

**SECTION ONE**

**KORO PHENOMENOLOGY**

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**KORO DEFINITION AND ETYMOLOGY**

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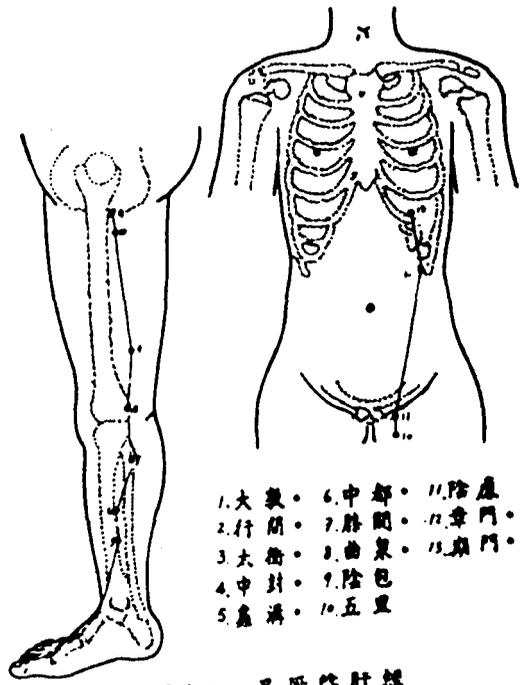
**YIN-YANG DUALISM AND SEXUALITY  
IN CHINESE CULTURE : A PSYCHO-  
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圖十二 足厥陰肝經

CHAPTER - 1

KORO DEFINITION AND ETYMOLOGY

## KORO : DEFINITION AND ETYMOLOGY

Koro is a culturally related psychogenic syndrome, clinically characterized by acute panic reaction concerning the complaints of genital hyperinvolution and fear of impending death. In the male, the shrinking/retraction of the penis into the abdomen, and in the female, shrinkage of vulval labia into the abdomen and/or breast into the chest cavity, are the cardinal features.

The symptom manifestations have three distinct features: first, perception of shrinkage and/or retraction of the penis due to an intra-abdominal pull with fear of impending death out of this penile dissolution; second, an intense panic reaction with feelings of collapse, palpitations, sweating, nausea, breathlessness, visual blurring, body-spasms, pain and paresthesias, and third, generally minor, sometimes severe complications (even death) arising from patients' idiosyncratic remedial measures to prevent the ostensible disappearance of the penis or vulva into the abdominal cavity, or the breast into the chest.

Koro is a Malay term and in Chinese it is called **Shook yang**. Historically, Koro is known as a localized culture-bound syndrome, predominantly found in the Chinese race who are inhabitants of southern China, and also in the countries of Southeast Asia to which the southern Chinese have migrated, viz. Malay, Indonesia, Borneo, Thailand and Singapore. The clinical concept and the term 'Koro' was first introduced to the Western medical press as a disease indigenous to southern Sulawesi by the Dutch physician Dr. J.C. Blonk in 1895.

Analysis of the world Koro literature shows that the first available report of genital retraction or Shook yang cases (in epidemic form) is found as early as 1865 in the Guangdong

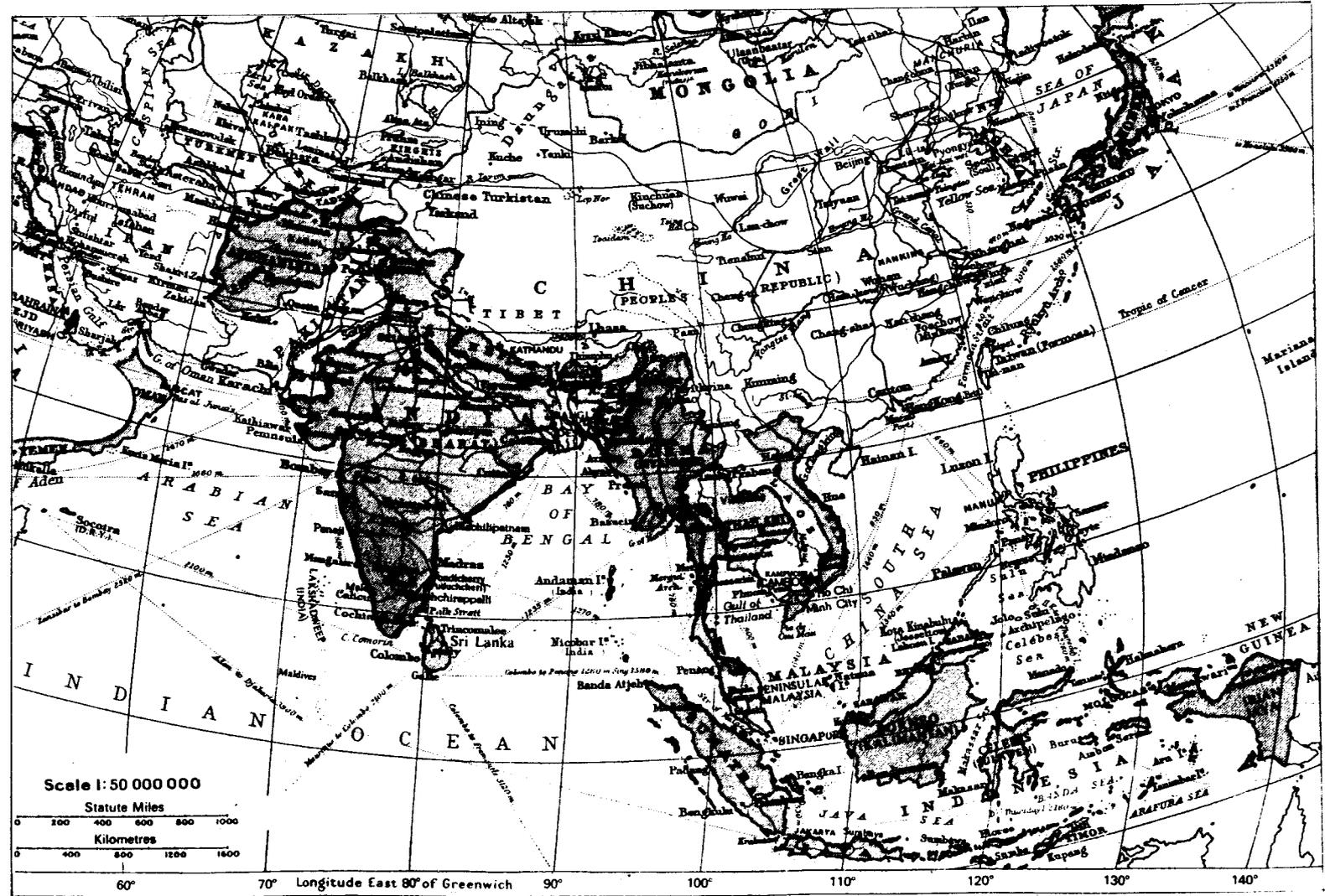
province of South China (Jilek, 1986). Till date there are reports of nearly 100 sporadic Koro cases and at least seven Koro epidemics involving countries like China, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and India. The term 'Koro' designating this malady appeared in 1874 in Buginese dictionary (Matthes, 1874). Since the last 128 years, though sporadic Koro cases has been reported from many countries of the globe, the epidemic form being restricted mainly to the South-East Asia region including India (Table 1).

The disorder has an age-old tradition in the Chinese culture and has a number of references in the ancient classical Chinese medical texts. Both the terms, Koro and Shook yang have a close folk-etymological connection with the tortoise in the Indonesian and the Chinese cultures respectively.

#### LINGUISTIC ORIGIN OF 'KORO'/'SHOOK YANG'

Koro is a Malay term. B.F. Matthe's 1874 publication of a Buginese dictionary contains the first known reference of Koro (Edwards, 1984), which means "to shrink" and *lassa Koro* is defined as "a shrinking of the penis, a sort of disease that is not unusual amongst the natives and must be very dangerous" (Palthe, 1936). The term Koro is used by the Buginese and Macassarese people of Southern Sulawesi (Fig.1), although the corresponding exact Macassaran term is *garring Koro*. The exact origin of the term is uncertain as the Macassaran and Buginese dialects have no corresponding cognate in Malay and Bahasa Indonesia speech. Gwee (1968) traced several Malay lexical items as the possible origin, eg. *Kuru*, *Kerukul*, *Keroh* and *Keruk*. In Malay and Indonesian dialects tortoise is known by the term *Kura* or *Kura-Kura* (Wilkinson, 1932) and in Macassarese by *Koero* (Slot, 1935). Both the Malay and Chinese people use the tortoise head symbolically for glans penis. Probably the similarity of the tortoise withdrawing its head under its wrinkled neck and ultimately within the body with that done by the shrinking penis gave rise to the folk-etymological expression of the term *Kuro* or *Kura* and ultimately by corruption Koro.

Fig. 1



**Table-1.** Global distribution of Genital Retraction syndrome (GRS)/ Koro or Koro-like syndrome (KLS) as reported between 1865-1993.

Year	Author(s)	Country
1865	Jilek (1886)	China (Guangdong)**
1883	Hammond	USA (GRS)
1885	Ivanov (Raven,1886)	Russia (GRS)
1885	Raven	UK (Broadstairs) (GRS)
1895	Blonk	Indonesia
1897	Van Brero	South Celebes
1897	Vorstman	Borneo (Kalimantan)
1908	Legendre	China (Szechwan)**
1913	Kraepelin	Germany (GRS)
1934	Palthe	Indonesia (Jakarta)
1935		
1935	Schilder	England (KLS)
1935	Slot	Indonesia (Sulawesi)
1937	Palthe	Indonesia (Jakarta)
1943	Bychowsky	USA (GRS)
1943	Sarkar	India (GRS)
1950	Chabot	Indonesia
1963	Rin	Taiwan
1963	Baasher	Africa (Sudan)
1963	Gwee	Singapore
1965	Yap	Hong Kong
1965	Yap	UK
1968	Bourgeois	France
1968	Mun	Singapore**
1969	Ngui	Singapore**
1970	Edwards	USA (KLS)
1972	Lapierre	Canada
1973	Dow & Silver	USA (Canada)
1975	Arbitman	Canada
1976	Ede	Canada
1977	Hes & Nassi	Israel

\*\* Koro epidemic report.

Year	Author(s)	Country
1977	Jilek & Jilek Aall	Thailand **
1978	Moekti & Denin	Indonesia (Palembang)**
1978	Barrett	UK (London)
1979	Ifabumuyi & Rwegellera	Africa (Nigeria)
1979	Suwanlert & Coates	Thailand **
1979	Constable	UK (Hertfordshire)
1980	Fakharani	Indonesia (Flores)
1981	Cremona	UK (London)
1981	Waldenberg	Canada
1981	Sukhla & Mishra	India (Uttar Pradesh)
1982	Cai	China (Guangdong)
1982	Rosenthal & Rosenthal	USA (KLS)
1982	Dutta et al.	India (Assam)**
1982	Chakraborty	India (Gujarat)
1982	Sachdev & Sukhla	India (Assam)**
1983	Nandi et al.	India (West Bengal)
1984	Lucieer	Africa (Tanzania) (KLS)
1984	Berrios & Morley	UK (Bedfordshire) (KLS)
1984	Ang & Weller	UK (London)
1984	Khubalkar & Gupta	India (Maharashtra)
1985	Malinick et al.	USA (Chicago) (KLS)
1985	Schahdev	India (Assam)**
1986	Joseph	USA (Boston)
1986	Oyebode et al.	UK (Tyne)
1986	Modai et al.	Israel (Tel Aviv)
1986	Chu et al.	China (Hainan Island)**
1987	Devon & Hong	Singapore
1987	Mo et al.	China (Hainan Island)**
1988	Ilechukwu	Africa (Nigeria) (KLS)
1988	Durst & Rosca-Rebaudengo	Israel (Jerusalem)

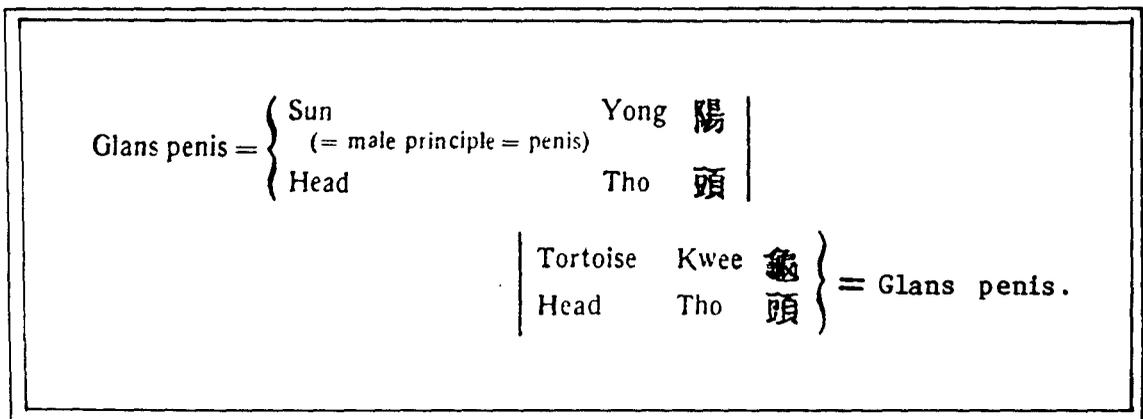
\*\* Koro epidemic report.

Year	Author(s)	Country
1988	Chowdhury et al.	India (West Bengal)**
1988	Tseng et al.	China (Guangdong)**
1990	Turnier & Chouinard	Canada
1990	Anderson	Israel (Jerusalem)
1990	Bernstein & Gaw	USA (Boston)
1991	Adityanjee & Subramanian	Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur)
1991	Chen	UK (Cambridge)
1991	Kennedy & Flick	USA (Kentucky)
1992	Heyman & Fahy	UK (London) (KLS)
1992	Smyth & Dean	UK (Birmingham)
1992	Ilechukwu	Africa (Nigeria) (KLS)
1992	Bhatia et al.	India (New Delhi)
1993	Damodaran & Nizamie	India (Bihar)
1993	Chowdhury & Bagchi	India (West Bengal)
1993	Chowdhury & Bera	India (West Bengal)
1993	Chowdhury et al.	India (West Bengal)

\*\* Koro epidemic report.

The Chinese equivalent of "to shrink" is "shook". The ordinary Chinese word for glans penis is "Yong Tho" and the term "Kwee Tho" means both head of a tortoise and glans penis (Fig.2) (Palthe, 1936). Based on these cultural cognates there are at least two sets of orthography in Chinese to designate the disease, namely in Mandarin - 'Suo Yang' and in Cantonese - 'Suk Yang'. Suo or Suk (shook) denotes 'shrinking, contracting, shortening, reducing, decreasing, retracting and drawing back' (Werner, 1961) and Yang is the male principle i.e. genitals or penis.

The disease is however known by different syntaxes in different cultures. Table 2 illustrates the various ethno-linguistic expressions of the illness in different geographical areas.



**Fig.2.** Chinese Folk Etymology of Koro (Palthe, 1936).

**Table 2.** Various ethno-linguistic expressions of genital retraction morbidity.

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**A. CHINA**

1. *Shook Yang* (Mandarin)
2. *Shook Yin*
3. *Suo Yang* (Cantonese)
4. *Seon-Ma Funn* (Cantonese)

**B. SOUTH-EAST ASIA**

5. *Koro* - Indonesia, Malaca, South-Central Mindano of Philippines, Macassaran area of Sulawesi, Kalimantan, Singapore
6. *Bangka* - Palembang (Indonesia)
7. *Lannuk-e-laso* - South-Central Philippines
8. *Bang-Utott* - Philippines
9. *Rok Joo* - Thailand
10. *Tira* - Mangaia, Cook group of Islands
11. *Mbaze* - Flores (Indonesia)

**C. INDIA**

12. *Jha - Jha* - Lower-Assam
  13. *Jhin-Jhinia* - Assam and North Bengal region of West-Bengal
  14. *Beriberi* - Darjeeling district (Kharibari block) of West Bengal.
  15. *Kattaow* - Cooch-Bihar district of West Bengal.
  16. *Disco* - South Bengal and Calcutta of West Bengal and Baleswar district of Orissa.
-

I wish to append here two interesting observations in the context of the term 'Koro'. First, the name of a shallow sea called 'Koro' adjacent to the Fiji island in the Pacific ocean (Fig.3). **Koro Sea**, in the south Pacific, is a depression in the ocean floor, with a depth of more than 9,600 ft., that intrudes into the shallow submarine shelf upon which the Fijian islands are grouped (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1973-1974). The geospecificity of this region (the ridges and grooves), upon which the **Koro Island** rests, may have some resemblance with turtle back !

The second one is a commercial logo by the term 'Koro', which the author found on the streets of Bangkok (Thailand) city. Fig.4 displays one such example where the term '**KORO**' is colourfully embossed on a pair of fashionable slippers.

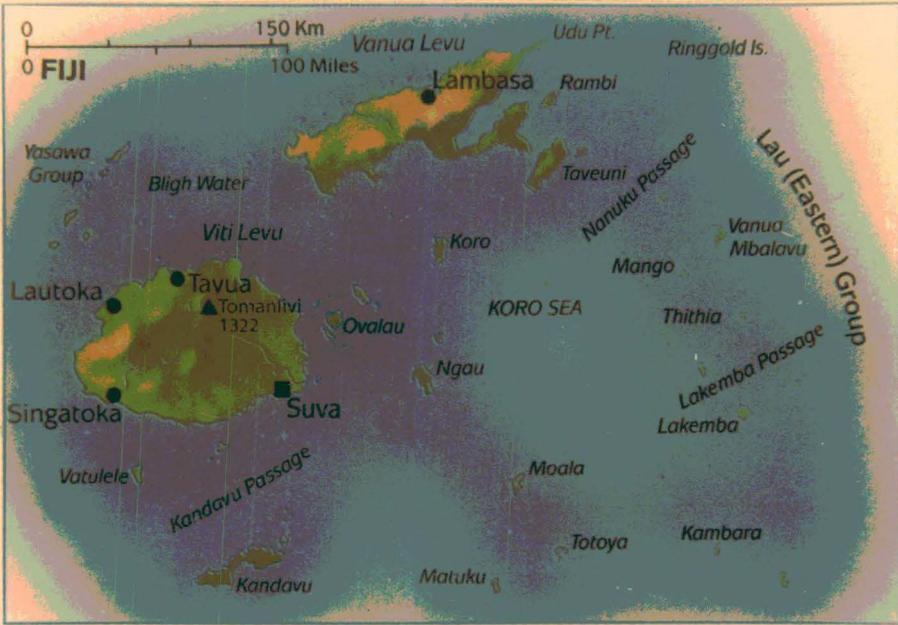


Fig.3



Fig.4



*CHAPTER - 2*

**YIN-YANG DUALISM AND SEXUALITY  
IN CHINESE CULTURE : A PSYCHO-  
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

**YIN-YANG DUALISM AND SEXUALITY IN CHINESE  
CULTURE : A PSYCHO-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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**SUMMARY**

The concept of *Shook Yang* ( "縮陽" ) or genital retraction as a grave sexual morbidity has its origin in the century old Chinese Taoist medical philosophy. The concept and the clinical presentation of genital retraction syndrome have been nicely documented under various names like yin-yan transposition; yin type fever; yin yang yih and Kaih Seh Shang Han in many of the ancient Chinese medical classics. It is thought that in due course the illness has been transported by the migrant Chinese to certain adjoining geographical regions namely Indonesia and other South-East Asian countries.

The present paper deals with a brief historical documentation of the basic yin-yang (陰陽) Taoist doctrine in relation to sexuality in general and male genital retraction in particular, with a view to understanding the background cultural dynamics of the syndrome *Shook (suk) Yang* or *Suo-yang* or Koro in the Chinese society.

