

## **Mandala as a Gift and the Reciprocal Gift – Mandalas that are Parts of Museum Collections of Belgrade**

Dragica Jovanović\*  
*Republic Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments  
Belgrade, Serbia*

**Abstract:** *The mandala is a diagram that is used for meditation. In tantra yoga, mandala is a visual design of the life scale - a symbolic composition, energy schemes, the matrix code from which everything is built, warehouse of spiritual essence. Mandala is a summary of the cosmic revelation. Researching mandalas as arts of the Hindu-Buddhist cultural circle in the geographical territory of the Republic of Serbia, it was found that in the Belgrade museum collections there are mandalas originating from Nepal. They are a gift of the President of Nepal handed over to the then president of FR Yugoslavia.. They are kept in the Museum of Yugoslav History in Belgrade, Serbia..*

**Key words:** *mandala, tantra yoga, gift, Belgrade museum collections.*

### **Role of mandala in yoga**

Mandala dates from 13th century and appeared in tantric yoga for the first time. It is symbolism based on relations between a man and the Universe that tantric yoga owes its special feature. Mandala is an artistic structure of lifetime ladder in tantric yoga-symbolic composition, energy scheme, matrix code from which everything is made, a storage of spiritual essence. It is a summary of cosmic annunciation. According to the Hinduism, everything that exists in the Universe exists in us as well-individual and universal make oneness. It is Yoga that offers means, tools, instrument for connecting with the universal being in us. This connection is accomplished using universal symbols-mandalas. Mandala contains a symbolism of characters and shapes, creation of images, by which the structure of the Universe is created and enables one to follow the path of the Universe and by that move from spiritually to Divinity. Most commonly, mandala is defined as a diagram which is used for meditation. Mandala is an instrument of a firm concentration for meditative infatuation (*dhyana*). The word mandala originates from Sanscrit and means "circle", something which one is surrounded by. The term "mandala" has different meanings and they mainly depend on the context. Mandala drawings has been appearing in all cultures for a long period of time and nowadays they are often present in all artistic media in various forms. Mandala is a sacred cosmic diagram, model of a perfect world, symbol of the Universe, having a connotation of the very essence. Being a two- or three-dimensional idea of the sacred space filled with shapes and objects, mandala is artistically far richer and more stylish than yantra, which represents a geometric diagram. Mandala represents a symbolic diagram, abstract or real, a circle around square with a symbol in the middle, which can be a shape as well. There is a widespread notion of mandala as a geometric projection of the world, imago mundi, with which the sacred space is surrounded, the entrance in the sacred centre, it represents unity of macrocosm

---

\* Corresponding author: dragica.jovanovic@yuheritage.com

and macrocosm. It denotes the idea of harmony inside macrocosm-Universe and microcosm, human being, a harmony which is realised by life in a human being and a nature. Vision of this idea is expressed by shapes of mandala, which is the reason why there had never been two mandalas, which had been completely the same. Basis of mandala comprises eight times eight squares-the order of Heavens, which is established on Earth. The centre of mandala symbolises the Sun or the gates of heaven, a means of providing access to Heaven. Mandala has bounded centre and carries that focus on the centre that is the Self. Mandala is a means of meditation and the object of meditation, when the mandala means meditation facilitates yogi to transform his consciousness to the divine. By practicing concentration on the mandala practitioner explores the limits of his subconscious mind where contrast and assimilation of new integration are possible.

In Western culture the most common opinion is that the mandala symbolises the Universe and its energy. Western culture is familiar with the Mandalas principally through Carl Gustav Jung. By studying mandalas, Jung concluded that they express a condition in which there was a dressing table, and that the means of communication at the same time conscious and unconscious, in which the viewer a sense of serenity and that life has order and its meaning was awakened Using the mandala forms in psychotherapy, he watched them as "instruments with whose help the existence of the order was introduced." For Jung the mandala design, reshaping the eternal sense, eternal conversation, it is the Self, personal integrity, or quoting verses from Goethe's "Faust" - "Create, change, constant recreation of the Eternal Spirit.

