the window. Events and objects pop in, grow, fade in, are born, move and subside within the four edges. Like the outside boundary of the yantra, which demarcates the physical limit of a temple, the four edges of the screen reinforce the notion of a stage, on and in which everything happens. Little walks in and even less goes out of the frame. This visual confining is augmented further by the use of repetitious music whose movement adds a spiral of concentric circles. (See Fig. 5)

Besides the general thematic use of the yantric idea of a created environment for the duration of an event, there are particular uses of this form.

On an animated section of rice and vegetables in the program is drawn a diagram of Ganapati. In actual ritual practice the act of drawing is a springboard into self-created worlds. The journey thereafter is internal and imagined. The moving rice and the patterning of light attempt to give it life into which a comic vegetable icon of Ganapati emerges.

Secondly, in the dance of the triangles, the sequence begins with the red (male) and blue (female) triangles intersecting to create a six pointed star. This geometrical illustration of cosmic creation principles is then humanized

Fig. 5



through the performance of the two dancers. In fact, a yantra for the event could be described as follows: The edge of the frame is the outer limit or boundary. The core of light creates a circle, the area necessary for the event. The movement of the two dancers is reinforcing the attraction of male and female forces. Inserted into a movement that celebrates the harmony of these forces is intercut a sequence that demonstrates the fusion of these principles. To inversely make a yantra of the dance, the result could look like the diagram presented on the next page (Fig. 6).

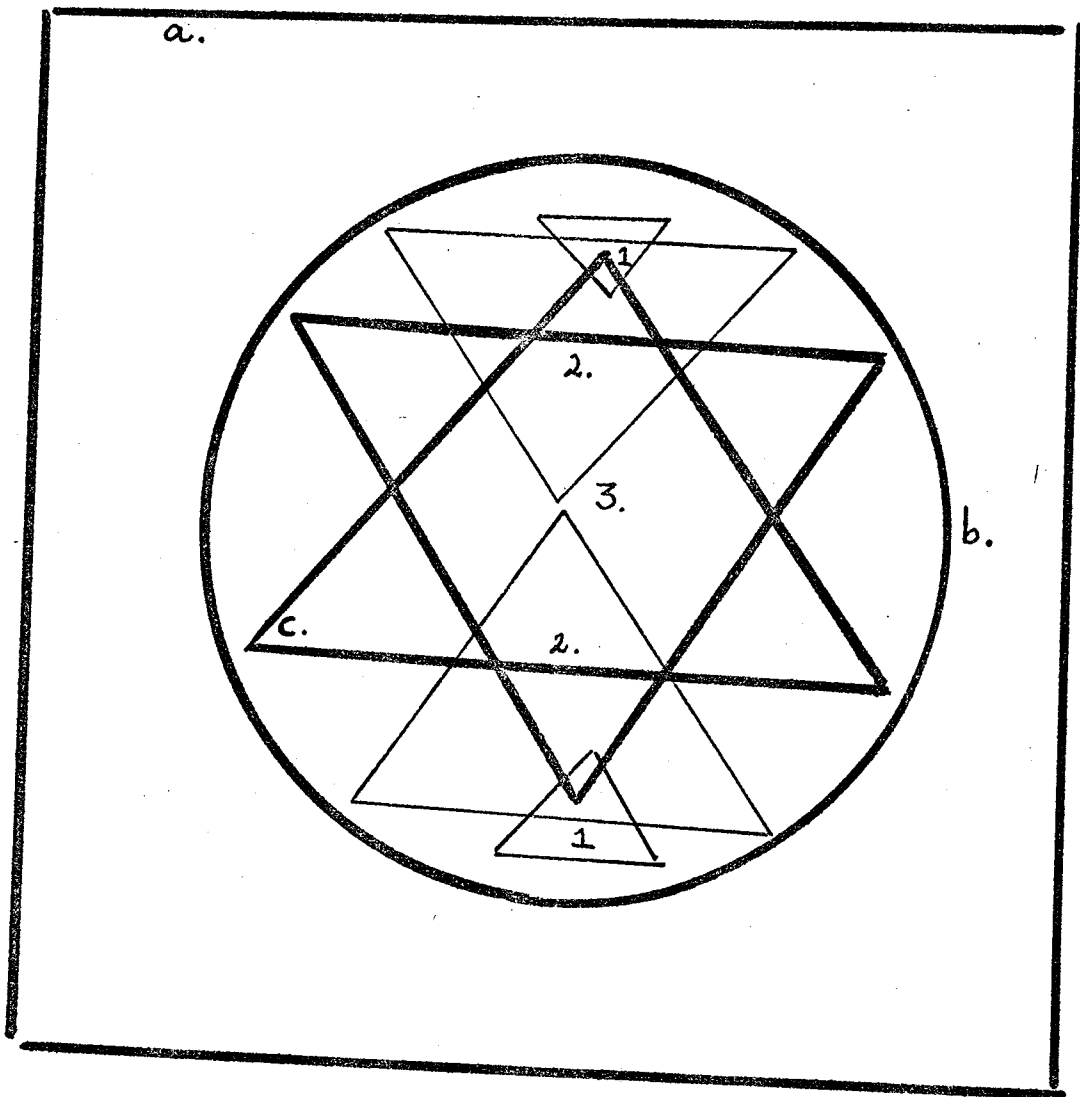
The third use of yantric diagrams is in the depiction of the seven psychic centers that are seated in the human body. According to the tantras, during the act of meditation, the devotee attempts to raise his "kundalini," or latent potential, up the vertical streams that correspond to the spinal column of the back.<sup>20</sup> In the passage from the base of the spine to the top of the head, this potential passes through seven centers that have yantric shapes. These centers are considered to be psychic planetary systems, so the journey upward is both from near to far and from small to big. The journey is evolutionary, with the final moment being a purifying merger of the individual potential with the eternal cosmic force.