This analysis very interestingly shows that there exists a highly sensitive cultural matrix in the Chinese society insofar as the male sexuality is concerned. The theme of male-female sexual union, male potency, semen value and interrelation between sexual act and disability/death is extraordinarily and negatively glorified in most of the accounts. The female role is also remarkably compromised even to the extent of such stigmatizations like "inimical to males". There is an abundance of various sexual myths, folklores and symbolisms - all depicting mainly a negative aspect of sexuality in general. This cultural reference probably has a deep link with the male sexual anxiety and hence the concept of a dreadful genital retraction morbidity, often mortality as well.

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Tao or "the way" or "teaching" indicates the inherent aim of Taoism, the most influential and original system of the Chinese religion, philosophy and inner alchemy that strongly shaped the whole Chinese culture and customs.

Taoism has two major divisions. One school is called *Tao - chia* which represents the philosophical and mystical branch and the other, *Tao-chiao*, is the more religious, magical and alchemical one. *Tao-chia* is based on the classical texts of *Tao-te ching* of Lao-tzu (480-390 B.C.). Lao-tzu, meaning 'old master' was a Chinese sage who was an archive-keeper in the court of Chous in his early life (Fig.1). He wrote "*Tao-te Ching*", a basic text of Taoism.

*Tao-Chiao* combined the Taoist doctrines with the existing schools of Chinese alchemy (350-250 B.C.) and taught the philosophy of immortality, breathing exercises and yogic and sexual practices like *fang-chung shu* in the text titled *Huang-t'ing Ching* or "The Classic Treatise of the Yellow Castle".

The theoretical system of Chinese philosophy and medicine is based primarily on the concept of yin and yang, the theory of five elements and the construct of eternal correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm.

The construct of yin-yang indicates that the human body, like the universe, is composed of positive and negative forces which confront as well as complement each other. This duality of positive-negative interconnections and interactions is thought to be operative not only in the structural anatomy and functional physiology of the human body, but also influential regarding the symptom manifestations of illness, thus dictating the nature of their treatments. Health is equated to a state of perfect balance in harmony between yin and yang while illness is perceived as the result of their imbalances.

The theory of Five Elements proposes that all the elements of human body as also of nature, belong to one of the five categories, viz. wood, fire, earth, metal and water. The corresponding

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Fig. 1



The Chinese sage Lao-tzu; early painting on silk.  
National Palace Museum, Taipei. (Camphausen, 1991).

visceral components of the human body are : liver, heart, spleen, both lungs and kidneys; the emotions are : anger, joy, worry, sorrow and fear; while the five natural conditions are wind, heat, humidity, dryness and cold. The theory of Five Elements attempts to view the natural world as also the human body as the expression of certain orderly relationships among these elements. For example, wood creates fire, fire creates earth, earth creates metal, metal creates water, water creates wood (Tseng, 1973). Concurrently, there also exists an antagonism between each of the factors, eg. that between water and fire, between fire and metal, between metal and wood, between wood and earth, and between earth and water. Each of these elements as a concept represents specific bodily structure and function.

The concept of continuous intercommunication between the microcosm and the macrocosm holds that human beings are governed by the principles which rule nature. As the four seasons and five elements (cold, heat, dryness, humidity and wind) change in nature, so also there is a change in the five visceras and five spirits (five emotions - joy, anger, worry, sorrow and fear) in the human body. An eternal cosmic communication or influence is advocated between body and nature. Thus, the spirit of sky communicates with the lungs, that of wind with the liver, that of thunder with the heart and that of rain with the kidneys. The general advice for maintenance of good health and long life is to keep the yin and yang in a perfect orderly balance, in the habits of food taking, living and sexual practices. This balance by virtue of the harmonious mutual relations with the five elements and nature keep things going in excellent form and functioning (Fig.2).

### **Sexual Dualism**

In Chinese tradition the metaphysical dyad is characterised by the *yang* and *yin*, which are understood as being elementary determinations and also real forces acting on every plane of being. This yang-yin duality considers that both man and women are representatives of the omnipotent dualism which permeates all and everything of this universe. This inherent dualism, the yang



An antique Chinese door plaque once used to ward off devils. At the center of a circle bearing the I Ching's eight basic trigrams is the dual embryo of the Yin-Yang - dark and light, female and male, earth and heaven, corporeal and spiritual - apparent opposites that are in fact complementary different phases of an essential unity. (Mysteries of the Unknown: Visions & Prophecies. Time-Life Books, 1988).

and yin (*yab-yum* in Tibetan philosophy and positive-negative or active-passive principles of occidental science and philosophy) is represented and counted in all cultural-ethical customs of sexuality and its related health practices.

As a symbol of determinations, *yang* has the nature of the Sky and everything active, positive, and male, whereas *yin* has the nature of Earth and everything passive, negative and female. In graphic symbolism a continuous line corresponds to *yang* \_\_\_\_\_ whereas a broken line corresponds to *yin* \_ \_ \_ , indicating the idea of the "two". The trigrams and hexagrams formed with various combinations of those two elementary signs are given by the *I. Ching*, the fundamental text of Chinese tradition, as the keys to the essential situations that reality may display in a spiritual or natural category of the universe, as well as in the human, individual, and collective sphere.

All phenomena, forms, beings, and changes of the universe are considered at the level of various counteractions and combinations of the yin and yang. From their dynamic aspect yang and yin are opposed but also complementary forces. The light and the sun have a yang quality, whereas shadow and the moon have a yin quality. Fire is yang, the waters are yin; mountain tops are yang, the plains are yin; the spirit is yang, the soul and vital force are yin, the pure is yang, the unfathomable is yin; and so on. One such symbolism is the *yun-yu* or "Clouds and Rain", the Chinese literary expression for the sexual act (Gulik, 1961). Cloud here is associated with female love juices or vaginal secretions and the rain to a man's semen (Fig.3). It is the predominance of yin in women and of yang in man that make them what they are : at this level the pure yin and pure yang appear as the substances of absolute womanhood and absolute manhood respectively. It is worth noting at this point the attribution of cold, wet and dark qualities to yin while the dry, clear and light qualities to yang, both of which play a role in sexual symbolism :

"To the *yin*, therefore, belongs shadows and the darkness with regard to elementary powers prior to form, which correspond in the human being to the unconscious and to the vital, nocturnal



**CLOUDS AND RAIN** : After a woodblock print by Shunchosai, Japan, 18th Century (Ramsdale & Ramsdale, 1993).

**Fig. 3**

part of his psyche... the day is equivalent to the clear, light ("sunny") quality of the *yang*, which is the very quality proper to manifested, definite, and completed forms that are released from the equivocal darkness and from the indeterminate nature of the generative womb and female substance or raw material" (Evola, 1991, p 121).

This dualism is also connected with the ancient social system as imbibed in the general belief "Web of Heaven and Earth" in relation to the sexual duties of an Emperor towards his subjects. Gulik (1961) discusses that it was the Emperor who should balance the forces of Heaven (*yang*) and Earth (*yin*) for the prosperity of his subjects. Camphausen (1991) states :

"That balance, which to the farmers expressed itself in plentiful livestock, abundant harvest, and general conditions such as good weather and the absence of war and other disasters, had to be achieved through the emperor's rituals of sexual union with the empress and with a number of other women available for this purpose; Gulik mentions a number of 120. If something nonetheless went wrong and the Emperor seemed unable to keep the forces of Heaven and Earth in harmony, the farming families of villages and countryside came to help. An auspicious night would be chosen, and hundreds of men and women would meet in the fields in a general orgy under the open sky" (p.207).

#### **Semen Value**

Semen is viewed in Taoism as vital energy-source, i.e., *Ching* and/or *Ching-ch'i*, a term used to mean sperm/semen or sexual energy or both ovarian or spermatoc sources of energy (Rowson & Legeza, 1973). Taoism put immense importance on the loss of this vital energy during male ejaculation because death may ensue once the *ching* energy is used up. So the male should replenish his *Ching* and to store it by absorbing as much female *yin* energy as possible.

*Huan-ch'ing Pu-nao* is the technical term that means "letting the semen return and strengthen the brain". It describes the method for preservation of *Ching* energy as follows : Just prior to ejaculation the man's penis is sealed off by finger pressure from either partner. With a deep exhalation of breath and grinding of teeth the *Ching* (semen/energy) is directed upward towards the highest *tan-t'ien* in the brain where it mixes up with the vital energy or *Ch'i* and offers the individual a rejuvenating force for immortality (Camphausen, 1991). Emerald Pillow is the Chinese technical term for the cranial pump in the brain which stores the sexual energy or *Ching-ch'i*.<sup>1</sup>

*Fang-chung shu* is a Taoist sexual exercise practised by men to extract women's energy, especially that of virgins, in order to accumulate more energy for his own benefit - a practice akin to sexual vampirism. P'eng Tsu, a legendary Chinese sage, is reported "to have lived more than nine hundred years" (Levi & Ishihara, 1989) by this method of retention of semen.

*Ho-ch'i* is the name of recurring communal sexual ritual held in ancient China, beginning with the time of Han dynasty, at each new and full moon. This collective sexual orgies were mainly practised by the adepts of religious Taoism known as the 'Way of Supreme Peace' and 'Five Peaks of Rice Taoism', until the time of the Sung dynasty. The aim of this mass sexual celebration was to have intercourse with as many partners as possible, so that one could increase one's own sexual energy to achieve immortality (Camphausen, 1991).

Yellow Emperor, the last of the three legendary Chinese emperors, sages and culture heroes, who by name was known as Emperor Huang Ti (2697-2598 B.C.), is one glorious example who attained immortality by absorbing yin essences of twelve hundred women ! It is believed that three legendary females - 'Three Lady Immortals' - taught the Emperor the Taoist teachings of sexual yoga or *ho-Chi*. These ladies were Su-nu, the simple girl; Hsuan-nu, the mysterious girl and Ts'ai-nu, the fancy girl (Blofeld, 1982).

## Genital Retraction in Chinese Medical Classics

Genital retraction syndrome or Koro or Shook Yang earned the designation of culture-bound syndrome mainly because of its early reports from the ethnic Chinese and because of its multiple references in the Chinese medical texts since ancient times. Following is a brief account of these earliest references of genital retraction.

Nei Ching (a classic on Internal Medicine) is one of the earliest Chinese medical texts of the Pre-Ch'in period (2,800 to 220 B.C.). It is believed that this classic was written by Huang Ti, the third legendary emperor of China (c 2674 B.C.), though historians hold differing opinions. This book is divided into two parts : *Su-Wen* (Elementary Questions) and *Ling Shu* (Ingenious Pivot). In this book a reference is made to the shrinking of penis and spasm of muscles (Fig.4).

The Five Dynasty Period extended from 265 to 960 A.D. and the Chin, Sui and T'ang periods were prominent amongst them, insofar as their influence on the medical theories and practices are concerned. During the Chin dynasty the rise of Taoism and in the T'ing dynasty the introduction of Buddhism were notable features. A religious influence in terms of ghost-evil or ghost-bewitched phenomena was noted in the area of psychiatric conceptualization. A well known book of the Sui period is the "Treatise on Symptoms of Various Illnesses", written by Chow Yen-Fen. It contains Taoist ideas along with the Yin-Yang theories. In its Chapter 10, the genital retraction is described as an aftermath of intercourse in a feverish state (Fig.5).

During the Yuan Dynasty (1260-1368 A.D.) Chinese medicine was divided into a number of schools on the basis of treatment principles they adopted for the cure of illness. A renowned medical school was established by "Four Famous Doctors of Chin Yuan". The concept of heat-cold theory of illness made its appearance in the text only during this time. For example, Lu Wan-su believed that diseases were caused by excessive heat in the body and he advocated the use of cooling drugs (T'ao et al., 1962).

## LIN-CHI ON BASIC ANIMUS

In the case of the liver, grief moves the innermost self and causes harm to the animus. When the animus is injured, the result is madness, amnesia, and lack of sperm. Without sperm, a person will not be well, and the manifestation is one of retraction of genitals with spasm of muscles, the bones of the chest are depressed, and the hair colour poor. Death usually occurs in Autumn.

室極本神

「肝悲哀動中則傷魂，魂傷則狂忘不精，不精則不常入陰縮而孿筋，兩脅骨不舉，毛悴色，夭死于秋。」

Fig. 4

## THE AETIOLOGY AND SYMPTOMATOLOGY OF DISEASES COMPILED BY CHOW YEN-FEN

CHAPTER 10—Fever, transposition of Yin and Yan symptoms—This disease arises in the case of man or woman just recovered from fever, and indulging in intercourse before being completely well. The illness resulting is called the transposition of symptoms of Yin and Yan . . . The symptoms are feeling of heat rising up the chest, head too heavy to be lifted up, vision blurred, and all limbs are in spasm, the lower abdomen is painful, there is carpo-pedal spasm, and, *all will die instantly.*

Fever and illness resulting after intercourse—The illness is cured, but the Yin and Yan are not in harmony yet. If the patient indulges in intercourse, the result will be swelling of genitalia with *retraction into the abdomen*, abdominal pain . . .

諸病源候論—巢元方等著

卷十 溫病陰陽易候：

陰陽易病者，是男子婦人，溫病新瘥，未平復而與之交媾，因得病者，名為陰陽易也。……其病之狀，身體熱衝胸

，頭重不舉，眼中生昧，四肢拘急，小腹疔痛，手足拳，皆即死。

溫病交接勞復候—

病雖瘥，陰陽未和，因早房室，令人陰腫縮入腹。腹疔痛……

Fig. 5

Ming, Ching period (1368 to 1911 A.D.) is marked with increased recognition and systemic classification of mental disorders. Different types of insanities e.g. excited insanity, stupid insanity, flower insanity etc. are described in the "Standards for Diagnosis and Treatment" by Wang K'en-t'ang, a notable physician of the early part of this time. The famous medical text, Chin-Yue's Medical Book, contains an elaborate discussion on hysterical neurosis and malingering (Chen, 1937). It is interesting to note that the psychosexual aspect of sexual impotency was nicely discussed, where it was considered to be the result of emotional disturbances from excessive worry, frustration, depression and fear or due to extramarital sexual desire and indulgence in excessive intercourse. Semen was thought to be the essence of energy and its expulsion was believed to be the cause of disability due to loss of vital energy. Nocturnal ejaculation was considered to be the result of poor mental control over sexual desire (Tseng, 1973). The clinical entity of genital retraction was endorsed by Chang Chi, and the treatment advocated was the ash produced by burning of underparts of the opposite sex (Gwee, 1968) (Fig.6).

The Chinese traditional medical system of acupuncture relates the genital retraction illness to the middle female meridian (足厥陰脈) which extends to the inner side of the lower limb to genitalia and then to the ipsilateral side of the abdomen upto the chest (Fig.7) (Gwee, 1968). This meridian is governed by liver, which is believed to be susceptible to emotions like worry, fear and anger.

The traditional Chinese medical people in recent century related the reference of Shook Yang or genital retraction illness to the text 'New Collection of Remedies of Value', written by Pao Sian-Ow in 1834 (Gwee, 1968). This book describes in detail the causes and symptoms of this malady including the female manifestations (nipple retraction). This is regarded as a serious medical emergency needing immediate intervention (Fig.8).

THE GOLDEN MIRROR OF DOCTORS—(1739)

Annotated book of fevers. Relapse of fevers as a result of work, food, and yin and yan transposition.

In fever, yin and yan transposition is seen as feeling of heaviness, shortness of breath, discomfort in lower abdomen, may be retraction of genitals with spasm, heat rising up the chest, head too heavy to be lifted, visions blur, knees and calves are spastic, the powder of burnt, panties is of value.

醫宗金鑑 卷十訂正傷寒論註差後，勞復食復，陰陽易病篇 (1937)

傷寒，陰陽易之為病，其人身體重，少氣，少腹裏急，或引陰中拘攣，熱上衝胸，頭重不欲舉，眼中生花，膝脛拘急者，燒稗散主之。

Fig. 6

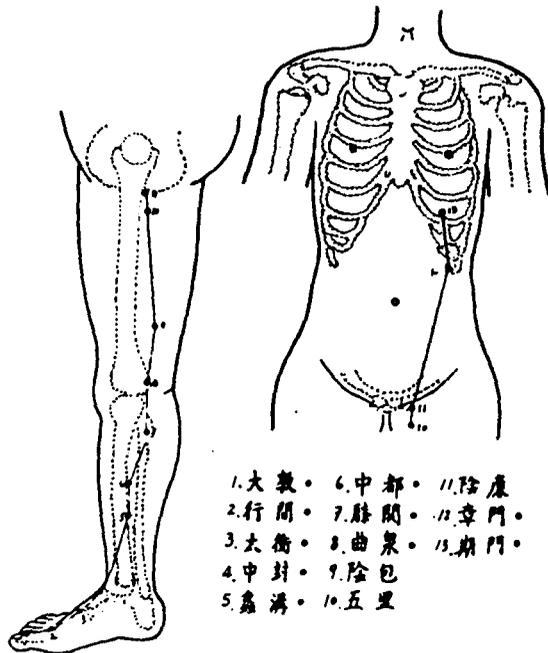
THE COLLECTION OF ACUPUNCTURE AND MOXIBUSTION — BY LIAN REN-HUON

The middle female meridian of the feet—chong-fen (1 inch in front of the medial malleolus). This is of value in . . . difficulty in movement, painful hernia, impotence and blackouts, muscle spasms, loss of spermatic fluid, retraction of the penis into the abdomen . . . Nocturnal emissions, retraction of genitalia . . . (See Fig. 1).

針灸集成—廖潤鴻著 (同治十三年)

足厥陰肝經一

中封 (在內踝前一寸 . . . ) 主治 . . . 身體不仁，寒疝瘕厥，筋攣失精，陰縮入腹 . . . 。夢洩遺精陰縮 . . . 。



圖十二 足厥陰肝經

Fig. 7

NEW COLLECTION OF REMEDIES OF  
VALUE BY PAO SIAN-OW

CHAPTER 6—GENITALIA

*Retraction of Penis*—the remedy is seen in Chapter 14 under "fevers—the Yin type of fever".

*Yin-yan transposition*—this arises when after a fever, the poisonous heat remains in the sperm and the marrow, and cannot be discharged. If intercourse is performed with a healthy person, the illness of the man will be passed on to the woman, and vice versa, hence it is called 'Yin-yan transposition'. The patient feels heavy and short of breath, the lower abdomen is tense, the genitalia may be affected by spasm and retraction, the heat rises in the chest, the head is too heavy to be lifted up, the eyes are blurred, and the knees and calves are tight. The powder made of burnt panties is valuable.

CHAPTER 14—

*Yin-type of fever*—after an intercourse between the male and female, may be arising of exposure to wind and cold, or the ingestion of raw or cold food, the result is pain in the abdomen, the scrotum in the male or the nipples in the female are retracted. May be the limbs will be flexed and of a dark purplish hue, and when severe, there is trismus, and cessation of breathing. This is called Yin-type of fever ...

*Another remedy*—After intercourse between the male and the female, the penis retracts with severe pain and feeling of death ... this is a good emergency remedy, and one should not miss the chance of cure because the remedy is dirty. Speed is essential, for delay will mean the case cannot be saved.

驗方新編—鮑相璣撰（道光丙午）

卷六前陰：

陽物縮入一方見卷十四傷寒陰症傷寒內。

陰陽易病—此症乃傷寒病後，熱毒遺於精滲中，無由發洩，驟與不病人交合，男病傳女，女病傳男，故名陰陽易病，其人身重少氣，小腹裏急，或引陰中拘攣，熱上衝胸，頭重不欲舉，眼中生花，膝脛拘急，燒裨散主之。

卷十四

陰症傷寒—男女交合後，或外受風寒，或內食生冷等物，以致肚腹疼痛，男子腎囊內縮，婦女乳頭內縮，或手足等，曲紫黑，甚則牙緊氣絕，謂之陰症傷寒.....