Relationship of the mandala to the shape is the same as the ratio of the sound of the mantra. Mandalas enable us to visually get in touch with the universal spiritual energy and authority. Five major elements of the twenty four have their geometric symbols are displayed in the form of the mandala. In Vedic architecture, the elements directly reflect the external shape of the object. In Vastu-tomorrow Upanishad which is about the meaning of forms, natural elements are related to the basic elements of geometry. The line represents the principle of separation and an initial impulse of creation. The line is a symbol of the Creator who creates worlds. The straight line is a symbol of the light pulse. Vertical lines, according to Vastu-sutra, symbolises fire element, the horizontal line symbolises the element of water, a diagonal element of air. Formed a circle around the cross represents the Sun, and the symbolism of the cross bears four arms of Vishnu, and only later taken from the Vedas as a symbol of crucifixion iconography. Figure, line blends, a rhomboid is leaning in one corner, and it is a symbol of the Earth. Although ether corresponds with the element of space is not shown in the geometrical shape. In the diagram, the triangle with the top up - symbolizes fire, and with its top down - symbolizing water, and the resulting hexagonal shape - a symbol of attraction. The line is a symbol of separation and corresponds to the metaphysical principle of the false ego, which is at the basis of the whole material creation. When the original blend of spirit and matter is breached, the resulting material world is full of diversity, which attracts our senses and leads us into temptations of various kinds. Ego is in fact a necessary protective layer that separates spirit from the matter.

Mandala should be seen as structure of spirit, resulting in a spiritual ritual, structure that cannot find its expression in the picture, but the spirit and structure that receives expression in the buildings erected by such requirements apply for all other structures. Mandala can be in the form of a square, triangle, hexagon, octagon, or is round, depending on the time, place and circumstances. Mandalas have long been made of various materials, including sand, thread, butter. Construction of the mandala serves directing consciousness to the spiritual dimension of man and nature, and recognizing and living the eternal law. Mandala is an important means of harmonizing and strengthening the inner being. The construction of the mandala ritual, shows the deepest meaning of the mandala, which is related to tantric yoga. It is believed that enlightenment is possible to achieve a specific yoga techniques, such as the saying of certain prayers - chants,

whose unique sound brings man into resonance with the cosmos, and it is looking in the magical symbols of the cosmos – mandala.

The yoga practitioner should develop clear self-knowledge as self-conscious beings. To realise that the body does not mean only the physical body - the human, but it is the divine - a spiritual principle as well, that lies hidden in every human being. Achievement of knowledge of self-divinity means "continuously built mandala." Commonly mandala painting is composed of a complex of concentric circles and squares plotted them, mainly oriented parts of the world. Mandala is an image, but that image is just an image expressed in us, a mysterious deity cosmogonic scheme. For a practitioner of yoga, mandala is not a picture, it's a simple circuit, it is a sacred place of residence of the gods. Hence, the huge mandala structure, similar to a labyrinth, formed by very strict rules. It is usually built in concentric circles and squares, which is spiraling down toward the centre. Only deity mandala, and the place where it resides, and both are also mandala. The best ones are complex mandala drawings and bright colors that come from Tibet and Nepal, as they the closest to a modern viewer. Two mandalas that are kept in the Museum of Yugoslav History in Belgrade, originate from Nepal. They are gifts form the President of Nepal to then-Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito in 1974. In respond, Tito ritually gave present to the President of Nepal-the name of this ritual is a reciprocal gift. What is a reciprocal gift?

Customs of giving have been known since ancient times. Bestowal, exchange of gifts, it is the exchange of goods that are valued in a society just as reciprocal values, regardless of their tangible and intangible cultural emanation, is considered to be a universal human activity present in all societies, regardless of their level of development, and variations are only a matter of local cultural paradigms. Theme of giving, exchange of gifts and reciprocity, s reciprocal transactions, are introduced by Bronislaw Malinowski with his ethnographic study "Argonauts of the Western Pacific", and Marcel Mauss with one of the most famous anthropological papers – "An Essay on the Gift": The Form and Meaning of Exchange in Archaic Societies." These two parts make the basis of all subsequent scientific papers on the subject of giving and exchanging gifts.