The computer-generated graphics render a cold metallic feel. The drawings grow, become three dimensional, and then are reduced. Under the quick pace of computer graphics,



Fig. 6

Yantra of Male (red) Female (blue) Dance



- |  |                                   |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. dormant energy triangles  | a. screen edge                    |
| 2. active but separate male-female triangles                           | b. dancer's stage                 |
| 3. fusion of male and female triangles into 6 pointed interlocked star | c. potential of dancer's movement |

successive images, the long slow dissolve of the woman walking, does evolve in physical terms as the metaphysical journey through kinetic spaces.

#### THE MAKING OF THE TAPE

- Movements:
1. Evolutionary and Linear
  2. Sound that is Circular
  3. Explanation and Experience

I begin with an introduction of the image of Ganapati by a woman who is unknown but who is, in essence, the traveller throughout the film. The audience is expected to identify with this character. This sequence in the museum is shot with the idea of distance. The traveller is introduced, as is the image of Ganapati. The shooting style is cold and stiff.

The next sequence is the performance of the ritual. Here the stance is observational. The camera is closer. The traveller is seen to be observing the ritual without actually being involved in thought or gesture.

The next development is mental participation of the character through the imagery presented.

The last stage is reached in which the character is a full participant in the ritual singing. The camera is intimate, grows agitated and, in the end, attempts to diminish the visual reality to arrive at a better under-

standing of the mental condition of the participant. The rotating movement and soft focus do, in fact, illustrate this.

While the camera style is changing from the distant-curious to the observational and finally to the participatory, the sound is addressing other needs. For example, sound is used to define space. It begins as solitary and simple. Gradually, it multiplies and becomes complex. This is characteristic of the fundamental chant.

The insertion of specific pieces of music is tied to particular scenes. These short events are bubbles within the stream that rise and burst but do not contribute to the basic musical theme. The heavy, locked mood of the circular chant is lifted temporarily at the climax of the tape at the end by the quicker rhythm and beat of the Bhajan singing before it subsides into the single tonal chant, the same as at the beginning.

The fact that the beginning and end are the same musically strengthens the circular notion. We get the feeling of expanding spirals in space, but of a space that the chant is definitely in control of and which is easily encompassed by the sound.

The dual action of linear visuals with circular sound is supposed to produce a cone-like web into which the audience is led, through four steps: introduction, observation, revelation, and participation. While the audio and real

human scenes work as a web and carrot, the symbolic image episodes within the body of the tape attempt to fulfill two different objectives.