又方—男婦交合後，陽物縮入，絞痛欲死者，此急救良方，不可嫌穢自誤，以速為妙，遲則不能救矣。

Fig. 8

**Disability/  
Death and  
Sexuality**

A host of precautions and illness potentials are connected with the sexual union between the sexes, so much so that a sexual intercourse is perceived in the traditional interpersonal customs of the Chinese society as a very delicate and balanced act that has to maintain certain strictly set up rules, the violation of which may result in grave consequences, even death. In the Taoist handbook on sex the term *yin-tao* ('hidden way') designates sexual intercourse. Taoism lays down the principle that the use of sex may be harmful for those who does not have the requisite knowledge to use sex for spiritual attainment and health. It is said, "To be united to a woman is like riding a horse at the gallop with rotten reins" (Evola, 1991). But he who knows the real technique and hidden rules of copulation will benefit from it. *Yu-fant Che-yao* thus states : "The yellow emperor lay with 1,200 women and became immortal; the common people only have one woman each and in enjoying her destroy their own lives" (Maspero, 1937).

One interesting fact of negative connotation attached to sexual intercourse is a handful of examples concerning the association of various disabilities/illnesses with the act of coitus, even death, in the traditional Chinese erotic beliefs and practices. Fainting is one such example which is variously related with intercourse, e.g. fainting in the beginning of coitus or "mounting horse wind" (上馬風); fainting at the end of coitus or "dismounting horse wind" (下馬風) or fainting due to profuse and uncontrollable discharge of semen - "incontinence of semen" (脫精). It is relevant to mention at this context is the Cantonese colloquial term for Koro - 'Seon-Ma Fuun' (上馬風) meaning a 'seizure of vapour during the act of mounting a horse', i.e. sexual activity (Gwee, 1963). All the above mentioned states are of acute nature and call for emergency intervention. The account of management of one such condition is given by Wong (1918) which reminds one of the same in the case of a Koro attack :

"The woman should on no account disconnect at once and scream for help. She should retain her presence of mind, clasping the patient tightly in her arms. With a hairpin a puncture should be made on the sacrum. Moxa may be restored to if the puncture proves ineffective.

Dissipated young men, or an old man with a young wife, are said to be specially liable to these attacks. When husband and wife meet again after a long separation incontinence of semen is common. In story books we often read of such cases brought before the court, the woman being charged with murder" (p.29).

The royal tales speak of the death of a Han emperor from the reaction of an aphrodisiac which he took to cure his continuous flow of spermatic fluid (Gwee, 1963). Another Chinese traditional belief says that intercourse within 100 days of postpartum is forbidden, the violation of which will cause an incurable form of tuberculosis (瘵癆).

Wong (1918) inquired into some common belief in sexual diseases in the Chinese society and noted a deep influence of the traditional Chinese medical philosophy on the disease cognition of the masses. He stated that since ancient times the "sexual intemperance has been regarded as the primary cause of a host of diseases". Sex is so highly pinpointed in the Chinese society that "whenever a newly married couple got sick, sexual carelessness is at once set down as the cause".

Wong (1918) cites a common illness believe called *Kiah Seh Shang Han* (夾色傷寒), an acute febrile episode characterized by headache, giddiness, back pain, abdominal colic and retraction of testicles in men and contraction of nipple in women. It is said to be caused by sexual carelessness or by catching cold or taking cold food specially melons or icecream immediately after sexual intercourse. Treatment includes hot fomentations (hot, hard-boiled eggs, heated bricks, mud cakes made with urine, roasted garlic, onions or pepper, bottles of hot water etc.) and medicinal decoctions : Ginger, ginseng, aconite, cassia and cloves are the drugs of common use. One favourite prescription consists of the following:

"Pepper, 49 pieces. Onion with root, 49 pieces. Grind into pulp, mix with soot, and wrap in cloth. Apply one part to the abdomen and tie another on the penis. A common remedy, generally practised by old women, is to apply a piece of heated silver to the naval on the top of which is placed a rooster killed for the purpose.

....When the ailment is complicated with retraction of the testicles or penis (縮陽), it is believed to be very dangerous. A disgusting cure is said to be the woman's pubic hair which is burned to ashes and taken with water used in washing the private parts. For emergency it is usual to compress the testicles or penis, as the case may be, between the two halves of a wooden box for scales to prevent the disease ascending" (p.28).

Yin yang yih (陰陽易) or "male and female exchange" disease is another example which states that if sexual intercourse takes place immediately after recovery from fever (typhoid), the inherent poison will be transmitted to the healthy partner. If sexual union takes place during a stage of convalescence, then a relapse occurs, known as "female relapse" (女復勞). This is considered to be a very serious pathology with symptoms like violent colic, retraction of the testicles and protrusion of tongue. The popular prescription for remedy consists of an infusion of the root of *allium odorum* and excreta of rat. A woman's fingers and toe nails or her undergarment are also used for treatment (Wong, 1918).

Death associated with intercourse is an important theme in most of the Chinese traditional teachings and folktales. Gwee (1968) thus states, "In novels, and folklores, sexual intercourse is regarded as an activity which when improperly conducted, or when indulged in under the wrong set of circumstances, can lead to sudden death, accompanied, or preceeded, in many instances by the retraction of penis".

A sudden catastrophe with the act of intercourse in the form of Shook Yang is termed as 'Yin type of cold affliction' and is mentioned in the book 'New Collection of remedies of Value'

of the Chin period as follows (Gwee, 1963) :

"During intercourse, the man may be seized suddenly with acute abdominal pain . The limbs become cold and the complexion dusky, the penis retracts into the abdomen . The disease is due to the invasion of cold vapours (寒氣) and the treatment is to employ the "heaty" drugs (熱藥)" (p.120).

Gwee (1968) noted a similar belief of genital retraction and death in the Phillippines, where genital shrinkage is known as 'Bangutot'. Sudden death during intercourse<sup>2</sup> from penile retraction is also an important traditional belief in Singapore and Malay (Gwee, 1963). Gwee (1963) traced the necropsy findings of four such postmortem reports of coital death in Singapore and found coronary thrombosis (in three) and cerebral haemorrhage (in one) as the cause of death - not any penile retraction ! Edwards (1984) tries to find out the possible cultural clue of this perception of genital retraction as a prodrome of death in China with some biophysical changes of penile morphology of left-open corpses and funerary practices of Chinese customs.

All these accounts show that an unusual morbid stress has been imparted on to the usual act of intercourse which probably makes people extraordinarily sensitive regarding sexuality, specially about the trivial morphological genital changes of non-clinical significance. This construct through the ages has gained a cultural reality and guided the behaviour of the people accordingly. Gwee (1963) thus aptly says :

"Fatality and retraction of penis seem therefore well correlated in the Chinese mind for many years, and a bit of imagination on the part of a physician can easily conjure up such a condition . Thus, it would appear that the disease (shook yang) is probably a result of the free play of imagination of a physician on top of a culture which links fatality with genital retraction and sexual activity with risk to life . The popular appeal of Chinese medicine soon propagates such a belief until it becomes a common knowledge found in popular books of household remedies like the

New Collection of remedies of Value" (p.121).

The oversensitivity to sexuality in terms of health and diseases helps to form a mass cognitive facilitative platform where any abnormality will easily gain a supposed sexual etiology. Wong (1918) thus comments,

"It used to be the custom to impute everything to sexual excess : a death whose cause was not clearly discernible was attributed to sexual excess; if someone became insane, sexual excesses were blamed for it. If a man died suddenly in an ill-famed house, sexual excess were acused, and one forget that the man had quite as good a chance of dying suddenly in his conjugal bed, though he rarely may have made the proper use of his matrimonial rights" (p. 30).

All these sexual beliefs are still operating in the Chinese society as has been evinced in the analysis of Koro psychodynamics in terms of cultural influence by Rin (1966) and Gwee (1968). Both the authors have shown that how the deep cultural beliefs about sexuality is operative in causing the sexual anxiety and conflicts in the Koro patients. The collective beliefs about genital retraction as a fatal disease is noted in the community as well.

Ngui (1969) provides two important reasons in this context why Koro continues to be endemic among the Chinese :

- "1) In traditional Chinese medicine, and in folklore, there is great emphasis on the importance of the genitals in the preservation of life. This is reflected in the Chinese belief in the value of spermatic fluid --

10 grams of rice form a drop of blood

10 drops of blood form a drop of spermatic fluid

There is also general belief that sexual excess, nocturnal emission and masturbation can lead to disastrous effects on a person's health.

- 2) Despite having emigrated from China, the overseas Chinese are still very much influenced by Chinese traditional medicinal system. Gwee, in a survey in 1956, found that 90% of Chinese attending the General

Hospital in Singapore had also taken Chinese medicine for their complaints. Again many of the terms used in Chinese traditional medicine have become common household words, such as heat and cold, wind and wetness. It would follow therefore, that belief in penile retraction as a cause of death and in the entity of "shook yang" would be a prevalent belief among the Chinese. Against the background of these cultural beliefs, the Chinese population is therefore vulnerable to attacks of Koro" (p. 263-264).

The recent advances in Chinese society specially of the educational standards (Gwee, 1984; Ngui, 1984) of people, however, is a main reason for the decrease of such cultural influences on the people of Singapore and thus the Koro incidences in recent times show a very minimal presence. In a very recent study of the psychosocial covariates of the Shen-Kuei and Koro beliefs, Ng and Lui (1992) note that among the 84 randomly selected Chinese males in Hong Kong, 18.7% and 7.7% believed in the Shen-Kuei and Koro myth respectively. Rin (1986) also noted a decrease in Koro incidence in Taipei, Taiwan because of the influence of education and modern medical care in recent decade.

#### **Orality and Sexual Anxiety in Chinese Culture**

Weakland (1956) traces the root of Chinese male's genital anxiety to the traditional dimension of orality observed in the Chinese society. Orality is used here in a broader perspective, i.e. ... "orality may be latent in symptoms apparently related to something else and that direct references to the mouth may not indicate fundamentally oral phenomena, ... any direct imagery of the mouth or eating has some oral significance" (Bergler, 1949). Weakland (1956) in a stepwise analysis shows the prevalence of orality in the Chinese mode/custom of male child upbringing, in cultural and in erotic conceptualization, all of which have a deep relation with the castration fear and sexual anxiety in the males. Rin (1965) also asserts a deep influence of orality in Chinese culture as follows :

"A marked emphasis on orality in the Chinese has been noted, and is evidenced by the frequent and prolonged breast-feeding of babies and the prominent and almost exclusive role of the mothers in bringing up children. Eating is a major factor in Chinese social life. Oral features permeate Chinese everyday life; *Chy* (to eat) is the usual word used in greeting instead of "good day"; to nourish well or *parn*(grow fat) indicates one's health; so *parn* and *soon* (become thin) are of great importance in one's perceptions of other people. Also, an indirect form of orality and dependency has been thought to be seen in the high prevalence of opium-smoking and gambling among the Chinese (Muensterberger, 1951)" (p.12).

Gulik (1951) describes many examples which show that semen contains the *Chi* - "the universal spirit of life" (Fig.9) which the female absorbs through "mysterious vagina" during copulation. A moral restriction is thus imposed on intercourse (other than procreation) because of the abuse of *Ching* - the sexual energy, and destruction of the body. Therefore intercourse and woman are viewed as the 'enemy' because woman robs the precious yang essence of man. In sexual union, thus, the man merely seeks a complementary fluid substance for absorbing or for pleasure, thereby strengthening his yang or dragon quality, the principle of his manhood or masculinity, against the yin or tiger quality of the woman (Evola, 1991). Hence, from the act of coitus 'he', not 'she', will obtain the benefit, but if semen is ejaculated during coitus, the whole process will be reversed. That is why the woman is called the 'foe' because she tends to take away the yang from the man. So a good woman never makes sexual demands on a man and withdraws his *Ching*, unlike a "fox woman".

The theme of female castrator and its consequent male genital anxiety, as analysed by Prince (1992) at the background of a folk cult of fox spirit in the Koro epidemic of Guangdong, China in recent years, is a strong cultural component of the Chinese society. This unconscious fear of castration by female is well illustrated in different folk projections of females being dangerous creatures, e.g. 'Fox woman', 'Snake woman' or 'Tiger girl' and



The Chinese character 'Chi': breath, bio-energy, ether (Camphausen, 1991).

Fig. 9

in each instance the orality and its dangerousness are depicted with the act of sexual union. Here are some examples :

"The fox woman is a common supernatural figure in Chinese folk tales. She appears in many of the stories as 'the entrancing and dangerous woman', who is beautiful and sexually exciting, available sexually, usually even taking the initiative in that direction. The result of sexual relations with a woman of this type is exhaustion or illness and often death; a man becomes weaker and weaker and finally wastes away "(Heyer, 1953) .

"A snake woman may bore a hole in her victim's head and suck out his brains. A proverb says, "Woman's mind is as much as a snake's mouth" (Weakland, 1956) .

"Tiger girl would know what she wanted and would know how to get it . .. It was not proper wife who awaited him there, but an old bitch possessed of the spirit of the she-wolf who steals at night into the darkened chambers of lonely men and sucks them empty of semen, drinking so deep of their manhood that the well runs dry, and they wonder through the rest of their time staring vacantly at the world about them and mumbling to themselves" (Shaw, 1945) .

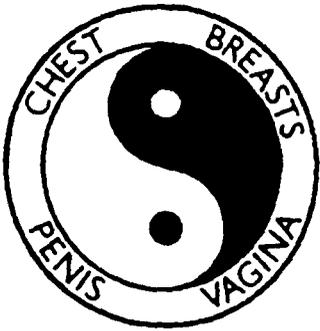
Gulik (1951) notes different phallic symbolisms in the Chinese culture, viz. turtle, dragon or snake. The dragon symbolizes the yang and corresponds to the men. It is interesting to observe some extraordinary term for penis in the Chinese culture, e.g. ambassador, crimson bird, jade flute, jade peak, jade sceptor, jade stream (*yu-heng*), ling, mushroom of immortality and yang peak (Camphausen, 1991). It is relevant to mention at this context that the symbolic expression of coitus in Chinese is the "coiling up of the dragon and the game of the tiger". The dragon symbolizes the yang and corresponds to man (masculine potency) while tiger for yin is embodied in the woman. This mixing up of yang and yin energies (with fusion of corresponding *li* and *K'an* forces) is also expressed by the Taoist symbol of *Lung-hu* means " dragon and tiger ".

Weakland (1956) from an in-depth socio-anthropological analysis asserts that there exists a genital phase castration threat in Chinese males, which is followed by a pleasurable phase with the experience of sexual anxiety and unconscious guilt. In support of these proposition, one may note that guilt over masturbation or illicit sexual contact is a frequent precipitating factor in Chinese Koro patients (Gwee, 1965; Rin, 1965; Yap, 1965a). A cultural metamorphosis of this female threat in recent times is the idea or belief in 'penis stealing' by female fox spirits of the Koro patients of Guangdong, China (Prince, 1992).

Last but not the least, one should mention the influence of "Taoist sexual philosophy" as a modern day sexual guide (Ramsdale and Ramsdale, 1993) for the experience of ecstatic joy of union. The yin-yang or *Tai Chi* ("great unity") circle is the secret metaphysical model of sexual union, the symbol (Fig.10) of which shows that each contains the seed of the other. It is a symbol of dynamic change within wholeness, holding the secret of life and love. The poetic description of *T'ai Chi* by Ramsdale and Ramsdale (1993) is indicative of the fact of high organ consciousness (penis and breast/vagina) in the process of love making for eternal pleasure (Fig.10).

#### NOTE

1. A similar concept is apparent in the basic theme of Kundalini yoga of Hindu Tantrik philosophy. The sanskrit meaning of Kundalini is "the coiled one", a name for the hidden "serpent power" of Tantra. It is the spiritual energy that often lies "coiled up" and unawakened in the muladhara chakra at the base of the spine. This force or energy (*Shakti*) is perceived as female in origin and yogis in ancient times could awaken it by complete sexual abstinence. Once awakened it rises upwards to unite with the male 'heavenly' cosmic forces present in the sahasrara chakra and thus depicts a transcendental bisexual union within one's (male's) own body. The arousal of Kundalini needs yogic skill, training and



**SUPREME  
ULTIMATE  
(T'AI CHI)**

*man juts out  
or projects  
from the bottom*

*woman juts out  
or projects  
from the top*

*a man's projection  
is called  
penis*

*a woman's projection  
is called  
breasts*

*a man draws in  
or introjects  
from the top*

*a woman draws in  
or introjects  
from the bottom*

... *here is the palace of joy  
the heart  
the feeling center  
the psychic core  
the soul  
the inner radiance  
the essence of  
the person  
this precious place  
we call  
the Love Spot*

*the key to the first lock  
is well known: penis*

...  
*when the connections  
above and below  
are fused  
a completed circuit  
is created which takes the shape  
of a luminous circle (or sphere)*

*we have felt and seen  
this radiant circle (sphere)  
and so have friends of ours*

*you may see and feel it too  
there are many possible signs  
such as an all-consuming joy*

*this great circle is T'ai Chi  
the sexual super battery*

*the experience of  
ultra-intimacy*

*relax  
become the depth  
you will be filled*

*you will be  
T'ai Chi*



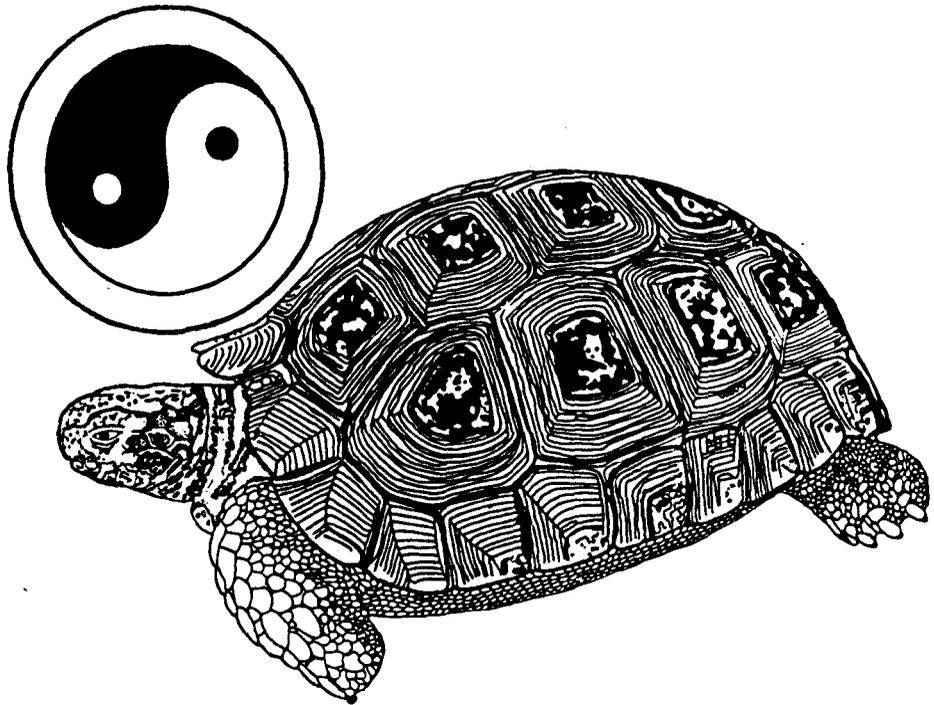
**Fig.10.** T'AI CHI : Symbol of dynamic change within wholeness, it holds the secrets of life and love (Ramsdale & Ramsdale, 1993).

experience because, if not properly controlled, it may lead to dangerous side effects including madness, illness, death or early rebirth or reincarnation (Camphausen, 1991).

2. Prince (1992) provides some interesting observation on the concept of coital death. He cites the work of Ueno (1963) in Japan which shows the autopsy report of 5559 cases of "endogenous sudden death" between January 1959 to May 1963 in Tokyo. Of 28 male deaths declared as 'coital death', 18 were due to cardiac causes. More than 50% of deaths occurred outside homes (e.g. in hotels). The distribution of female partners of these coition deaths was as follows : lovers 16, wives 7, waitresses 3, prostitute 2, common-law wives 2 and mistresses 1. In three cases the death was postmasturbatory. On average the males were twenty years older than their partners. The time correlation between intercourse and death shows that in eleven cases death occurred during intercourse, in eight just after intercourse, in eight others between thirty minutes to an hour after intercourse and in the rest seven between 1-18 hours postcoital.