It is the the work of Marcel Mauss, which is significant as he tried to give a scientific explanation of the answers to some of the key issues related to the exchange of gifts, and also wanted to explain why giving was not a unilateral act, but still had its extension in the form of reciprocity. When one obtains something, one always reacts by giving, giving back, and reciprocation of gifts can be considered one of the basic patterns of human behavior. Presumption of giving in ancient and tribal societies is the obligation of receiving gifts and giving back. Unlike trade, donate works through a network of personal and lasting interpersonal relationships based on complex social order. The exchange of goods is essentially a strategy for the formation of broad social and economic habitat. It includes a strategy for establishing, shaping and structuring of social relations. The basic characteristic of the exchange, which must include the right to be a successful strategy, is the existence of controlled reciprocity, regardless of its current balance.

In his Essay on the Gift, Mauss exposed a concept of gift-giving form of equivalent exchange. The gifts which are exchanged have no economic value in the literal sense of the word, that is equivalence does not imply equivalence of barter, but it includes the exchange of symbolic objects, rituals, dances, organizing festivals whose meaning is usually strongly interiorised. The gift is part of the giver, and he is an inalienable attached to it - getting it, the recipient gets in touch with his soul and spiritual essence that is transmitted through the object. For Moss is very important that the gift has a character of prestation, which means that it must be compensated for in equal reciprocal gift (lat. *prestatio*, compensation).

## **Mandalas in the Belgrade museum collections**

The two mandalas, which make the subject of this paper, and which are kept in the Museum of History of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, are the ones which the Prime-Minister of Nepal, Magendra Prasad Rijal, gave the President of the SFRY, Josip Broz-Tito in 1974. Then Tito gave the Prime Minister of Nepal a silver table cigarette box with silver embossed facsimile of Jajce and crystal and Flowerpot Idrija lace was given to his wife. The whole ritual should be seen as a political exchange. The collection of gifts that were given to President Tito, which is located in the Museum of History of Yugoslavia, is extremely valuable, especially one that consists of items from the Far East. There is no Museum of the Far East in Belgrade and Serbia. There is the biggest collection of artifacts Far East in this area at Tito's Gift Fund at the Museum of History of Yugoslavia. One part of the collection are the two mandalas. They were shown to the public for the first time at the "The Death of Treasury" exhibition in 2009. The exhibits that had never before seen the light of day were exhibited at that exhibition - they had been all the time in the vault of the Museum. Mandalas are large, sculptural shapes, made of metal alloy, opal, pearl and glass.

They were made in the State of Nepal craft workshop in 1974, obviously exactly with the purpose of giving them to Tito. Mandala (abstract cosmic publication, the path to liberation, liberator substance) is usually a two-dimensional, like drawing or painting, or drawing on the ground, in the sand. We're talking about a three-dimensional representation of the world. Mandala of the eight deities that surround the central deity seated among the earliest of most widespread examples show mandala in Asia, and has most of the structure of the palace architecture. These compositions comprise the inner circle in which the supreme deity (or several) surrounded the palace square shape with structured outputs of walls on all four sides. The palace is located in the multilayer circuit, and additional figures (monks or followers) can be found outside of this circle. In the focus, there is always a sublime being presented with a manlike figure. This deity is pursued and all the circles represent the time scale to it. The circles range from large to small, because it's all about the center pursued. So, the focus is directed towards the center - to the deity of the liberation of the circle into the central mandala in the first and in the second square, which is coming through the loops that go to the center. These mandalas are made of materials that are not normally do and precious stones, because they were made as a gift to a great statesman Josip Broz Tito. They are made of embossed metal alloy, with inserts dropped, pearl and glass. Their dimensions are quite large for the mandala. The height of the first 78 cm 53 cm diameter circle, the other is slightly smaller, 60 cm high with a diameter of 50 cm circle. Both mandalas are very well preserved, although some pieces of gemstones are missing. The structure consists of concentric circles of the mandala, sectioned transverse lines. They start from the centre and reach the four corners, so that the surface is divided into four triangles. In the center of each triangle in the center of the circle is a symbol or figure of the deity. Mandala is usually surrounded by four rounds. The first round was done as a continuous line represents the Mountain of Fire, flame barrier, which at first glance not allowed on the mandala, but which in fact represents a consciousness that has to burn banish the darkness of ignorance and error to bring us to the knowledge we all strive for. The second round of the Diamond girdle or Vajras. Diamond symbolises supreme knowledge, Bodhi, Enlightenment, Essence exactly Absolute Cosmic Consciousness, which once reached more is lost. It is like a diamond, is unchangeable. Then comes the third round in which he presented eight cemeteries, especially dedicated to the mandala deities. The last lap is made of lotus signifies rebirth. Lotus petals are open to the outside, because nothing on this level is not brought to an end - a beginner needs to find the secret gnosis in his soul.