First, the images related to the icon of Ganapati are explanatory, such as the milk drop sequence, as illustrated by the onion rings between the eyes of the image of Ganapati. These represent different galactic systems. The expanding ripples on the water and the outward expansion of a burst drop of milk illustrate the expansive characteristic of an oscillating universe, which lies between the brows of Ganapati and whose eyes are the sun and moon, the father and mother of all the suns and moons of the universe.

There are many such illustrations about different aspects of Ganapati's anatomy and the symbols he carries. This explanation of the iconography of Ganapati is one objective of the images. The images are primarily achieved through special effects such as time lapse, high speed, x-ray, and related techniques.

In addition to these explanatory images are images that have an experiential basis. The computer graphic imagery, on the one hand, is geometric diagrams that symbolize the elements of a psychic planetary system. These are related to the central character (and, through her, to the audience) as she moves through her evolutionary journey.

This dual purpose in the imagery does present problems of identification and is a principal limitation in the tape

as it is. The explanatory scenes and those of experiences seem to be antagonistic rather than complementary at times. The insertion of a slow dissolve of the principal character walking through the hard computer worlds may alleviate this confusion a little.

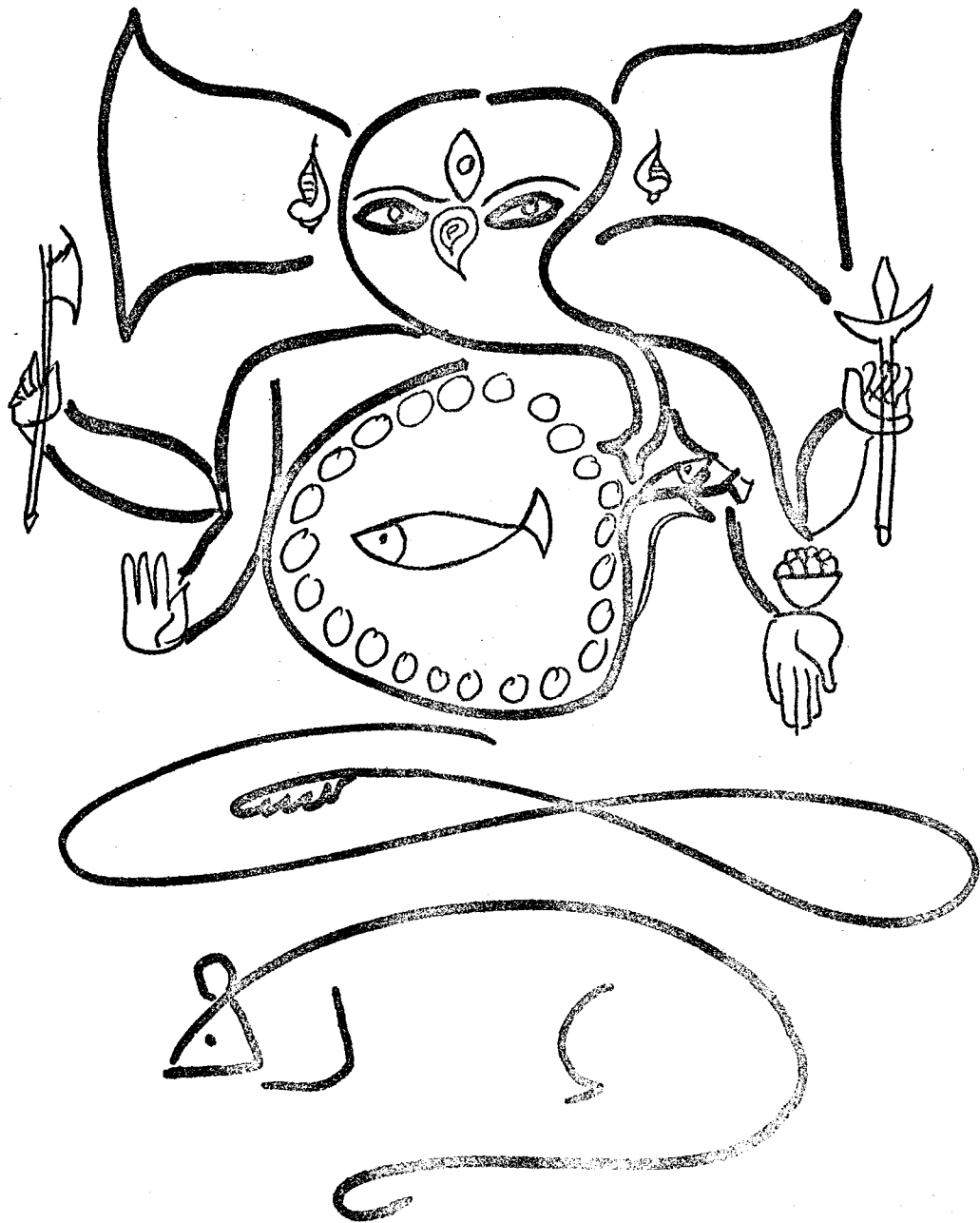
Though the preceding pages refer to the principal version of the film "Journey with Ganapati," two other versions have been made.