Prince (1992) appropriately interprets these natural occurrences as a cue to the folk myth of malevolent fox spirit prevalent in Chinese and Japanese cultures :

"These statistics conjure up a picture of illicit sexual relations between an older man away from home and a considerably younger woman. It is possible perhaps to see this scenario as forming the basis of the myth of the beautiful young fox spirit seducing the susceptible male ..." (p.130).



*CHAPTER - 3*

**KORO AND THE ANIMAL CONNECTION**

- \* **TORTOISE/TURTLE : ZOOLOGICAL FEATURES**
- \* **TORTOISE/TURTLE SYMBOLISM**
- \* **TORTOISE : THE CHINESE PERSPECTIVE**
- \* **TORTOISE : THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE**
- \* **KORO AND THE FOX CONNECTION**

## KORO AND THE ANIMAL CONNECTION

'Koro' comes from the term for 'tortoise' in Malay, Indonesian dialects (Wilkinson, 1932) and the imagery of genital retraction in Koro is linked with the turtle symbolism among the Chinese (Gwee, 1963). The turtle or tortoise is one of the most primitive creatures still existing and is connected with the creation myth in many cultures of the world. It reflects various symbolic meanings, viz. good, bad or erotic in different cultures. The unique biological characters, viz. wide eco-adaptations and long life, amazing capability of navigational migration, profuse power of fecundity, phenotypical features (eg. hard, decorated, unbreakable shell; device for complete encasement in response to threat or danger; retractile head and neck) and docile, non-aggressive behaviour have been a matter of great wonder, often mystic and magical, for man since early days of civilization. Its extraordinary capacity to vanish into the depths of the endless sea for months or years together prompted the belief in its connection with the other world (world of the dead). This was used as a vehicle of divination or oracle in many cultures making it a topic of psycho-anthropological interest. Its extensive reference as a mythical animal in Hinduism is again a matter of great interest in mytho-anthropology. The turtle or tortoise has thus earned a specific connotation in religious themes, in magical myths and in erotic symbolism in different societies, especially in India and China. Its geographical distribution along the equatorial line and attached socio-cultural taboos in some ethno-geographic pockets prompted Chakraborty (1989) to speculate the possible existence of a 'turtle-culture'.

The present discussion attempts to explore the tortoise/turtle myth-reality dimensions in notable cultures of the world with a special reference to erotic (genital) symbolisms. Throughout this discussion the words tortoise and turtle are used interchangeably.

Fox (spirit) has recently been implicated as a cultural theme in Koro epidemic in Hainan island, China (Tseng et al., 1988; Prince, 1992). The fox is regarded in many cultures as a soul-animal with power of transformation into human beings. The implication of fox-spirit in Koro is another example of animal myth causing human disability. A brief transcultural discussion on Fox-connection with Koro along with its Sino-Japanese cultural link is done.

This paper also tries to focus the theme of animal (other than tortoise) erotic symbolism as a matter of related interest to this field.

## TORTOISE/TURTLE : ZOOLOGICAL FEATURES

In biology the word tortoise refers to the land-based reptile only and the term turtle is reserved for the amphibian, marine or freshwater forms.

The zoological name of tortoise is Testudians or Chelonians. They are most primitive, typically clumsy and poikilothermous animals. They are mainly amphibious and have adapted to various ways of life. Some live in freshwater, some in muddy habitats while some have become terrestrial and some have adapted themselves to marine way of life, leading a semi-pelagic life. Common turtles and tortoises are small to medium size reptiles ranging from 100 grams to a few kilograms in body weight but the giant sea-turtles might attain a weight of many hundred kilograms. The largest and most pelagic species among the living turtles these days is the huge Leather-back turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) which reaches a body weight of over 750 Kg. These reptiles have a very long life span and the available records (FAO/UN, 1968) indicate that a giant tortoise *Geochelone gigantea* survived for 152 years in Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean, from 1766 to 1918.

The phylogenetic history of tortoise shows that it is one of the most primitive species that is still surviving across the millions of years of evolution. From Triassic period to this date turtles have hardly undergone any changes. Their maximum development took place from late Mesozoic to early Tertiary period. The main divisions of Chelonians which occurred in those early days are still existing today. The exact ancestry of the modern terrestrial and aquatic testudines goes back to the Upper Cretaceous period. The fossil *Zangerlia testudinimorpha*, a large amphibious turtle from the lower Nemegt beds of Mongolia had a deep shell, very strong dorsal sulci, thick sculptured scutes, shortened phalange and the extensive fusion of the carpal elements. All these characters are also seen in most of the tortoises of the present times. The aquatic preference of most of the present turtles is probably a secondary

adaptation. It is believed that the terrestrial tortoises have evolved a long back from the primitive emydid turtles. Fossil records of the primitive tortoises which are ancestral to the modern land tortoises are available from the Mid-Eocene deposits. Probably they were present in the Paleocene and flourished in the Pliocene period. Evolutionary history of the modern marine turtles can be traced back to the early Triassic period. Fossil records of the marine turtles are available from the Lower Cretaceous, Upper Jurassic, and Upper Cretaceous (Tikader & Sharma, 1985).

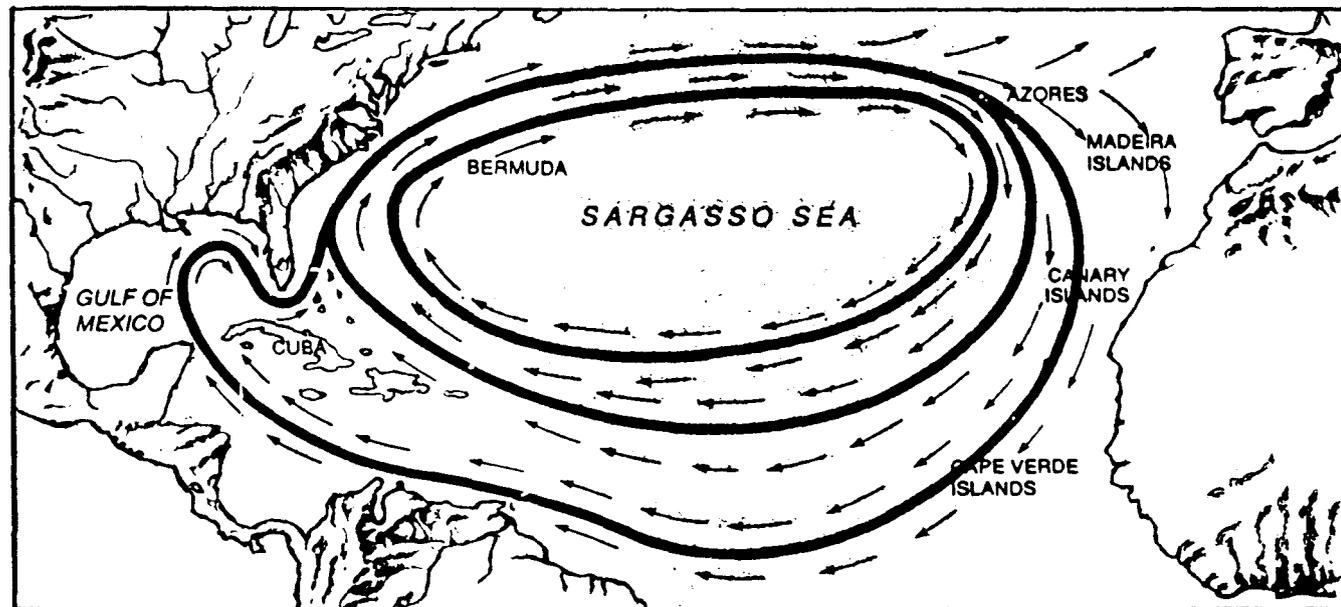
### **Unique Biological Character**

Their body is well protected by a box-like bony or leathery shell. The upper portion of the shell is the carapace and the lower one is the plastron. Both the outer coverings are composed of a modified inner layer of bony dermal plates with modified outer layer of horny scales, scutes or shields. They are very hard and the animal being enclosed within this can survive any outer attack even the lion's sharp fangs (Fig.1). The carapace is composed of median series of plates and a right and left lateral series of eight costal and marginal plates. The limbs emerge sideways from the anterior and posterior apertures of the shell. Openings for the head and tail are also left at the front and behind the shell. The neck is long, flexible and retractile. In certain aquatic species there is accessory respiratory arrangements (pharynx and cloacal sac) beside lungs for which they can live submerged for many days without suffocation. Vision of some species are remarkably receptive to infrared radiation. It is believed that the migratory sea turtles has an intrabody magnetic field that helps an orientation mechanism with a range of spectral sensitivity (Ehrenfeld, 1968). In recent years laboratory experimentation has shown that hatchling turtles could orient themselves by detecting waves as well by detecting the earth's magnetic field (Lohmann, 1992).

Extraordinary navigational capability of sea turtles amidst the almost featureless vast ocean (Fig.2) is a matter of great awe and wonder since the ancient times. Lohmann (1992) states



**Fig.1.** Even the lion's sharp fangs can not harm a tortoise (Dimitriyev, 1984).



**Fig.2.** Migrating path of Loggerhead hatchlings. Arrows indicate the flow of ocean current (Lohmann, 1992).

a unique example :

"... green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) that frequent feeding grounds off the coast of Brazil regularly migrate eastward across more than 1,400 miles of open ocean to reach their nesting grounds at Ascension Island. This remote speck of land is so isolated and difficult to find that during World War II air force pilots required to stop there for refueling summed up the situation with a rhyme : "If you miss Ascension, your wife gets a pension" (p.82).

Several recent experiments on turtle migration is also suggestive of the roles of magnetic maxima and minima strips on the ocean floor, wave directions and some chemosensory cues and reflected lights (Pearce, 1992).

## Geographical Distribution

### A. Marine Turtles (Fig.3)

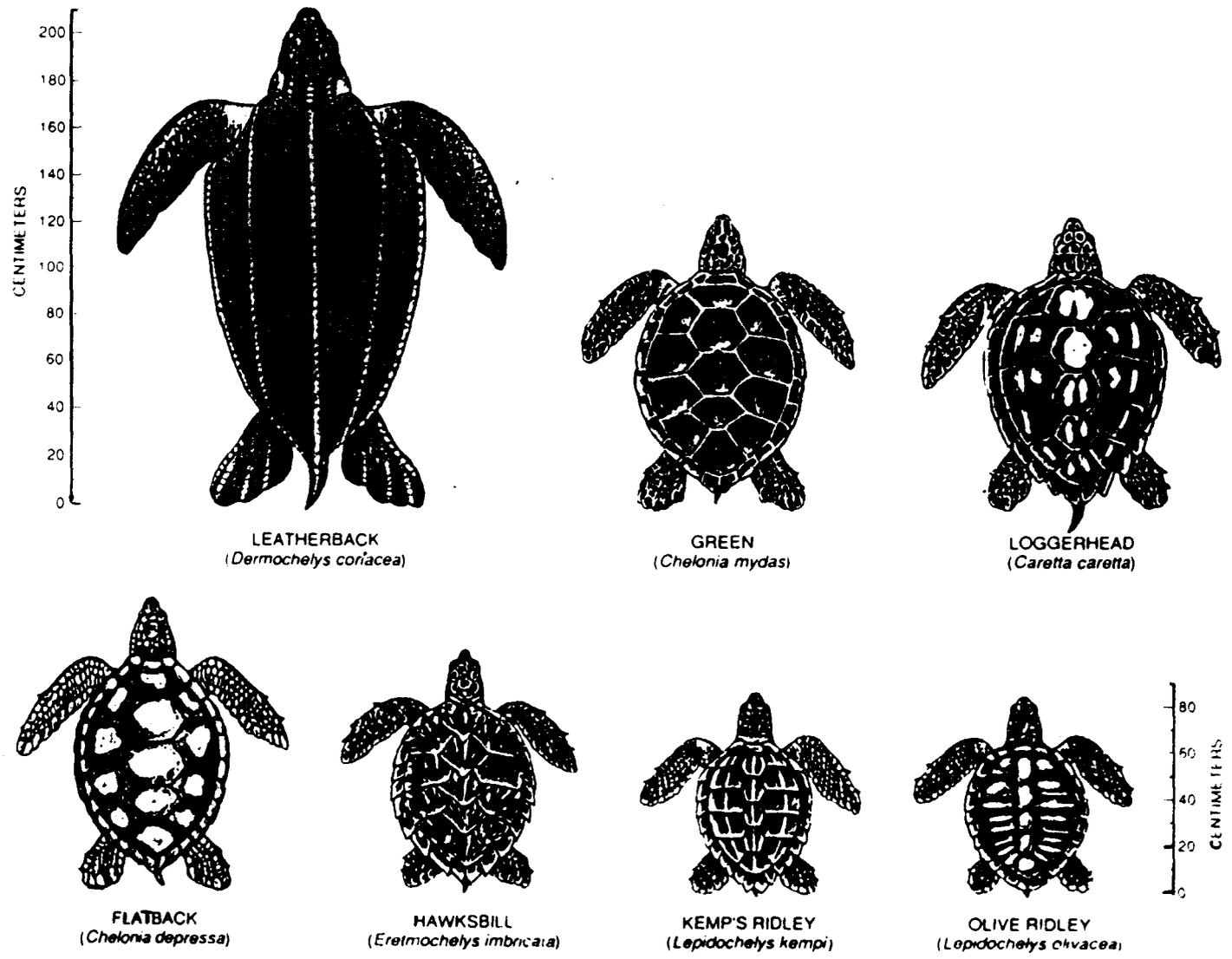
1. The Loggerhead Sea Turtle (*Caretta caretta*) is a large, cosmopolitan species with a big head (gets its name) and is one of the largest amongst all other sea turtles. A fully adult one may attain a length of 2.7 metres and weight 385 Kg.

Distribution : It is found in all the temperate and subtropical oceans of the world. Generally the nesting zones are either north of the Tropic of Cancer or south of the Tropic of Capricorn. Nesting areas extend from the sandy beaches of Oman, USA (Florida) and Australia. They have been also recorded from the waters of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, West coast of Sumatra, coasts of Southern China and Taiwan and Burma.

2. Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) is the largest of the hard-shelled species of marine turtles with green fatty tissue. A fully grown adult attains a length up to 155 cm. and a weight of 135-175 Kg.

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Fig. 3. Sea Turtles of the world (Lohmann, 1992).



Distribution : The Green Sea Turtle is a circumtropical species, nesting mainly in tropical and subtropical zones of the world. Low to moderate population of these turtles have been recorded from coastal areas of central and south Americas, Burma, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Thailand, and in the Indo-Chinese waters.

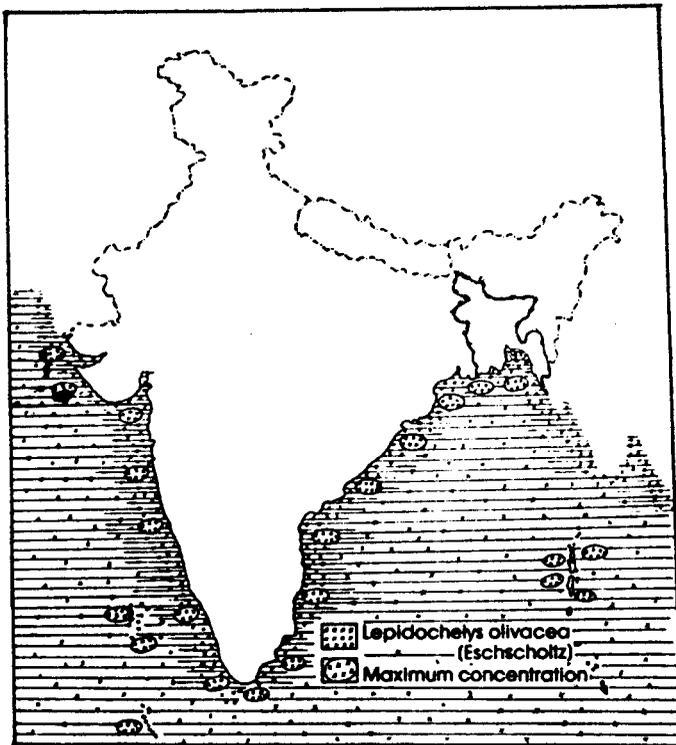
3. Hawksbill Sea Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) is one of the smallest but the most colourful species of the marine turtles. Beautiful yellow mottling on the rich brown background distinguishes this turtle from other sea-turtles. Adult ones are about 60-65 cm in length and 60-120 Kg. of weight.

Distribution : It is a circumtropical species, nesting mainly on beaches of tropical and subtropical zones of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indo-Chinese waters.

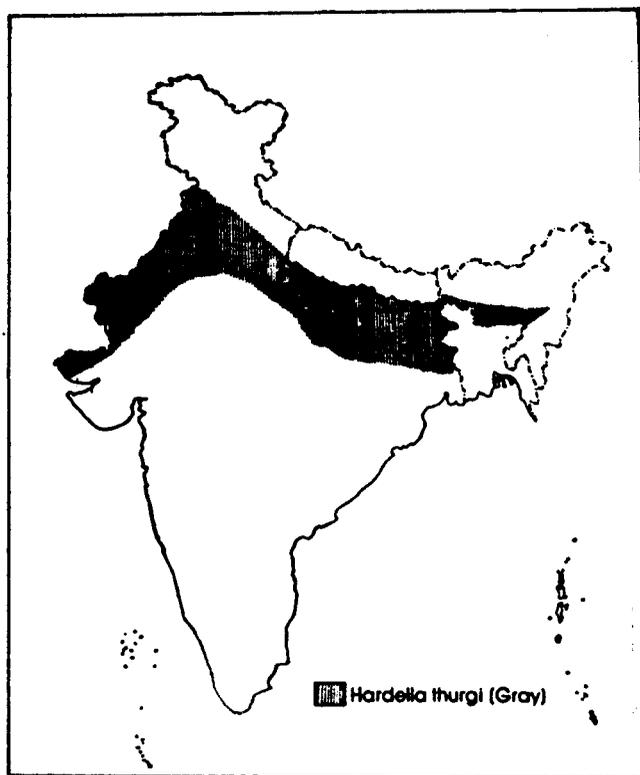
Its keratin layer is beautifully decorated with yellow-brown translucence, which is used for adornment and for making fashionable toilet articles and furniture.<sup>1</sup>

4. Olive Ridley Turtle (*Lepidochelys olivaca*) is a small, broad and flattened marine turtle, whose length varies from 56-75 cm.

Distribution : It is a circumglobal species and is widely distributed in the tropical waters of the Pacific, Indian (Fig.4) and Atlantic Ocean. At certain places in the world wherever the population densities of these turtles are still sufficiently high (Orissa in India; Costa Rica, Panama, Sri Lanka), their females emerge to nest in very large numbers (in synchronised concentration), sometimes upto 150,000 turtles. This phenomenon of mass emergences of the female Ridley turtles for nesting on the beaches is popularly termed as 'arribada' in Spanish, meaning 'arrival'.



**Fig.4.** Indian range and concentration of Olive Ridley turtle (Tikader & Sharma, 1985).



**Fig.5.** Distribution of river turtle in North India (Tikader & Sharma, 1985).

5. Leatherback Sea Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) or Luth is the largest and heaviest of all living turtles and tortoises of the world. Its body shape is somewhat triangular in shape resembling the ancient musical instrument<sup>2</sup> 'lute', from which the name 'Luth' came by corruption. Its length varies between 140-200 cm and the average weight is about 400 Kg, maximum recorded being 725 Kg (Nishimura, 1967).

Distribution : It is a circumglobal species and its nesting takes place on the beaches of tropical seas of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans. It migrates considerable distance in the warmer and tropical waters for feeding. Most of the breeding and nesting spots are situated between 30°N and 20°S. The southern range of its migration extends upto Uruguay and New Zealand. Two largest nesting spots in the South-East Asia Coastal region are at Trengganu in Malaysia and Kepala Burung area of Irian-Jaya in Indonesia.

#### B. Freshwater Tortoises (Family : Emydidae)

These are the hard-shelled, amphibious, herbivorous, or carnivorous and omnivorous chelonians relatively of small size, inhabiting the various fresh-water bodies of Northern Hemisphere. One of its type (genus *Cyclemys*) is widespread from Assam(India) to the Philippines Islands through south-east Asia.