**Figure 1.**  
*Mandala*, metal alloy, opal, pearl, glass, sign.  
*Nepal Handicraft Palace*, 1974, h60cm R50cm,  
 Museum of Yugoslav History, Belgrade, Serbia



**Figure 2.**  
*Mandala*, metal alloy, opal, pearl, glass, sign.  
*Nepal Handicraft Palace*, 1974, h78cm R53cm,  
 Museum of Yugoslav History, Belgrade, Serbia

Presents of the President of Nepal, Nagendra Prasad Rijal to the President of the SFRY, Jospi Broz Tito, handed in Belgrade, Serbia, in 1974.

The gods, however, sitting on a lotus closed, because events other planes - they are in the end times. The petals facing outward marks the entry into the living rebirth, and the central bud of a lotus, which is closed, symbolising the unity of the original. In the middle of this circle is drawn mandala palace, where are placed the performances of the gods. In the mandala from the Museum of History of Yugoslavia we see the traditional elements: a lotus flower, lotus petals, Toran - kind of arch, being exalted figure in the gates. Their pedestals are made in the shape of feet, and the larger mandala at the top of a bell with petals.

The structure of the first mandala which is a circle, one recognises the idea of an open flower petals on which are symbolically represented deities whom the first round eight and the other six, in order to reach the center circle of a deity. Since the three-dimensional mandala, one can imagine the stairs going to the centre of the circle. A goal of yoga is the centre or - samadhi-arrival to the core. Mandala second consists of two circles of petals (the petals are red stones) exactly quadrangle in the center. Right, left, up and down are placed into the centre, in which the deity is placed. Both first mandala and second mandala have leg that rest on the ground (the man is a temple, every man wearing a deity in itself) so that they can be free-standing in the space, they do not have to be leaning on the wall. While the first mandala more three-dimensional -sculptural and complex content, mandala 2, although three-dimensional, was more made as a mosaic. Donors from Nepal, who are of Hindu religion, created gifts that serve to guiding of consciousness. The path to liberation is symbolically presented. This path is shown on the mandala layers and if the mandala laid the on the ground, it would be steps toward the centre of is shown on most forward on the surface of the the first mandala. In this political gift exchange exactly reciprocity immaterial is the most basic exchange of goods, display value. In the modern times, something very valuable from the donor culture is given, such as the Americans gave Tito those years the stone from the Moon then. Nepalis donated the first mandala as part of their