The first of these two is about five minutes long and consists of three tapes that play simultaneously on three monitors. The placing of the monitors could be in a horizontal line or a vertical one. The use of Qantel for these pieces is envisioned but untried.

The other short version of eight minutes experiments with silence separated by the monotone chant. All ethnographic elements, such as the prayer ritual, singing and dancing, are excluded. It is this version that is submitted with this thesis.

Fig. 7

Author's Homage to "Remover of Obstacles"



APPENDIX I

Shooting Script

I. Visuals

<u>#</u>	<u>Scene</u>	<u>Transition/ Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Effect</u>
1	red/white/black; fades & dissolves		1'	computer imagery
2	snake eating tail in cyclic repetition	dissolve	20"	animation
3	a.Rakhi at Fogg outside b.Rakhi inside Fogg c.Rakhi before Ganesh d.close-up of Ganesh e.Rakhi & Ganesh freeze	dissolve cut cut zoom freeze	2'	
4	a.Bhajan singers before Ganapati b.Rakhi walking in c.museum freeze fades to singing group frame expands to full size d.Bhajan scene-wide angle e.close-up Ganesh to fill frame	box within box frame inside frame grows	2'	
5	a.sunset at Cape Cod b.superimposition of Ruja Ganapati appearing & disappearing c.appearance of geometric symbols, i.e. square over land; circle over water; triangle over sun, etc.	dissolve  fade in	30"	computer
6	a.close-up of square with keyed in landscape while sunset fades b.dissolve to circle with water expanding ripple in pond or cascading water c.dissolve to triangle of lcg fire		1'30"	computer

<u>#</u>	<u>Scene</u>	<u>Transition/ Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Effect</u>
	d.dissolve to crescent or hexagonal shape over clouds (single frame to speed movement)			
	e.vertical eye with soap bubbles & incense spirals			
7	a.dissolve to sunset with geometric shapes com- pressed into the position where Ganapati was before disappearance b.Ganapati emerges to be superimposed on the geo- metric shapes c.Geometric shapes fade in color, leaving neon out- lines d.Ganapati begins to en- large a third of his size e.Red laser beam from right eye goes to bottom left corner of screen f.Left eye blue beams to right bottom corner of screen g.middle eye, white laser to top of frame h.crossing of beam i.beams drain to full frame of Ganapati enlarged		30"	computer
8	a.dissolve on to tantric symbolic painting of Ganesh b.close-up of right hand and clock-wise pan of painting, arriving at stomach	Carpenter Center, Harvard		animation
9	dissolve to fish in aquarium	New England Aquarium	1'	computer
10	dissolve back to stomach and pan to 1 face in the ring of faces circling the stomach			



<u>#</u>	<u>Scene</u>	<u>Transition/ Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Effect</u>
11	a.dissolve to live-face mask exercises b.dissolve to stomach showing freeze of faces circling stomach with dancer's face in the middle c.nine moods depicted by dancer, lighting changes with mood	studio     dance studio		computer
12	a.Zoom out to show full miniature figure of dancer in Ganapati's stomach framed by frozen masks b.zoom in to dancer only on stage c.performance of dance: mythical dance of Ganesh; churning of cosmic ocean; pure dance, video distorted for multiple imagery e.zoom out of dancer back in stomach of symbolic painting		5'	computer   video effects
13	a.full frame of painting b.zoom on head to dot in middle of forehead c.dissolve to drop in water expanding circles d.dissolve to aerial shot of camera in plane e.dissolve to water	hot air balloon over Western Mass.	30"	animation
14	full frame of painting dissolve to Ganapati yantra	Carpenter Center	30"	animation
15	animation of vegetable Ganesh with rat	Carpenter Center		animation
16	close-up of rat			