Batagur Baska is a moderately large, web-footed aquatic species available in Sumatra, West Malaysia, Thailand, Bangladesh, Burma and Sunderbans of India. Fragments of this species have also been recorded from the Mohanjodaro and Harappa remains of Indus Valey civilization (Tikader & Sharma, 1985).

Hardella Thurgi is a river tortoise, available from the Sind basin to Gangetic and Bramhaputra (Assam) system of India.

*Kachuga dhongoka* is an aquatic species found in the eastern Ganga river system and Brahmaputra (Assam) basin including Assam ( Fig. 5 ). Fossils have been found in the Siwalik hills.

#### C. The Land Tortoisids (Family : Testudinidae)

These are the heavy-shelled, terrestrial and herbivorous forms with head and neck completely retractile within the shell. This family is widespread in India and in tropical south-east Asia. *Geochelone emys* is the largest of the Asiatic species found in hilly areas of Assam, Burma, Kampuchea, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Sumatra and Borneo (Indonesia). Plenty of fossil records of Indian land tortoise have been obtained from the Siwalik Hills.

#### D. Freshwater and Mud Turtles (Family: Trionychidae)

The group comprising of flattened, soft-shelled, carnivorous aquatic turtles whose head and neck are completely retractable. This family is represented in India by three well established genera, namely *Lissemys*, *Chitra* and *Trionyx*, inhabiting freshwater habitats like marshes, pools, lakes and rivers. Genus *Trionyx* is also widely distributed in Asia, Africa and North America. *Lissemys* is also found in Burma and Sri Lanka. Genus *Chitra* is represented by a single species *Chitra indica* inhabiting the river systems of North India, Thailand, Malaysia, Pakistan and Nepal. Fossils of Trionychids have been recorded from the Pliocene and Pleistocene deposits of the Siwalik hills in India.

### **Turtle Character of Psychoanthropological Significance**

The tortoise or turtle is one of the most primitive creatures (Fig.6 A&B) that the human civilization has encountered since its inception. The transition from nomadic hunter-gatherer life style to a settled agriculturist life pattern enabled man to have varieties of new experience involving an unlimited horizon of cognitive cues including his love-hate relationships with aquatic animals of which the turtle occupied a special position. Some remarkable zoo-specificities of tortoise offer a unique scope of cognitive categorization so far as the animal's mythical and legendary folk beliefs are concerned. The following brief discussion will try to focus on some of these biological characters of the tortoise/turtle which make it a creature of cosmic significance with various sagas of wonder and myth.

(1) The benign, mostly nonaggressive and herbivorous nature of the tortoise enabled the development of relations with human settlements since ancient times. This non-antagonistic acceptance of the primitive animal thus facilitated its incorporation into various myths and legends, specially among the indigenous peoples of the world (Fig.7).

(2) Its morphological features offer a built-in super-protective system by which it is able to survive the severest insult, though it has no well-defined specific aggressory devices to attack a predator (Fig.8 A,B&C).

The body is boxed by two rigid, unbreakable shields, dorsal (carapace) and ventral (plastron). This great self-protective shelter for the retractile head, limbs and tail of the animal offers the basis of the belief in magical energy and its supernatural capacity to withstand the greatest of odds. The basis of this supernatural magical strength is also enhanced by the fact of its extraordinary tenacity of life. Patrik and Geddie (1935) described it as follows :

"Tortoise excel most animals in their tenacity of life. They can live for a long time without food; they are very difficult

**Legend of Figs. 6A & B; 8A, B & C; 9 & 10**

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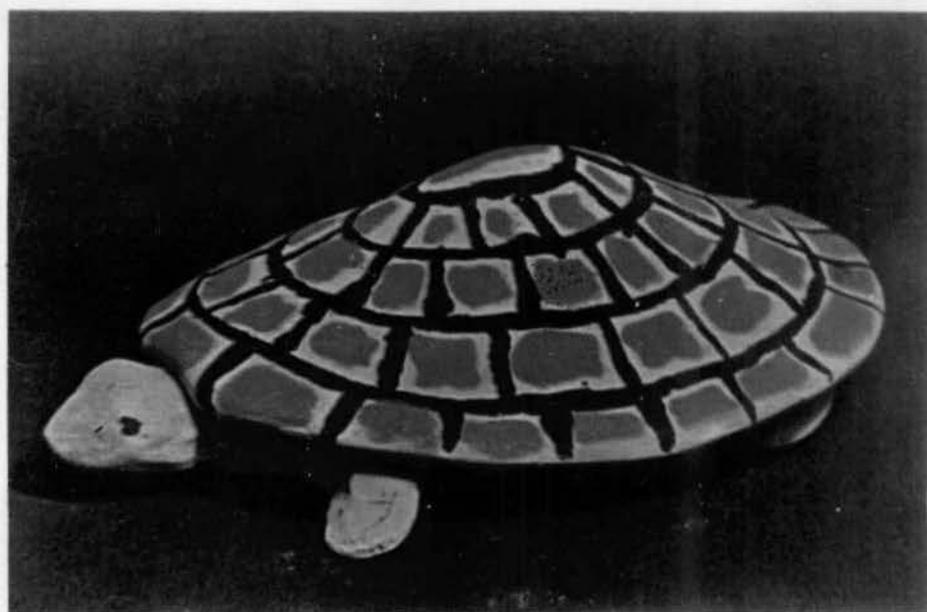
- Fig.6A.** A **Galapagos giant tortoise** (Kilpatrick & Hard,1990). First described by Charles Darwin, this tortoise can weigh over 200 kgs., and live 100 years or more.
- Fig.6B.** The only known specimen of the giant Fernandina Island tortoise, **Geochelone elephantopus phantastica** (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.8A.** Indian high-domed turtle, **Lissemys punctata** with fleshy flaps to protect the limbs (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.8B.** Adult **Podocnemis unifilis** from Gunea (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.8C.** Yellow-spotted Amazon turtle, **Podocnemis unifilis** (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.9.** **Callagur borneoensis**, a very large Malaysian river turtle (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.10.** Stone engraving of Kaurma Incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Ranganath Temple, Brindaban, U.P., India, 18th century.



Fig.6A



Fig.6B



**Fig.7.** Turtles have played a part in the culture of many indigenous people of the world. This figurine is of Amazonian Indian (Pritchard, 1979).



A



B



C

Fig.8

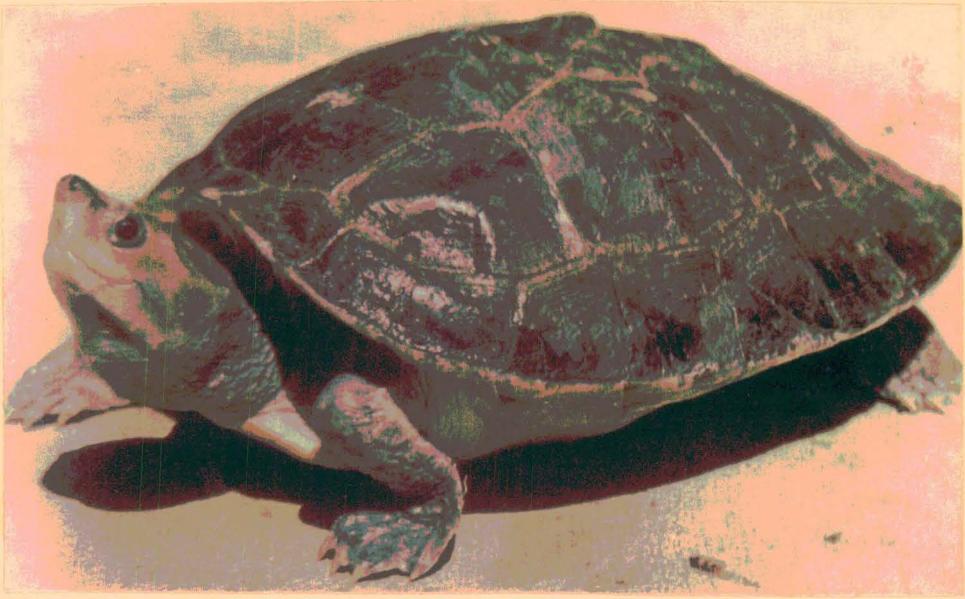


Fig.9



Fig.10

to kill, and even after the brain has been destroyed life lingers long in the body. It is said that a headless tortoise has been observed to walk 200 yards twenty-four hours after decapitation; and it is well known that the heart removed from the body will, if carefully suspended in a moist chamber, continue capable of beating for two or three days" (p.175).

The encasing of great power and strength within the shell of a tortoise is the cognitive basis for its association with many creation myths of the world (Fig.9). This aspect also acts in the symbolism for wrapping of strength and sacred power of soul within the innermost confidential human body areas e.g. in *Kundalini yoga* or *Kurma asana* of Tantra in Hinduism. The Hindu myth relating to the incarnation of Lord Vishnu as a tortoise (Fig.10) also depicts this aspect of magical strength inherent in the creature.

(3) The varieties of lines with some geometrical designs on the turtle shell, called scutes, provide a cue to the perception of sacred directives or divine meaning within the lines of the shell (Figs.11 A,B,C & 12 A,B,C). There are many mythological and legendary references of these tri/quadri/hexagonal lines of tortoise shell, especially in the Chinese culture, e.g. the graphic configuration of I Ching of Taoism, calligraphy and oracle bone divination. Specific disposition of colours (Figs.13 A,B,C & 14 A,B,C) on the shell was regarded as a good omen for the King and his subjects in ancient India.

(4) The remarkable ability of the tortoise for extraordinary distance navigation in the ocean and its power to stay deep under for hours together make it not only a creature of mythical link between the earth and the netherworld but also the progenitor of the soil of the new earth from vast and limitless waters of the primordial cosmic ocean and flood (Fig.15). In many cultures turtles are regarded as the ancestral animal and hence worshipped with great reverence and rituals.

(5) Its enormous fecundity makes it a symbol for eroticism and generative power (Fig.16).

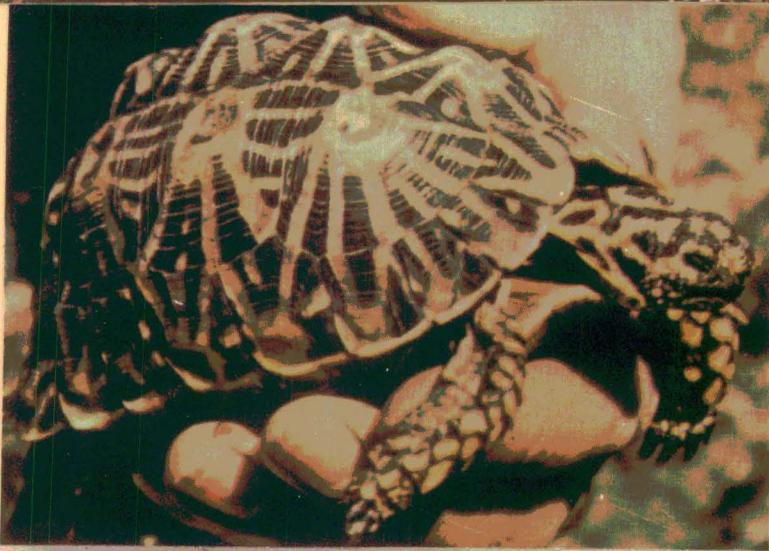
**Legend of Figs. 11A, B & C and 12A, B & C**

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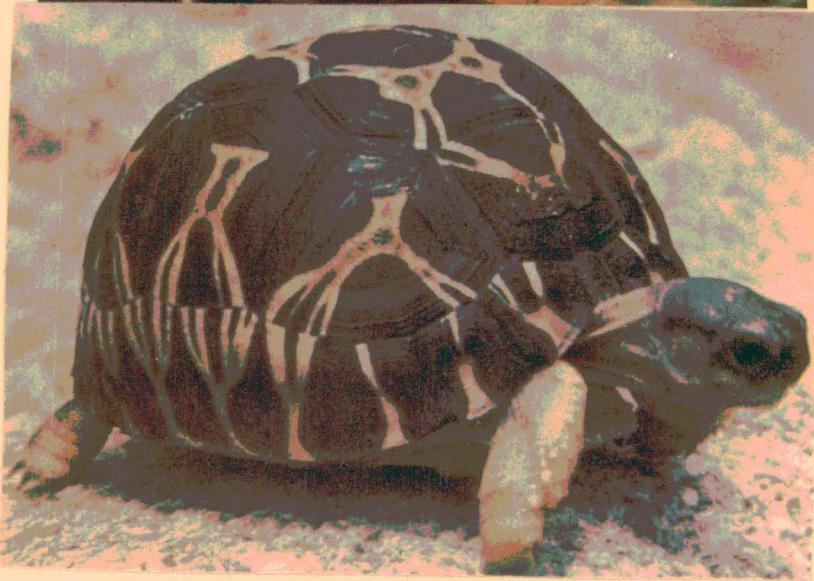
- Fig.11A.** Hieroglyphic turtle, *Pseudemys concinna hieroglyphica* of south-central United States (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.11B.** South American geometric tortoise, *Psammobates geometricus* (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.11C.** Baby radiated tortoise, *Geochelone radiata* (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.12A.** Radiated tortoise, *Geochelone radiata* of Madagascar Island (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.12B.** Florida box turtle, *Terrapene carolina bauri* (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.12C.** Madagascan spider turtle, *Pyxis arachnoides* (Pritchard, 1979).



A

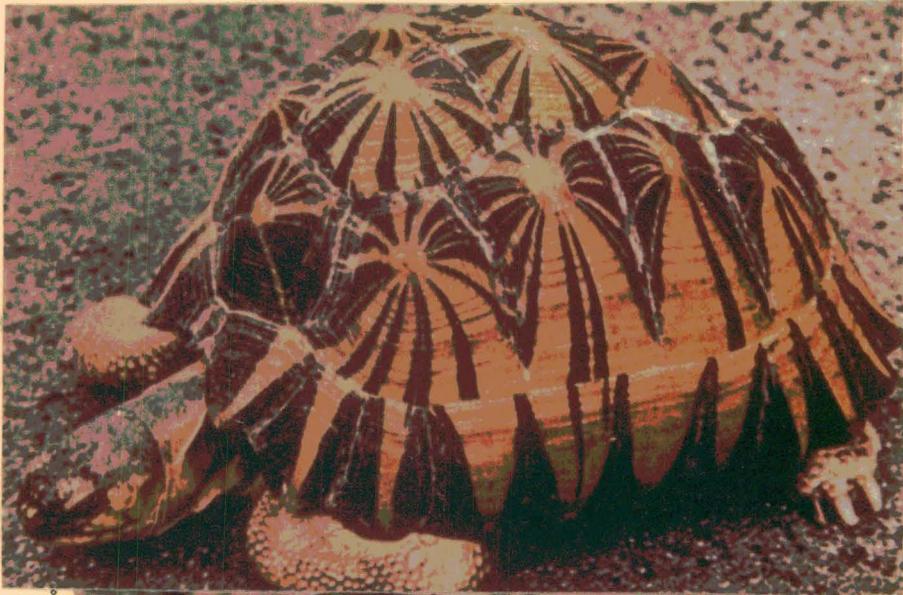


B



C

Fig.11



A



B



C

Fig.12

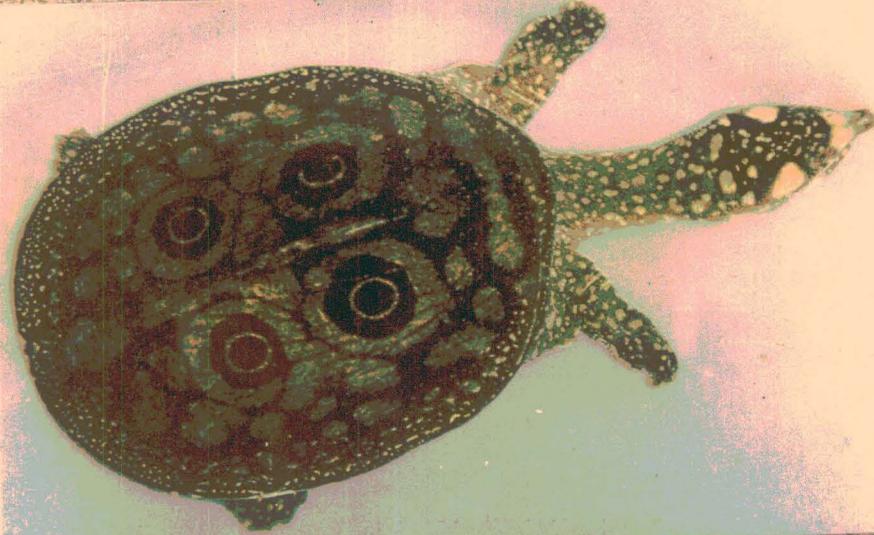
**Legend of Figs. 13A, B & C and 14A, B & C**

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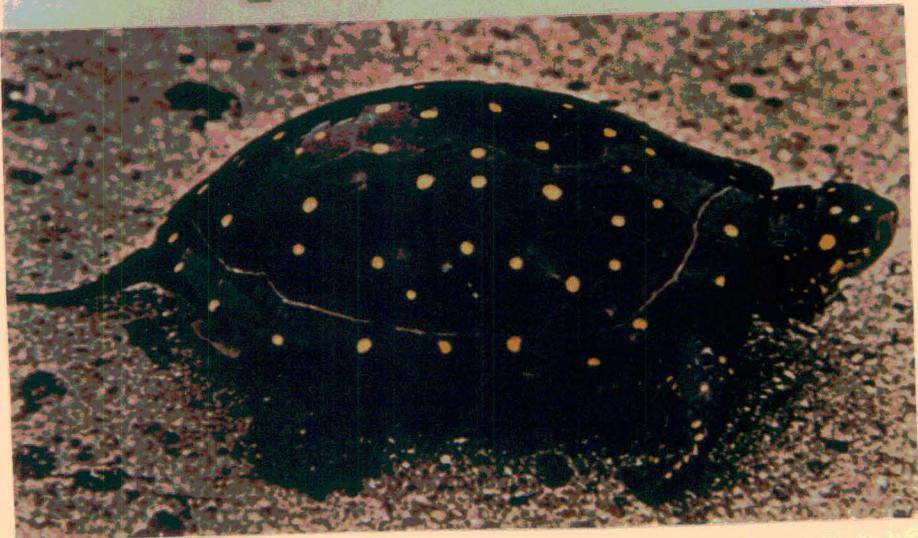
- Fig.13A.** An excellently coloured red-footed tortoise, *Geochelone carbonaria* (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.13B.** The peacock turtle, *Trionyx hurum*, a beautiful species from the Indus and Ganges rivers (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.13C.** Spotted turtle, *Clemmys guttata* from north-eastern United States (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.14A.** Hawksbill turtle, *Eretmochelys imbricata*, from Grand Cayman Island (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.14B.** Painted head turtle, Singapore Zoo (Chowdhury, 1990).
- Fig.14C.** Hatchlings of *Pseudemys scripta dorbignyi*, from southern Brazil and northern Argentina (Pritchard, 1979).



A



B



C

Fig.13



A



B



C

Fig.14

**Legend of Figs. 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19**

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- Fig.15.** Male Green turtle, *Chelonia mydas*, on the Great Barrier Reef of Australia (Pritchard, 1979). The multicoloured 'geographic spots' on the carapace at the background of limitless sea is the cognitive clue for a mystic/mythical link of it with the other world.
- Fig.16.** Egg-lying in the green turtle, *Chelonia mydas* (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.17.** Advertisement of Serentil (Mesoridazine) of Sandoz Pharmaceuticals in Archives of General Psychiatry, 1973.
- Fig.18.** European *Testudo* is a popular pet in Britain and Germany (Pritchard, 1979).
- Fig.19.** Postage stamps of different countries depicting various species of tortoises.