cultural heritage, but those years specially designed for the occasion in Nepali national workshop, meticulous machining and metal inlay of very valuable , opal, pearl and glass. The stones are red, blue and white, which represented the colours of what was then the state flag of Yugoslavia. Great skill and imagination, creativity has been invested in the design and implementation of gifts to Tito by the government of Nepal. Expressions are a great respect for the authority of the then Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito, who reveled in the world. They are kept in the Museum History of Yugoslavia there in Belgrade.his path is shown on the mandala layers and if the mandala laid the on the ground, it would be steps toward the centre of is shown on most forward on the surface of the the first mandala. In this political gift exchange, it is reciprocity that is the most basic exchange of goods, display value. In the modern times, something very valuable from the donour's culture is usually given, such as the Americans gave Tito the stone from the Moon then. Nepalis donated the first mandala as part of their cultural heritage, but those years specially designed for the occasion in Nepali national workshop, meticulous machining and metal inlay of very valuable , opal, pearl and glass. The stones are red, blue exactly white colors of what was then the state flag of Yugoslavia. Great skill and imagination, creativity has been invested in the design and implementation of gifts to Tito by the government of Nepal. They were expression of a great respect for the authority of the then Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito had in the world. They are kept in the Museum History of Yugoslavia here in Belgrade.

There are no information about the destiny of the objects, which Tito have been giving to the foreign statesmen during his presidency , including the objects which Tito had given to the Prime-Minister of Nepal in 1974 and his wife- stone silver cigarette box with silver embossed facsimile of Jajce, and crystal Flowerpot Idrija lace. It is assumed that both these cases were found in any of the museums in Nepal.

## Conclusion

In *tantra* yoga, *mandala* is a visual design of the life scale, the matrix code from which everything is built. It is the repository of spiritual essence, diagram that is used for meditation. By researching *mandala* as the part of Hindu-Buddhist cultural circle, in the geographical area of the Republic of Serbia, we found out that in Belgrade's museum collections there are two *mandalas* from Nepal. They are gift of the President of Nepal to the President of the SFRY Josip Broz Tito. They are kept in the Museum Yugoslav History in Belgrade.

## References:

1. Bataj, Ž. (2009). *Erotizam*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd
2. Derida, Ž. (2001). *Politike prijateljstva*, Circulus, Beograd
3. DO, UT DES, darovi i uzdarja, katalog izložbe (2003). Muzej istorije Jugoslavije, Beograd,
4. Eljajade, M. (1984). *Joga – besmrtnost i sloboda*, BIGZ, Beograd
5. Jung, K.G. (1987). *Čovjek i njegovi simboli*, Mladost, Zagreb
6. Jung, K.G. (1995). *Sećanja, snovi, razmišljanja*, Atos, Beograd
7. Lifshitz, F. (2012). The Language of Gift in the Early Middle Ages. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 43 (1): 87-88.
8. Malinovski, B. (1979). *Argonauti zapadnog Pacifika*, BIGZ, Beograd
9. Mill, J.S. (2004). On the Definition of Political Economy; and on the Method of Investigation proper to it (1884) u: John Stuart Mill, *Essays on some unsettled Questions of Political Economy*, Project Gutenberg, Ebook
10. Mos, M. (1998). Oglad o daru – Oblik i smisao razmene u arhaičnim društvima, u: *Sociologija i antropologija* (2), Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd
11. Nikić, P. (1994). *Tajne samousavršavanja*, Joga Savez Srbije, Beograd
12. Olson, C. (2002). Excess, time and pure gift: Postmodern transformations of Marcel Mauss' theory, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, No.14
13. Osho (1998). *Knjiga tajni 2 - Predavanja o "Vigyana Bhairava Tantra"*, Osho Lotos Knjiga, Sutomore
14. Pajin, D. (1986). *Tantrizam i joga*, Prosveta, Beograd
15. Patanjđali (1997). *Izreke o jogi*. Beograd: BIGZ

16. Petrović, R. (2010). Prisutnost joge u umetnosti, u: JOGA - svetlost mikrouniverzuma: zbornik radova sa Međunarodne interdisciplinarnе naučne konferencije „Joga u nauci- budućnost i perspektive“, 23 - 24. 09. 2010, Joga Savez Srbije, Beograd, 190-194.
17. Sarasvati, S.S. (1994). *Kundalini tantra*. Zemun: OM
18. Smrt u trezoru, katalog izložbe (2009). Muzej istorije Jugoslavije, Beograd

Received: June 19, 2012

Accepted: July 23, 2012