<u>#</u>	<u>Scene</u>	<u>Transition/ Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Effect</u>
17	a.dissolve to real rat b.dissolve to x-ray of rat c.dissolve to close-up rat with worm d.dissolve to Tantric painting	V.A. Hospital, West Roxbury	30"	
18	a.zoom to left upper hand b.close-up of trident c.dissolve to triangles & mimes and the act of creation	mime studio	4'	computer/ animation
19	Full frame of painting, close-up of right arm with ax		1'	animation/ computer
20	dissolve to earring vibrating, expanding arcs from left top corner to bottom right corner, superimposed by cross section of conch shell			animation/ computer
21	dissolve to face of woman from old to young, moving from bottom right corner to top left corner, shrinking in size			
22	a.dissolve to eye of sculpture b.eyes of Rakhi c.closed eyes on full face		30"	
23	a.invasion of multiple overlapping, conflicting, distorting scenes with video effects b.lessening one by one of imagery till only the flame of the oil lamp is seen	Harvard Square, local locations		video effects
24	a.dissolve from flame to sunset b.sun in close-up			computer

<u>#</u>	<u>Scene</u>	<u>Transition/ Location</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Effect</u>
	c. zoom out to reveal sunset			
	d. emergency of Rakhi on ocean in exact position of Ganesh			
	e. the figure is drained of color, remains as a cut out lined by a neon border			
25	a. appearance of psychic centers in outline b. close-up of bottom c. development of center d. upward penetration of the uncoiled serpent e. next center 2 f. center 3 g. center 4 h. center 5 i. center 6 j. center 7 k. center 8	Harvard Museum of Mineralogy	5'	computer
26	a. zoom out to reveal cut- out of Rakhi with all centers blazing b. center dissolve as camera comes to closed eye face c. zoom out from face to reveal Rakhi amidst the singing group d. pan to Ganesh and to faces of singing par- ticipants, one of whom is J. Bapa e. long shot of singing group	Lexington	4'	
27	dissolve to red, white, black with the snake, in cycles			computer
28	credits, titles appear in the black bands and are reduced to a dot/star	TV studio		studio effects

## II. Sound

<u>#</u>	<u>Scene</u>	<u>Sound</u>	<u>Sound Text</u>
1	red/white/black; fades & dissolves	A B	om
2.	snake eating tail in cyclic repetition	A B	phat
3	a.Rakhi at Fogg outside b.Rakhi inside Fogg c.Rakhi before Ganesh d.close-up of Ganesh e.Rakhi & Ganesh freeze	A C	phat
4	a.Bhajan singers before Ganapati b.Rakhi walking in c.museum freeze fades to singing group frame expands to full size d.Bhajan scene-wide angle e.close-up Ganesh to fill frame	A C D	
5	a.sunset at Cape Cod b.superimposition of Ruja Ganapati appearing & disappearing c.appearance of geometric symbols, i.e. square over land; circle over water; triangle over sun, etc.	A D E (F) (G) (H)	
6	a.close up of square with keyed in landscape while sunset fades b.dissolve to circle with water expanding ripple in pond or cascading water c.dissolve to triangle of log fire d.dissolve to crescent or hexagonal shape over clouds (single frame to speed movement)	A D D F G H	lam  vam  ram yam