Fig.15

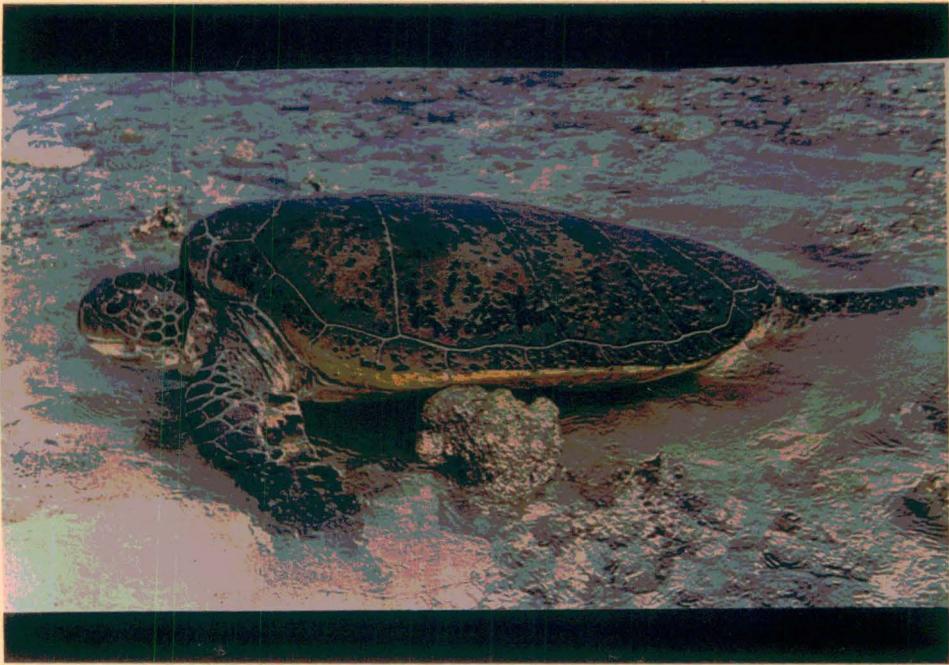


Fig.16

(6) Its nature is frequently compared to the human temperament. Its slow and guarded movement signifies both its wise, careful and steady character, and its timid, shy and withdrawn nature. This last imagery is skillfully exploited in commercial advertisements of antipsychotic drugs (Fig.17).

(7) The tortoise, like other pet animals (Fig.18), is loved and adored by humans and is thus portrayed in various characters in folk tales of the world. Different countries have colourful postal stamps on the tortoise (Fig.19) and one finds many groups or organizations called the "turtle group or club or shop" etc. in various parts of the globe. Turtle, like the mouse, is an important terminology in modern computer technology. Turtle computing is an electromechanical computer drawing device where the precise movements of the turtle are transmitted to the computer. The device which is used in LOGO and some other languages, predates but is similar to the mouse (Cambridge Encyclopedia, 1992).

#### NOTE

1. The turtle shell has a long history of ornamental and domestic use. The rich, luminous, brown and yellow mottled sea turtle shells are suitable for those purposes. The best shell is that of *Chelo imbricata* from the Cuban waters followed by *Chelo mydas*, from the Mediterranean sea (Lightbrown, 1984).

The brittle outer layer is removed from the shell by heat, when the plates become soft and adhesive and can be easily moulded. Tortoiseshell jewellery was greatly appreciated by the ancient Romans and Egyptians (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1985, vol.11). Muslim workers made tortoiseshell caskets, combs, and knife handles in eleventh century Cairo. Around 1570 eating and drinking from tortoiseshell vessels was a way to avoid infectious diseases (Lightbrown, 1984). Since the 1620's tortoiseshell was a

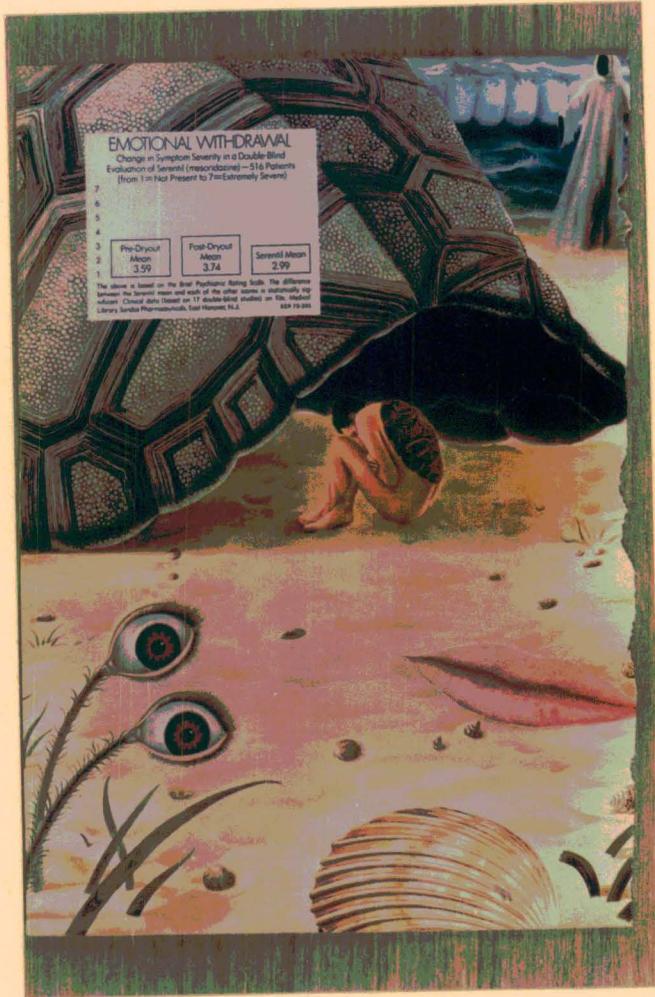


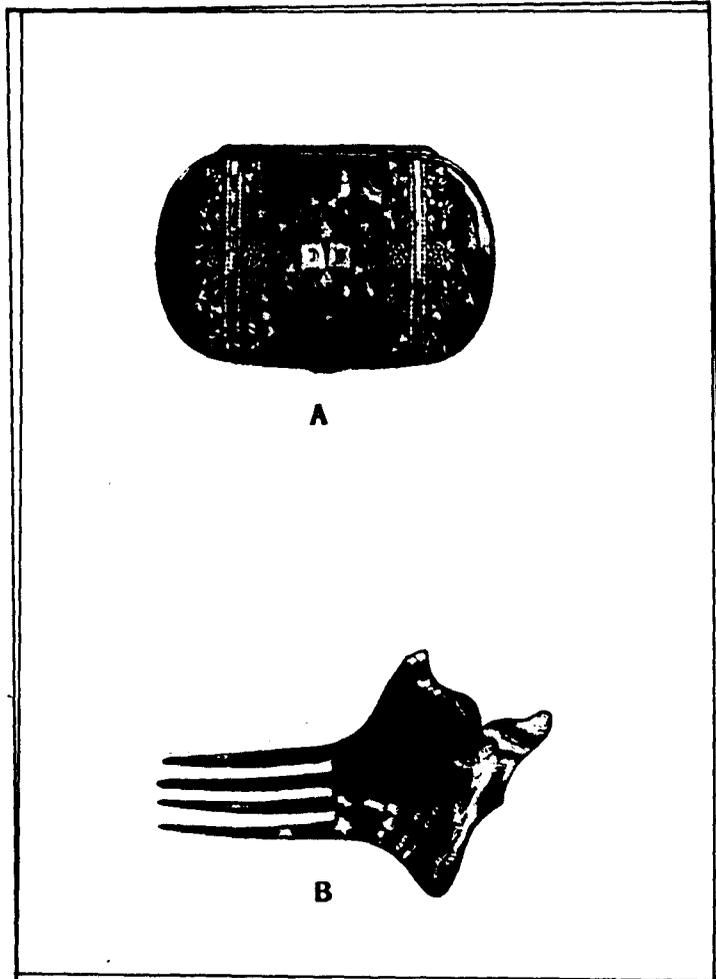
Fig.17



Fig.18



Fig.19



**Fig.20.** Tortoise-shell (Lightbrown,1984)

- A. Purse with mother-of-pearl inlay.
- B. Decorative comb.

favourable decorative veneer on baroque furniture. The Parisian cabinetmaker Andre' Charles Boulle made veneers from plaques of tortoiseshell cut by special saws and inlaid with different metals like brass or copper, or, alternatively, from metal plaques inlaid with tortoiseshell. In the middle of the 17th century, small objects like clock cases, picture and mirror frames, *etuis* (needle cases), toilet sets, ornamental high combs (especially for Spanish women, Fig.20) and snuff boxes made from tortoiseshells were popular in France and England. The French technique is known as 'pique' where gold or silver designs are laid on the tortoiseshell objects (Fig.20). From about 1680, Naples has been a major centre of *pique* and other tortoiseshell work (Light-brown, 1984).

2. In India the tortoise is known by the name *Kurma* or *Kachchhap*. A musical instrument shaped like a tortoise shell is known as 'Kurma bina' or 'Kachchhapica' or 'Kachhua Sitar' (Basu, 1988).

## THE TORTOISE / TURTLE SYMBOLISM

The major universal symbolic use of Tortoise and Turtle is indicative of its pre-historic survival and biological features and life potentials.

**Tortoise** : Symbolically it represents the waters; the moon; the Earth Mother; the beginning of creation; time; immortality; fecundity and regeneration. The tortoise is frequently depicted as the support of the world as the beginning of creation and the all-sustaining.

**Turtle** : Its main symbolic themes are longevity; slowness; lubricity and phallic.

The following account shows the different symbolic relevance of Tortoise in different world cultures. (Cooper, 1993).

**Alchemic** : The tortoise represents the *masa confusa* or *prima materia* i.e. the primordial chaotic state to be transformed in the Great Work at the beginning of the creation.

**Amerindian** : The Cosmic Tree (indicating universal manifestation proceeding from unity to diversity and back to unity or the union of heaven and earth) grows out of the back of the Tortoise.

**Christan** : It represents modesty in marriage or used for women living retired in their houses as the tortoise is in its shell. In some early Christian art tortoise appeared as evil.

**Egyptian** : Two tortoises appear with the sign of the Scales as the measure of the flood waters of the Nile.

**Graeco-Roman** : The feminine principle, the fertility of the waters. It is a sacred animal of Roman Venus (goddess of love in Italy/Rome) who rose from the sea. It is also an emblem of the Greek god Hermes, who created his first musical instrument from a

tortoise shell. It is also connected with Aphrodite and Mercury.

**Japanese** : The tortoise represents longevity, good luck and support. It is depicted in mythology as the support of the abode of the Immortals and of the Cosmic Mountain. It is used as an emblem of Kumpira, god of seafaring men and an attribute of the goddess Benten.

**Maxican** : The tortoise is regarded as the terrible aspect of The Great Mother.

**Sumerian** : Sacred to Ea-Oannes as Lord of the Great Deep.

The Turtle is also symbolised as longevity; slowness; lubricity and phallic. To the Amerindians it represents : the coward, braggart (Fig. 1); sexualist, the earthly. To the Egyptian it represents drought; an enemy of the sun god. To the Maori people it symbolises procreation and fertility; the 'land-worker'; agriculture and success in harvest.

### **The Turtle Myth**

The existence of turtle or tortoise since olden times and some of its unique biological characters offer a host of creation myths linked with this creature in many societies of the world, for example, one such widespread myth is that the earth rests on the back of a turtle or tortoise (Fig.2). This archaic idea is found among the North American Indians, in South Asia and inner Asia. According to certain myths involving an earth diver, the turtle, sometimes as an incarnation of divine being, plays a prominent part in the cosmogony of various culture.

The Maidus in California believe that a turtle dived to the bottom of the primeval ocean and procured a little soil under its nails. When it surfaced, God scraped its nails carefully and made a ball shaped like a small pebble. The ball of soil then grew miraculously until it became as large as the universe itself (Waida, 1987a).



**Fig.1** The turtle was a symbol of lubricious and bragging cowardice (hard on the outside, soft and slimy within) to the Aztecs (Cooper, 1993).



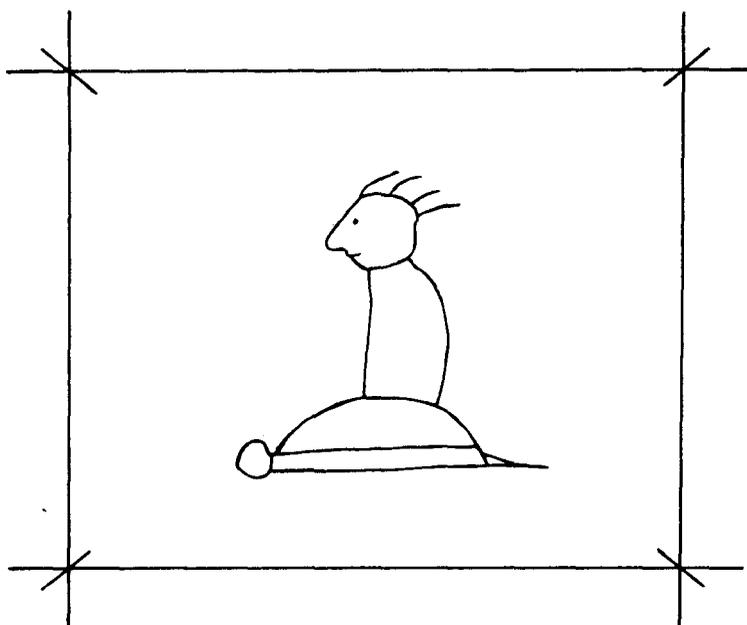
**Fig.2** : Olive ridley sea turtle from Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (Lambart, 1991).

Yokuts, one of the North American Indian groups of small tribes of San Joaquin valley of California, narrate how at the time of creation the eagle and the coyote sent a turtle into the waters. The motif of the turtle's successive dive is also known among the Algonquin (a member of a group of North American Indian tribes formerly along the Ottawa river and northern tributaries of the St. Lawrence). Mohawk and Onondaga, tribes of Iroquoian Indians of north (eastern) America, also believe that it was a turtle that directed different creatures into the ocean; a beaver tried in vain, an otter also failed, but a musk-rat returned successfully with soil in his claws and mouth. This primordial soil was placed on the back of the turtle and then a miraculous growth of the Earth began (Waida, 1987a).

In native American iconography various types of religious geomorphology have been incorporated. The most prominent geological being envisioned is Mother Earth. Among the Delaware Indians (inhabiting the same named state in the eastern United States on the Atlantic coast), the earth is symbolized by the great tortoise which saved humankind from flood and upon whose back the new earth was created by Nanabush (Fig.3), (Geertz, 1987).

The story of the long-necked tortoise woman, Ngalmangii is a popular mythical theme of the Australian Emianga religion (Berndt, 1987). The Buriats of Mongolia believe that in the beginning of creation there was nothing but water and a turtle. God turned the turtle on its back and built the world on its stomach. In Buddhism, Mandishire (the *bodhisattva* Manjusri) transforms himself into a great turtle and supports the earth he has made on the surface of the waters (Waida, 1987a).

The old age upto which the tortoise supposedly lives has made it a symbol of magical longevity and immortality. In the mythico-iconographical tradition the tortoise thus forms a complex together with immortality, the moon and the paradise. There are big "stone" turtles in South Korea and in southern Japan (Kyushu), at its seashore facing the Korean peninsula. Since prehistoric times, these mountains indicate that people



**Fig. 3** Delaware Pictograph. Painted on one of a bundle of marked sticks that constitute the tribal chronicle of the Delaware, this pictograph shows the trickster Nanabush riding a great tortoise, symbol of Mother Earth (Geertz, 1987).

believed in the turtle bestowing new life or immortality on the dead and escorting them to the otherworld far across the ocean or to paradise deep under the waters (Maringer, 1963).

In China, the turtle symbolizes the universe (Fig. 4), its domeshaped back represents the sky; while its belly, square in shape, stands for the earth. In ancient China, Egypt and Greece the tortoise was regarded as the female principle, hence a symbol of erotic power and fecundity. In Indian mythology the great tortoise is often represented as the sustainer of the four elephants upon whose back the world rests.

A. de Gubernatis (1872) in his book 'Zoological Mythology' described some myths and folk beliefs of tortoise.

### **The Turtle Cult**

Frazer (1950) discusses a number of indigenous rituals concerning the various symbolic meaning of turtle in different cultures. Here are few examples :

The islanders of Torres Strait (between north-east Australia and south New Guinea) use a model of turtle for magical purpose. They use this to charm the herbivorous aquatic mammal dugong (found in Red sea and Indian ocean, having a fishlike body, flipperlike forelimbs and no hind limbs) or even the living sea turtles for catching. In the island of Torres Straits many magical ceremonies are also performed to prepare a canal for turtle-fishing. There are many taboos connected with the fishing, primarily of sexual nature; turtle dances are also performed to ensure success in the fishing (Camb. Univ. Exp. Rep., 1903). The western tribes of British New Guinea also employ such magic turtle as a charm to aid the hunter in spearing dugong or turtle.

The Caribs (group of Indian people of north-eastern south America) abstained from eating the flesh of pigs and tortoise. It is believed that such eating would affect the physical nature of the eater, e.g. small eyes like pigs or heavy and stupid like tortoise. In some groups of West Africa, men in their childhood never eat the flesh of tortoise because it is believed that



**Fig.4** : Painted turtle *Chrysemys picta belli*. This is the largest and most attractively marked race of painted turtle (Pritchard, 1979).

this will destroy their vigour and 'fleetness of foot'. There is, however, no restriction of eating flesh of the slow-footed animal for the old man since they already have lost the power of running for aging.

In the Zuni Indians of New Mexico the turtle is a sacred object of totem faith. It is believed that the turtles may act as a vehicle or medium through which transmigration of souls of the dead (of the near and dear ones) may come into the earth. *Ka-K'ok-shi'* or 'Good Dance' is such a religious festival devoted to the killing of turtle for this purpose. People take basket full of turtles and marched in procession towards the river bank where after prayers and ritualistic blessings the turtles are killed. Its flesh and bones are removed and deposited in the river sand with the hope that the human soul might "return once more to eternal life among its comrades in the dark water of the lake of the dead". Thereafter the shells are carefully scraped and dried and use to make dance-rattle, covered with a piece of buckskin and kept hanging from the raft of the house.

An interesting code of sexual behaviour is noted among the islanders of Mabuag of New Guinea during the 'turtle season'. The 'turtle season' lasts during the parts of October to November there. A sexual continence is imposed on the people both before their hunting sail for dugong and while the turtles are pairing. If during this season unmarried persons have sexual intercourse, it is believed that when a canoe approaches the floating turtle, the male would separate from the female and both would dive down in different directions. So at Mowat in New Guinea men have no relation with women when the turtle are coupling, though there is no such restriction or moral overtone at other times of the year (Frazer, 1950).

Both in Asia (Bastian, 1873) and in America the turtle is one of the mythical animals on which the world rests. In the Iroquois (a member of the Indian confederacy of North American Indians of Canada and the eastern U.S.) myth the world was at first covered with water and when Aataentsic fell from heaven, all the animals held a conference to decide how she was to be

received and the turtle caught her on his broad and strong back; with the aid of mud and sand brought up by water-fowl and thus the earth was formed ( Thomas, 1964). The turtle is thus regarded as sacred animal and is an important Iroquois totem and the clan traces its descent from a turtle that threw off its shell (Frazer, 1887).

A turtle tabu exists in Madagascar (Gennep, 1904), Pomotu (American Indian people of northern California) and Java (Tijdschar TLV, 1853). In Indonesia, the failure to observe the tortoise tabu is believed to lead retraction of genital organs (Koro), "specially the failure to turn around immediately when a turtle crosses one's path and pulls in the head" (Jilek & Jilek-Aall, 1985). The Kwapas are not allowed to lift a small water tortoise by its tail, least there should be a flood (Journal of American Folklore, 1888).

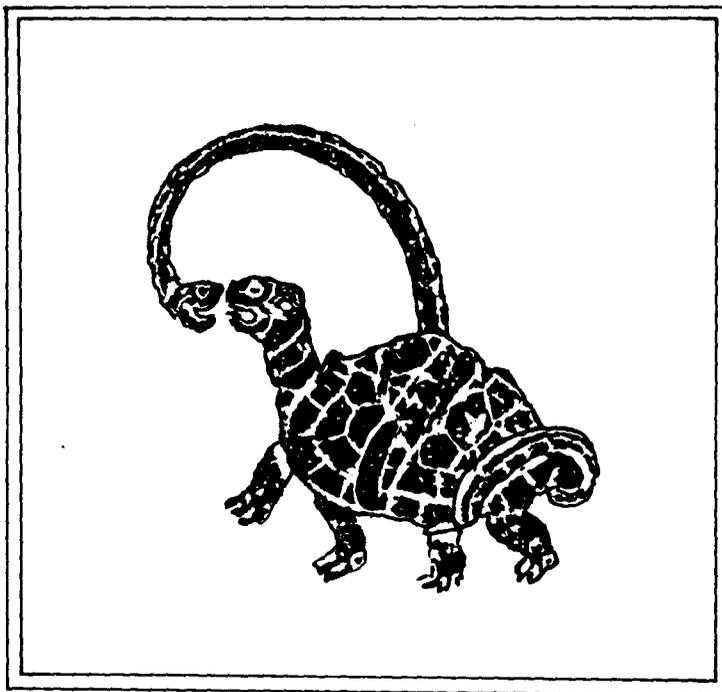
In Madagascar the turtle-fishing is an occupation and is surrounded by many taboos. The fisherman has to eat the turtle on the shore and the shell has to be left too and should not be used for any purpose. All the villagers organise a turtle feast and no other food is allowable on that occasion. If these taboos are not observed, the turtle leaves the shore (Gennep, 1904). In Zoroastrianism, the tortoise is regarded as an evil creature and deliberate killing is the practice ( Thomas, 1964).

## TORTOISE : THE CHINESE PERSPECTIVE

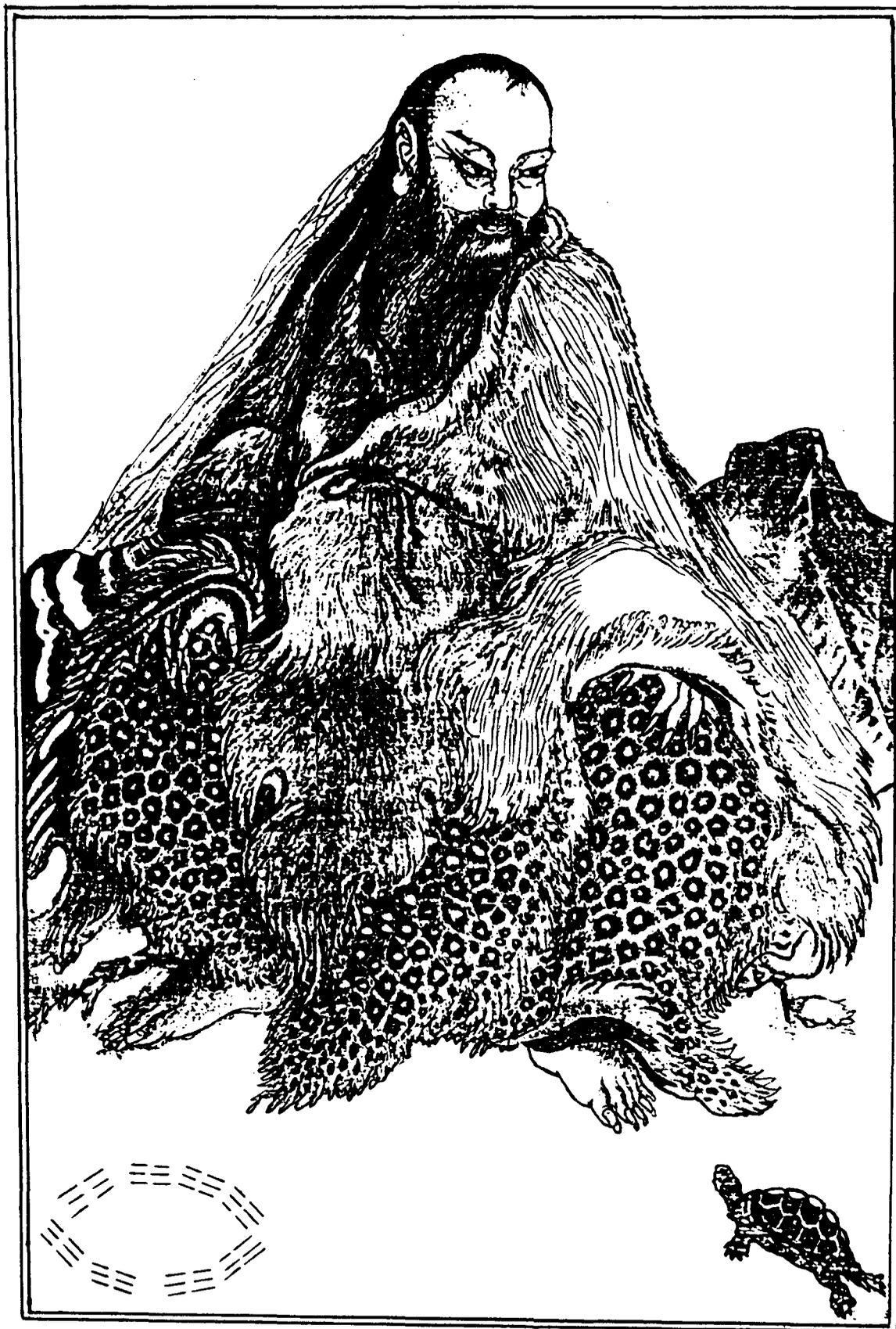
In Chinese the tortoise is regarded as a sacred animal and one of the four spiritually endowed creatures (with dragon, phoenix and Ky-lin). It is believed that tortoise possesses oracular power. It is also linked with the creation myth : it supports the world, with its four feet as the four corners of the earth.

Tortoise in Chinese philosophy represents the watery element, the yin principle,<sup>1</sup> winter, the northern region and the colour black - the colour of primordial chaos (Fig.1) (Cooper, 1993). The tortoise is also known as black warrior, and then becomes strength, endurance and longevity. The tortoise usually accompanies every major cultural hero and is regarded not only as a symbol of immortality, but of order, steadfastness and immutability. The dragon and tortoise banner was carried by the imperial army as a symbol of indestructibility since both creatures survive a fight, the dragon being unable to crush the tortoise and the tortoise being unable to reach the dragon. The tortoise frequently appears with the crane as a longevity symbol (Cooper, 1993).

The Taoist philosophy considers the tortoise as the symbol of the universe. Its shape symbolizes the Great Triad or the entire cosmos, with the dome-shaped back as the sky, the body in the middle as the earth or as man, the mediator, and its under shell as the waters. It is believed that the mythical first emperor of China, Fu Hsi, draws inspiration from a tortoise. Legend says that the emperor derived the eight basic trigrams of the I Ching<sup>2</sup> from studying lines on the tortoise's shell (Fig.2). Lines on the tortoise shell was regarded sacred with mystic power. It is used for divination by the Chinese royal personalities. The practice of divination seems to have been entrusted to certain officials, who consulted the omens indicated by the lines of the tortoise shell and the stalk of the milfoil plant (Thomas, 1964). The upper shell of the tortoise was removed and a quantity of ink spread over the under side. It was then held over a brazier,



**Fig.1.** The tortoise on a 3rd century Chinese sarcophagus symbolizes the 'North', land of darkness and of the dead (Cooper, 1993).



The mythical first emperor of China, **Fu Hsi**, draws inspiration from a tortoise in this thirteenth-century Chinese painting on silk. Legend says the emperor derived the eight basic trigrams of the **I Ching** (lower left of the painting) from studying lines on the tortoise's shell.

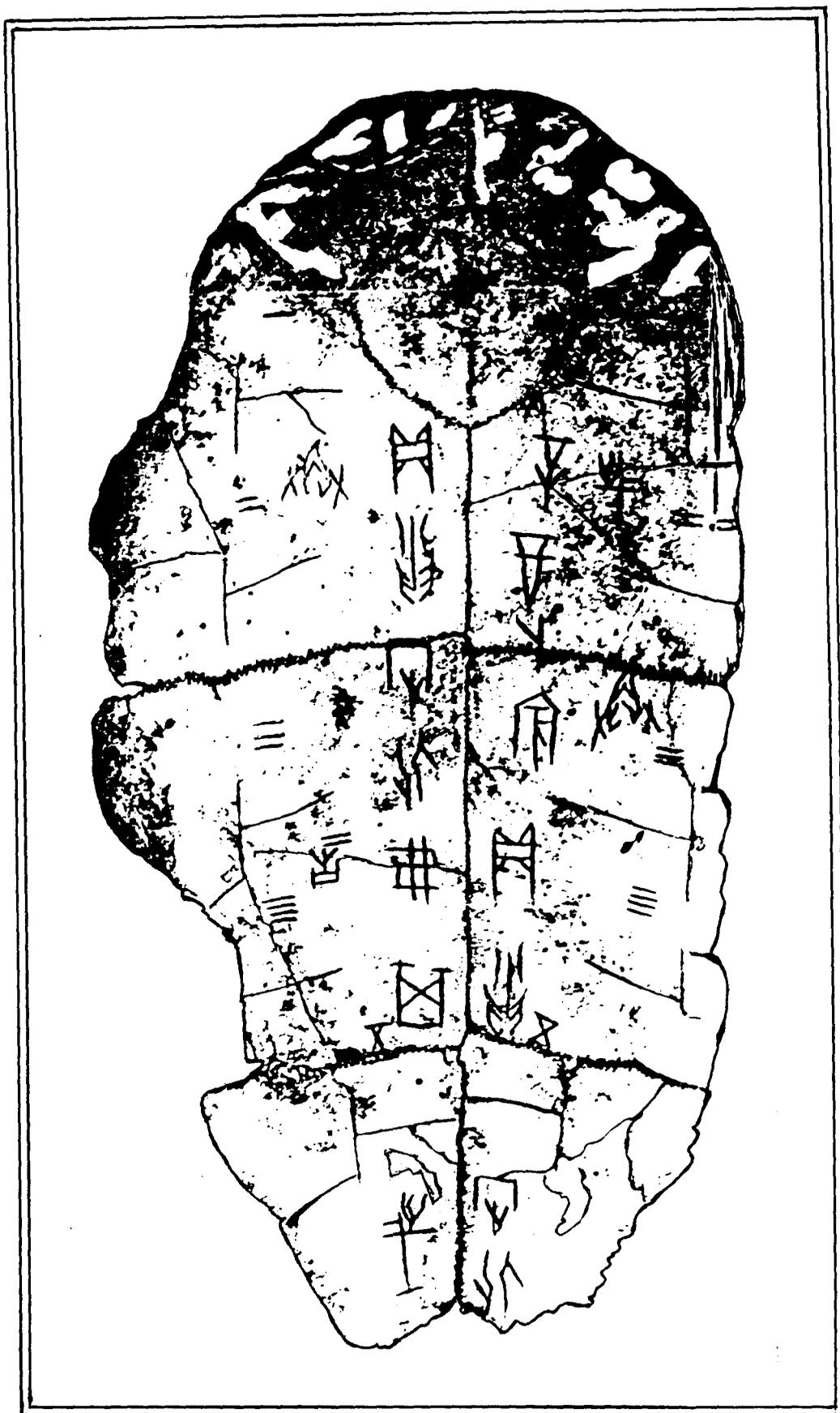
and the ink, in drying, formed a number of lines which the diviners professed to be able to interpret. Communication with the dead in this way was usually performed at an ancestral temple and guidance on different matters were asked (Fig.3). The Chinese were very keen to know their future. Small holes were made in the hard-shell of a tortoise (or the bone of a Cattle) and it was placed on fire. Being gradually heated the shell (or bone) cracked. These cracks were interpreted as answers to questions previously put. This method of knowing man's future, called "Oracle Bones", was a very popular method among the Chinese. These directives enabled them to embark on journeys or undertake warlike activities with greater mental strength than might otherwise have been the case (Clark, 1992). Keightley (1978) provides a beautiful account of oracle-bone inscriptions of Bronze Age China (Fig.4).

The *Chia-Ku-Wen* or shell and bone script (18th-12th century B.C.) is the earliest recorded Chinese calligraphy. These ideographs are engraved on the shoulder bones of large animals and on tortoise shells. Kings of Shang dynasty (18th-12th century B.C.) tried to solve their problems by consulting their ancestral souls and deities through divination and the sacred answers and directives were engraved on bones and on tortoise shells for perpetual preservation ( Needham, 1965 ). The twenty-four rim plates of the tortoise shell are correlated with the twenty-four agricultural divisions of the year (Camphausen, 1991).

#### **Turtle and Sexual Link**

The tortoise or *Gui* has several sexual association in Chinese erotic thoughts. Gulik (1961) states that there are number of metaphorical use of penis as turtle, dragon or snake in every Chinese conversation. He further notes that the Chinese until the Ming Dynasty used the turtle as artistic and literary symbol for longevity and vital forces but later the symbol acquired scatological connotation. The symbolism acts because of the obvious similarity between the head of this long-lived

Fig.3



Tortoise breastplates preceded yarrow stalks in I Ching divination. Cracks in this Shang dynasty shell were read by the oracle Bin, who inscribed on it his name and that of the inquirer, one Chu Hua, along with the date and the question. Chu Hua sought guidance on whether to harm an enemy, X. (Mysteries of the Unknown : Visions and Prophecies. Time-Life Books, 1988).



**Fig.4.** Chinese oracular inscription on the base of a tortoise shell dating from the Shang dynasty (Clark, 1994).

creature and the glans penis (Fig.5). Gulik (1961) quoted a passage from a Ming treatise on art of attaining longevity through coitus reservatus where the retraction of tortoise's head is used as a simile. The Chinese term for tortoise '*Gui*' is also used as a secret code for the phallus and in a word for "pimp" (*Wu gui* or 'black tortoise') and as a swear word that roughly equates to "father of a whore" (*gui-gong* or "tortoise master"). Palthe (1936) also denotes an interesting etymological link between terms used for glans penis and tortoise head : The ordinary Chinese word for glans is '*Yong Tho*' and the term *Kwee Tho* means both head of a tortoise and glans penis. Gwee (1968) states that in usual conversation there exists a tendency to refer to glans penis as tortoise head by the Chinese (Fig.6).

In the present day Chinese folktales the tortoise is depicted as a helpful, kind-hearted, clever animal. "The Tiger and the Tortoise" is one such popular tale found in Childrens' story book where the turtle survived the attack of a cunning tiger because of his intelligence and presence of mind (Fig.7).

**Fig.5 : Glans penis and the turtle head/neck symbolism**

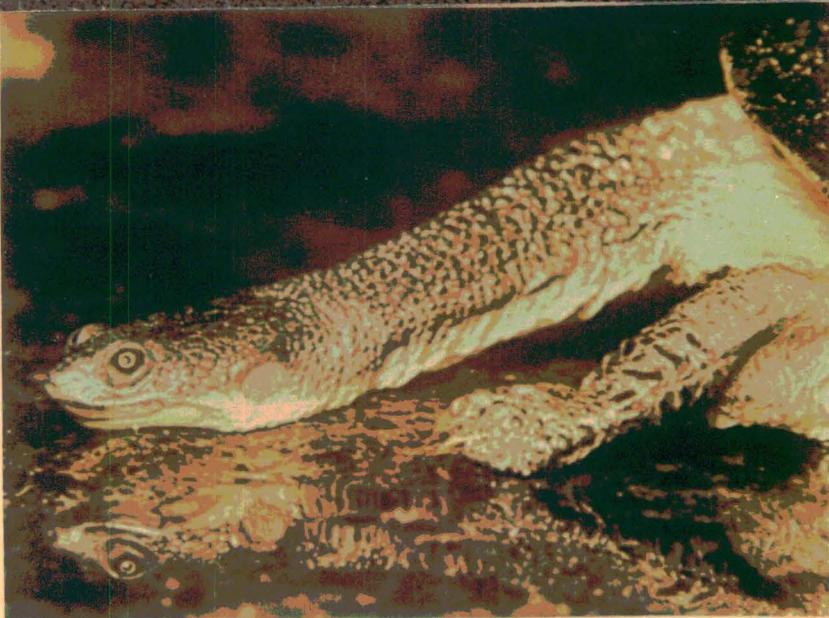
- A. *Ocadia sinensis***, a medium-sized turtle abundant in Taiwan, Hainan and the adjacent Chinese mainland (Pritchard, 1979).
  
- B. The Chinese soft-shelled turtle, *Trionyx sinensis*** (Pritchard, 1979).
  
- C. At full extension, the neck of *Chelodina longicollis*** (Pritchard, 1979).



A

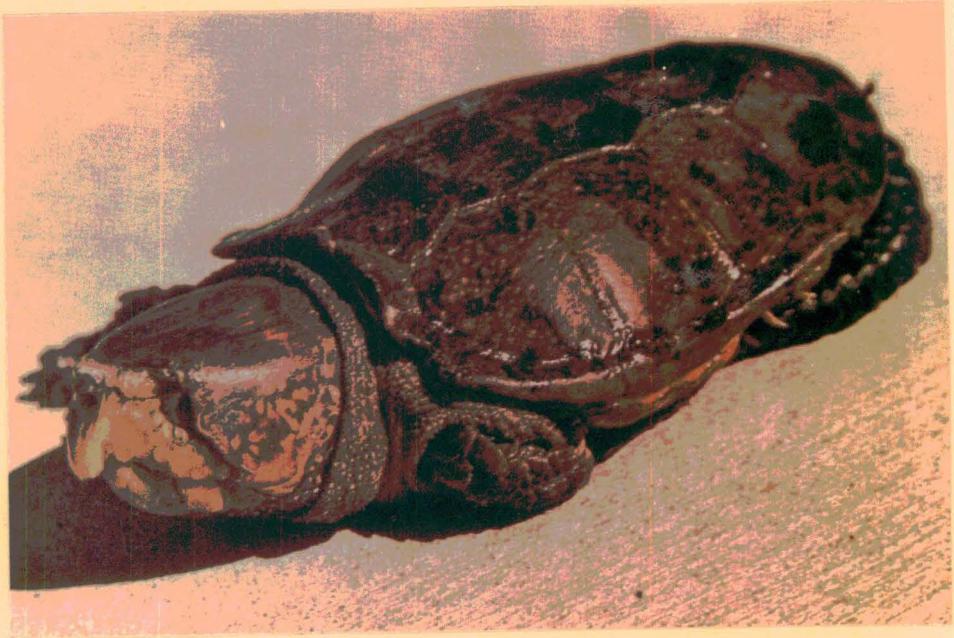


B



C

Fig.5



**Fig.6.** Chinese big-headed turtle, *Platysternon magacephallum* (Pritchard, 1979).

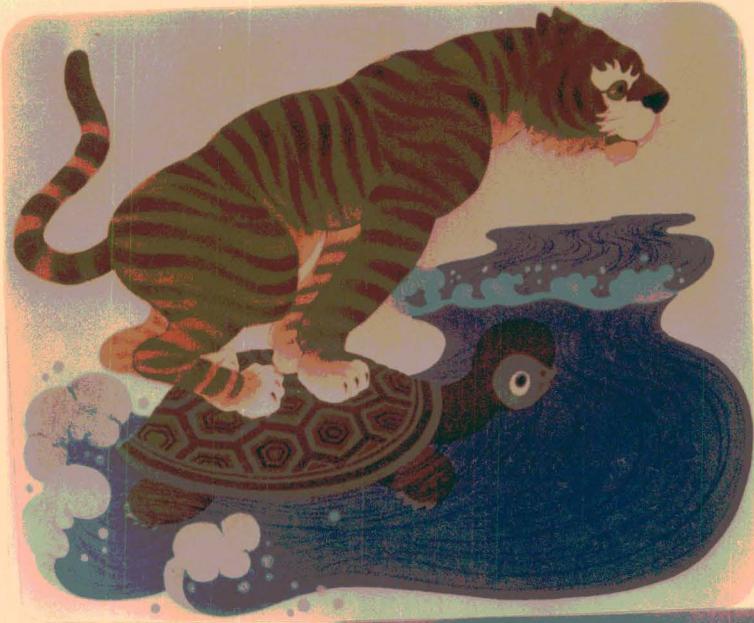


Fig.7 : The Tiger and the Tortoise

Note

1. The yin is depicted by the broken lines --, is the feminine principle. The yin is also the primaeval waters, the instinctive and intuitional nature, *contraction*, and *soft and paliable*, it is symbolized by all that is dark and belonging to humid principle, such as colour black, the earth, the valley, trees, nocturnal animals and creatures that live in the *waters or damp places* and by most flower (Cooper,1993). The above mentioned words in italics holds relevance to turtle head symbolism of Koro and also the nature of the morbidity (penile contraction) as well.
  