<u>#</u>	<u>Scene</u>	<u>Sound</u>	<u>Sound Text</u>
	e.vertical eye with soap bubbles & incense spirals		ham, phat
7	a.dissolve to sunset with geometric shapes com- pressed into the position where Ganapati was before disappearance b.Ganapati emerges to be super-imposed on the geometric shapes c.Geometric shapes fade in color, leaving neon outlines d.Ganapati begins to enlarge a third of his size e.Red laser beam from right eye goes to bottom left corner of screen f.Left eye blue beams to right bottom corner of screen g.middle eye, white laser to top of frame h.crossing of beam i.beams drain to full frame of Ganapati enlarged	same as 6	
8	a.dissolve on to tantric symbolic painting of Ganesh b.close-up of right hand and clock-wise pan of painting, arriving at stomach	A D E G H	
9	dissolve to fish in aquarium	A,D,E,F,	vam
10	dissolve back to stomach and pan to 1 face in the ring of faces circling the stomach	A,D,E,G,H	
11	a.dissolve to live-face mask exercises		

<u>#</u>	<u>Scene</u>	<u>Sound</u>	<u>Sound Text</u>
	b.dissolve to stomach showing freeze of faces circling stomach with dancer's face in the middle		
	c.nine moods depicted by dancer, lighting changes with mood		
12	a.Zoom out to show full miniature figure of dancer in Ganapati's stomach framed by frozen masks b.zoom in to dancer only on stage c.performance of dance: mythical dance of Ganesh; churning of cosmic ocean; pure dance, video dis- torted for multiple imagery d.zoom out of dancer back in stomach of symbolic painting	A,E, (I)	
13	a.full frame of painting b.zoom on head to dot in middle of forehead c.dissolve to drop in water expanding circles d.dissolve to aerial shot of camera in plane e.dissolve to water	A,B,D,E,G,H	
14	full frame of painting dissolve to Ganapati yantra	A,B,D,E,G,H	
15	animation of vegetable Ganesh with rat		
16	close-up of rat		
17	a.dissolve to real rat b.dissolve to x-ray of rat c.dissolve to close-up rat with worm d.dissolve to Tantric painting		

<u>#</u>	<u>Scene</u>	<u>Sound</u>	<u>Sound Text</u>
18	a.zoom to left upper hand b.close-up of trident c.dissolve to triangles & mimes and the act of creation	A,B,E	
19	full frame of painting, close-up of right arm with ax	A,B,D,E,G,H	
20	dissolve to earring vibrating, expanding arcs from left top corner to bottom right corner, superimposed by cross section of conch shell		
21	dissolve to face of woman from old to young, moving from bottom right corner to top left corner, shrinking in size		
22	a.dissolve to eye of sculpture b.eyes of Rakhi c.closed eyes on full face	A,B,D,E	
23	a.invasion of multiple overlapping, conflicting, distorting scenes with video effects b.lessening one by one of imagery till only the flame of the oil lamp is seen	A,D,E,F,J	
24	a.dissolve from flame to sunset b.sun in close-up c.zoom out to reveal sunset d.emergency of Rakhi on ocean in exact position of Ganesh e.the figure is drained of color, remains as a cut out lined by a neon border	A,D,E,F	

<u>#</u>	<u>Scene</u>	<u>Sound</u>	<u>Sound Text</u>
25	a.appearance of psychic centers in outline b.close-up of bottom c.development of center d.upward penetration of the uncoiled serpent e.next center 2 f.center 3 g.center 4 h.center 5 i.center 6 j.center 7 k.center 8	A,D,E,F,G,H     A,E,F,G,H	
26	a.zoom out to reveal cut-out of Rakhi with all centers blazing b.center dissolve as camera comes to closed eye face c.zoom out from face to reveal Rakhi amidst the singing group d.pan to Ganesh and to faces of singing participants, one of whom is J. Bapa e.long shot of singing group	A,D,E,F,G,H   A,D	
27	dissolve to red, white, black with the snake, in cycles	A,E	
28	credits, titles appear in the black bands and are reduced to a dot/star	A	
29	at the end of credits the black of the red-white-black cycle has increased and has left a night sky of stars that were the names of project participants and acknowledgments and dedication to Mapu		



### III. Sound Key

- A represents a loop of Aum (ooooohmmm) sounds that run throughout the entire film
- B Sanskrit phrases that are subtitled
- C real sound at the Fogg Museum
- D religious singing
- E electronic music which interacts with A through the length of the film. It complements the drone and also explores compounds and enhances individual sequences
- F sounds of wind, fire, etc.
- G mantra syllables--single sounds
- H mantra phrases--lines, couplets, phrases in Sanskrit that are chanted over appropriate sequences and which are not subtitled
- I classical Indian dance music
- J sounds related to no. 23, which will consist of overlapping sounds from English, Bengali, Gujarati--in speech, song, and music. In addition, J sounds will include effects
- K transition and linking sounds
- L silence

APPENDIX II

Songs Used for the Film

1. Text

Ganapati jaya jaya  
Gajanana jaya jaya  
(repeat couplet)  
Gauriputra, -bolo  
Gajanana jaya jaya

Translation

Ganapati [lord of categories] hail hail  
Gajanana [elephant faced] hail hail  
Gauriputra [son of the goddess Gauri] -speak  
Gajanana hail hail

Explanation

This is a dhun. It is started by the lead singer, and the line is repeated by the group present. The duration of dhuns is dependent on the lead singer. It may be two minutes long or exceed ten minutes. This is in the Gujarati language of western India.

2. Bhajan

Title

Mara anganiya ma  
Ghoomata padharo Ganapati

Text

refrain:  
Mara anganiya ma  
Ghoomata padharo Ganapati  
(repeat)  
Khelata padharo rumata padharo  
(repeat)  
Mara anganiya ma  
Ghoomata padharo Ganapati

verse #1:

Vishnu padharo ne, laxmi padharo ne  
(repeat)

Sangma laone Suraswatiji  
Mara anganiya ma  
Ghoomata padharo Ganapati

verse #2:

Shankar padharo ne, Nandi padharo ne  
(repeat)

Sangma laone Parawatiji  
Mara anganiya ma  
Ghoomata padharo Ganapati

verse #3:

Krishna padharo ne Balram padharo ne  
(repeat)

Sangma Laone Radha-Rani ji  
Mara anganiya ma  
Ghoomata padharo Ganapati

#### Translation

refrain:

Come to my courtyard (home)  
Come swaying o Ganapati  
(repeat)

Come playing come dancing  
(repeat)

Come to my courtyard  
Come swaying o Ganapati

verse #1:

Come Vishnu come Laxmi  
And bring with you Saraswatiji

verse #2:

Come Shankar come Nandi  
And bring with you Parvatiji

verse #3:

Come Krishna come Balram  
And bring with you Radha-Raniji

#### Explanation

This Bhajan is in the Marwari dialect of Rajasthan in western India. The Bhajan lasts 5 to 6 minutes.

APPENDIX III

Initial Participants

Dr. Pramod Chandra, Busch Reisinger Museum, research advisor  
Dr. Michael Apstein, V.A. Hospital, West Roxbury, x-ray  
photography  
Jitendra Sinhji Wankaner, Cambridge, research/music  
Jack Campbell, MIT, co-producer  
John Corea, MIT, computer graphics  
Delle Maxwell, MIT  
Clea Waite, MIT  
Walter Bender, MIT  
Steve Gano, MIT  
Dennis Pies, Carpenter Center, animation  
Amy Kravitz, Carpenter Center  
Dr. Joshi, Worcester, music  
Mrs. Shah, Lexington, community organizer  
Mrs. Nina Gulati, Brookline, dancer  
Annie Louie, Boston, dancer  
Ken Kantor, MIT, music  
John Fracois, Cambridge, music  
Rakhi Jhala, MIT, research, production  
Jayasinhji Jhala, MIT, producer

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17. Ibid., p. 350.
18. Ibid., p. 351.
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#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Guidance, instruction and support toward the writing of this paper and the making of the film, both entitled "Journey with Ganapati," was given by: Professor Richard Leacock, chairman, Film/Video Section, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Professor Pramod Chandra, Department of Fine Arts and Indian Studies, Harvard University; Professor John Ward, Department of Music, Harvard University; Glorianna Davenport, lecturer, MIT Film/Video Section; Benjamin Bergery, lecturer, MIT Film/Video Section; Jack Campbell, video engineer and filmmaking partner; Rakhi Jhala, partner; Ken Kantor and Delle Maxwell, participants in the film production.

It has been a privilege to be associated with them all.

I would also like to thank Diane Bohl, who typed this thesis.



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