2. The eight complementary pairs of opposites are known as *Pa Kua*. The triagrams are placed in a circle, the circumference of which symbolizes time and space. Each triagram represents force in nature and there are four yin and four yang powers giving balance and harmony in the universe. (Cooper, 1993).

The following is a brief chart showing the meaning of each triagram. The broken lines are yin and the whole lines are yang. Each of the triagrams, interestingly symbolize one animal.

Triagrams	Name	Natural Object	Human Quality	Direction	Animal
	<i>K'ien</i>	Heaven, Sky	Father, Creative energy	South	Horse
	<i>Tui</i>	Collected Water, Cloud	Fertility, Pleasure impregnation	Sout-East	Goat
	<i>Li</i>	Fire, Sun, Heat	Zeal, Wisdom Consciousness	East	Pheasant
	<i>Chen</i>	Thunder,	Power, Will, Impulse	North-East	Dragon
	<i>Sun</i>	Wind	Mind, Intellect, Life, Spirit	South-East	Cock

Contd.

Triagrams	Name	Natural Object	Human Quality	Direction	Animal
☵	<i>K'an</i>	Water, Rain, Moon, River	Emotions, Instability	West	Pig
☶	<i>Kan</i>	Mountains, Physical Nature	Solitude, Resting	North-East	Dog
☷	<i>K'un</i>	Earth	Mother Nourishment, Law	North	Ox

TORTOISE : THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

The tortoise or turtle is a mythical animal and is intimately related with the creation myth in Hinduism. Four important tortoise links noted in the Hindu mythology are as follows.

1. Kasyapa or the "tortoise man" : He is the primordial sage who appears as North Star in the sky and is the first living creature and progenitor of the human race. He married thirteen daughters of the sage Daksha and thence created the living world. The daughters are : Aditi, Diti, Danu, Kastha, Aristha, Surasa, Ila, Muni, Krodhobasa, Tamra, Suravi, Sarama and Timi. Different classes of living creatures were born from these Great Mothers e.g. from Aditi the gods; from Diti the demons (Titans); from Danu the monsters; from Kastha the horse and other animals; from Aristha the heavenly musician (Gandharba); from Surasa the cannibal monsters (Rakhshasa); from Ila the plant kingdom; from Muni the celestial nymph (courtesan of heaven); from Krodhobasa the evil spirit; from Tamra the birds; from Suravi the cow, buffalo and the four-legged animals; from Sarama the wild animals and from Timi the fish and aquatic creatures. Though there are other versions of the Hindu creation myth, this account evidently shows the great procreative power of the 'tortoise sage' (Sarkar, 1990; Zimmer, 1962).

2. The Great God Vishnu is the son of this 'tortoise sage' and his wife Aditi. Vishnu is the preserver and maintainer of the established order of this creation. Vishnu is also the god of love and emotion. There is a canonical list of ten incarnations of Vishnu (*dashavatars*). The different forms or *avatars*, are translated as 'incarnations', which figuratively mean the special forms of god to help mankind at times of great need (Blurton, 1992).

The cult of Vishnu as a saviour god is interesting from the mytho-anthropological view point. The ten incarnations of Vishnu are : Matsya (Fish form); Kurma (Tortoise form); Varaha (Boar form); Narasingha (Half lion-half man form); Vamana (Dwarf form);

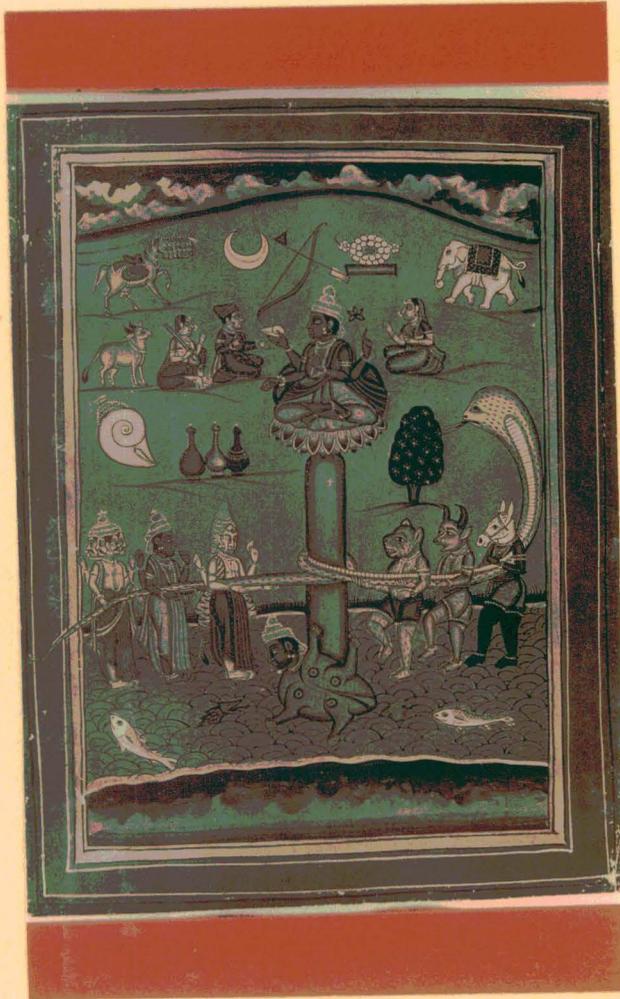
Parashuram (Aggressive form); Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki (human form with horse-head).

Though this is not the place for a detailed discussion on mytho-anthropological aspects of the various forms of incarnations, the most intriguing feature one may note about the association of animal forms from lower to higher class (fish, tortoise, boar, lion, horse) is indicative of the evolutionary perspective in the creation myth. The different forms have some socio-psychological symbolism too. The first four are animal or part-animal in form; the middle group is more epic and heroic in character while the last two emphasize the saviour qualities.

### **Kurma or Tortoise Incarnation of Vishnu**

The theme of Tortoise incarnation is related with the creation myth in which the goddess class overpowered the demon class by achieving immortality by drinking heavenly nectar or *Amrita*(Fig.1).

The legend describes the bringing forth of creation by churning the sea of milk or *khirod sagar*. This cosmic ocean was churned by using the sacred mountain *Mandar* as a churning pole. The snake *Vasuki* was used as a churning rope, coiled round the *Mandar* and was pulled to and fro by the gods on the tail side (left) and the demons on the mouth side (right) of the snake. After churning for one thousand years *Vasuki* emitted deadly poison by the action of which both gods and demons became sick. In order to prevent the poison causing universal destruction, Lord Shiva responded to their distress call and swallowed the poison, thus saving the creation. But Shiva did not allow it to enter his stomach but withheld it in his throat. The deadly poison burned his throat and permanently discoloured it to a blue hue which gave him the epithet *Nilkantha* (the blue-throated). Owing to continued churning the *Mandar* sank into the sea and went down to the nether world or hell (*patal*). The main difficulty was the nonavailability of a suitable fixed object upon which the rotating churning-pole could be fixed because such a platform must have immense power to withstand the vigorous force of this churning.



**Fig.1 :** Painting of the Churning of the Ocean of milk. Vishnu appears here at the base of the cosmic churning pole as a Giant Tortoise Kurma (Blurton, 1992).

At this point Lord Vishnu took the Tortoise incarnation or the **Kurma** (*Giant Tortoise*) form to provide this mighty platform where- by the churning pole was set on his stable back, powered with a divine unbreakable strength. In this form Vishnu assumes the role of cosmic foundation, upon which all things securely rest and without which the world would lack stability.

So the most interesting theme inherent in this Kurma trans- formation is the *sankochan* (contraction) or concentration of great power and strength inside the turtle body<sup>1</sup>. Thus here Kurma symbo- lizes heavenly power in a contracted form having immense stress tolerance capacity even underwater and saviour-quality. Tortoise, as an avatar of Vishnu also symbolizes the power of water and that of the great preserver. The lower shell is the terrestrial world and the upper celestial (Cooper, 1993).

The gifts of churning are also important from the perspec- tive of creation myth. These are : the great physician of the gods (*Dhanwantari*)<sup>2</sup>; numerous courtesans (*Apsaras*): *Baruni*, the daugh- ter of mighty water-god Barun; the white horse (*Uchchaishraba*); the elephant king (*Airabat*), the dazzling emerald (*Kaustava*); the goddess of prosperity (*Lakshmi*) and lastly the nectar (*Amrita*). A fierce battle was set between the gods and demons for the nectar and ultimately Vishnu, disguised as a fascinating woman, took away the pot of nectar.

3. In traditional Indian cartography the tortoise is depicted as the base upon which the world is placed. The tortoise supports the elephant on whose back the world rests, the elephant being male and the tortoise female, representing the two creative powers (Cooper, 1993).

4. Chakraborty and Bag (1989) traced another interesting mythi- cal link of tortoise transformation of a god, viz. Lord Shiva in connection with the genesis of the land of Assam (from where Indian Koro epidemic began). They state :

"Assam is known as the land of the Lord Shiva (who is worshipped mainly as the Phallus) : the story goes that the union of Shiva with his consort shook the earth so much that it was about to disintegrate. Hearing the urgent plea of the earthlings Shiva contracted himself into a tortoise and that is the land of Assam. The tortoise is a revered animal there..." (p.147).

### **Turtle Symbolism in Indian Erotic Classics**

There are a number of Indian erotic classics where various symbolisms are drawn from nature (flower, climber, scent, etc.) and animals including the tortoise in the context of love-making, especially the different coital positions. The list of such classics include the love teachings of Kama-Sutra (written by Mallanaga Vatsayana sometime between 2nd-5th century A.D.); the love text of Ananga Ranga (written by a poet Kalyana Malla, probably in the 16th century); a love text Panchasayaka or The Five Arrows (composed early in the 14th century by Jyotirishvara Kavishekhara); a love text with tantrik influence Ratiratnapradipika (composed by Maharaja Prandha Devaraya of Vijayanagara who ruled from 1422 to 1466 A.D.); Saaradipika, a love text composed by a man well-versed in erotic wisdom Sri Minanath between 13th-15th centuries and Srngararasaprabandhadipika or 'The Light of Love' of uncertain date by Harihara who lists 64 coital postures.

There are at least 15 love positions named after animals like tortoise, cobra, crab, fish, conch, cat, dog, ass, cow, deer, mare, elephant, monkey, crow, peacock and are found in the above mentioned texts. The following is a brief account of the tortoise position quoted from the English translation of Kama Sutra by Sinha (1988).

### **Kaurma or Tortoise Love Position**

- 1 "Each of you with arms and legs extended in the full *Kaurmasana*, she below, you above, lips, arms and thighs meeting, hands joined : this is *Kaurma* (The Tortoise)."

- Ratiratnapradipika.

*Kaurmasana* is the name of a yoga posture because of its resemblance to a tortoise with tucked-in head and limbs. This special position offers a transcendental experience as has been described in Bhagavad Gita : 'When, again as a tortoise draws its limbs in on all sides, he withdraws his senses from the object of senses, and then his understanding is well-poised' (Sinha, 1988).

2. "Seated, mouth to mouth,  
arms against arms, thighs pressed to thighs :  
this is *Kaurma* (the tortoise)" .

- Ananga Ranga

3. "If, seated face to face,  
your toes caress the lovely woman's nipples  
her feet press your chest  
and you make love holding each other's hands  
it is *Kaurma* (the Tortoise)"

- Srngararasaprabandhadipika.

### **Turtle Worship :**

Chakraborty and Bag (1989) mentions that the tortoise is regarded by many cultural groups, especially of North Bengal region and Assam as a sacred animal and so worshiped. Some interesting observations in this context were made by Annadale and Shastri (1914) in the early part of this century. They state that :

"The practice of keeping tortoises living in shrines as sacred animals is probably one of wide distribution in the East and is not now confined to any race or cult". (p.131).

Annadale (Annandale & Shastri, 1914) noted mud-turtle (of the genus *Trionyx*) worship in shrines of Hindus (at Puri), Muslims (Chittagong, now in Bangladesh) and Buddhists (Arrakan Pagoda at Mandalay, Upper Burma, now Myanmar). At each place the sacred animals were connected with some legend and a definite construct of symbolism was noted. The author described the worship

of Indo-Gangetic Mud-Turtles (*Trionyx gangeticus*) of Puri as follows:

"The large bathing-tank in which these animals are kept is attached to small Vishnuite shrine ... The tank covers an area of perhaps half an acre and is surrounded by stone steps... The Brahmins attached to the shrines are in the habit of inviting pilgrims and other visitors to feed the turtles with sweet meats made of parched rice and palm-sugar. To attract them these men, ..., call out repeatedly standing on the steps round the tank, 'Gopal, ao! Gopal ao !' (p.132 ).

Brahmins believe that once upon a time there was a man called Gopal, who annoyed the Lord Jagannath by his utter laziness. The god therefore cursed him and turned him into a tortoise and made him carry bricks or stones on his back.

The mud-turtles at the Mahomedan shrine of Sultan Bayazid of Bastam of Chittagong are also regarded sacred by local muslims. A saint of Bastam or Bistam, a town in Persia, is said to have visited Chittagong for devotional exercise. His mausoleum is situated some five miles out of Chittagong town and there is a tank close by which is full of turtles locally known as Madaris. The local people will neither kill them nor permit them to be killed. They believe either the turtles are in some way connected with the saint or these were once sinful men whom the saint metamorphozed into turtles as punishment for their wrong doings.

The present author also noted a big tank (sarobar) adjacent to the legendary temple of Mother Gomateswari in Udaypur, Tripura, full of sacred turtles and big fishes. In ancient times humans were sacrificed along with 100 buffaloes every new-moon night before the live diety. Now one buffalow is instead sacrificed with dozens of goat. Turtles are not permitted to be caught or killed and people regularly feed the turtles. The local priest said that some of the turtles are about 120 years old.

Shastri (Annandale & Shastri, 1914) provided a beautiful account of mud-turtle worship and iconography of northern India.

He cited examples of turtle worship with different symbolisms as practised in religious rituals or in socio-cultural customs. Following is a brief account from his narrative :

1. "Altars (*Vedi*) raised for Vedic sacrifices are generally built on bricks of various shapes, sizes and forms; but when the ground is prepared for building an altar, they make a rather deep depression at the centre of the area covered by the altar. In that depression they put a mud-turtle and give it food to last till the end of the sacrifice and the destruction of the altar. If the turtle is alive, the sacrifice is regarded as auspicious; if it dies, inauspicious'.
2. 'In chapter LXIV of *Vrihat Samhita* of Varaha Mihir (a Sanskrit encyclopaedia of the 6th century A.D.) kings are enjoined to rear up tortoises and turtles with the following auspicious signs :- The colour should be either like that of a crystal or silver variegated with lines of blue. The shape should be like that of a water jar; with a beautiful bridge at its back; or it may be of the rosy colour like that of the morning sun with spots (most likely black) like mustard.

If such a tortoise is kept in the house it increases the greatness of the King. The tortoise which has a body black like eye-point or like the bee, variegated with spots, which has no defective limbs, and whose head is like that of serpent and the throat thick; increases the prosperity of the empire" (p.135).

3. Tortoise as icon of Lord Dharma : In Dharmapuja (worship of Dharma) the tortoise plays an important part. Buddhism has a role in the development of the icon of Dharma as a tortoise.

"In some of the Dharma temples the figure of the deity is exactly like that of a tortoise and he is often represented in Bengali Mantras, with which he is worshipped, as *Kurmarupi* or *Kacchapakara*. ... Dharma is the second member of the Buddhist Triad, but Dharma is always represented as stupa or mound. ... A stupa with five niches would look like a tortoise with four legs

and the head. There is a small stupa of the kind in the Indian Museum . The worshippers of Dharma I believe associated the five-niched stupa with some totemistic form of tortoise-worship and now as they have forgotten that they are Buddhists, they worship the tortoise-shaped diety Kurmarupi Bhagavan" (Lord in tortoise form).

Chitra-indica, is a colourful species of tortoise (Fig.2) which is only known from the Ganges, the Indus and the Irrawadi-river system of south Asia (Annandale & Shastri, 1914). The people of the Ganges valley are able to identify different species of mud-turtle found in river and ponds because most are used as food while some are highly esteemed as sacred type and is regarded by many in northern India as the "vehicle" of the goddess of the Jamuna river, like the crocodile being the "vehicle" of Mother Ganges.

Chitra Indica was probably regarded in the past as a highly reverend totem or the ancestral god of some particular clan or tribe. These mud turtles were thought to have great strength and power and to have attacked boats with blows.

Chowdhury (1912) described various food taboos concerning turtle meat. As regards tortoise meat, some species are considered clean while others unclean. The meat of *Dundi* species, for example, is allowable even for Brahmins. *Sundi*, a small land tortoise, is also eaten by higher classes. *Keto* (that is "wooden") is another species the meat of which is allowable. But the big tortoises, all called *Barkole*, are never used as food except by the lower classes. It is interesting to note in this context that the King Asok (273-232 B.C.) in one of his inscription prohibited the use of Dudi's meat, that is the meat of *Dudr* or *Dhoor* tortoise.

Ancient physicians of India were of the opinion that the meat of tortoise had good effects on the body (Basu, 1988). Turtle meat was believed to increase the sperm number, reduce wind and distension, increase intelligence and memory, increase physical strength and was good for the eye. Its skin was thought to be



**Fig.2** : *Chitra indica*, the narrow-headed gigantic species from northern India, Thailand and Malaysia (Pritchard, 1979).

helpful in bile disorder, its feet helped expectoration and the eggs increased the sperm number.

In the present context of turtle symbolism regarding genital retraction in Koro, one traditional use of turtle neck as folk medicine in India is noteworthy. The neck of the turtle is used in many parts for the treatment of a prolapsed rectum or uterus. The meat is eaten but the neck is hung up to dry, powdered and applied on the prolapsed organ which is then pushed inward again (Shankar, 1991).

Mundari Kols of India regard tortoise as a sacred animal linked with the world creation and worship them (Crooke, 1896). Though there is no definite turtle culture observed in any traditional groups of India, its significance varies in different parts of the country, e.g. small tortoises are regarded as a holy symbol in south India and many people keep these as pets in wells (Murthy, 1991), while in some areas of north India the animal is considered to be a bad omen and even uttering its name before any good work or journey is forbidden. In some tribal groups, e.g. Santals and Rabhas of West Bengal tortoise is a totem animal.

In Indian folk-tales and moral stories tortoise is depicted as both a steady, wise and humble creature and a foolish one. The popular stories thus run like "The Hare and the Tortoise" where the tortoise because of his determination and patience defeated the hare in running competition (Fig.3) in contrast to "The Tortoise and the Swans" where the tortoise died because of his foolishness and quarrelsome character (Fig.4).

#### NOTE

1. The biological character of the tortoise, specially its, 'encased' long life and remarkable survival power in the face of extreme odds, is the reason why it is regarded as the reservoir of cosmic energy in contracted/concentrated form. This concept of *sankoch* or contractile capacity plays a role in context of 'wrapping of the soul' in Kundalini yoga of Hindu Tantra. In different pictorial representations of Kundalini, the emblem of micro-

# HARE AND TORTOISE



Fig.3

# THE TORTOISE AND THE SWANS

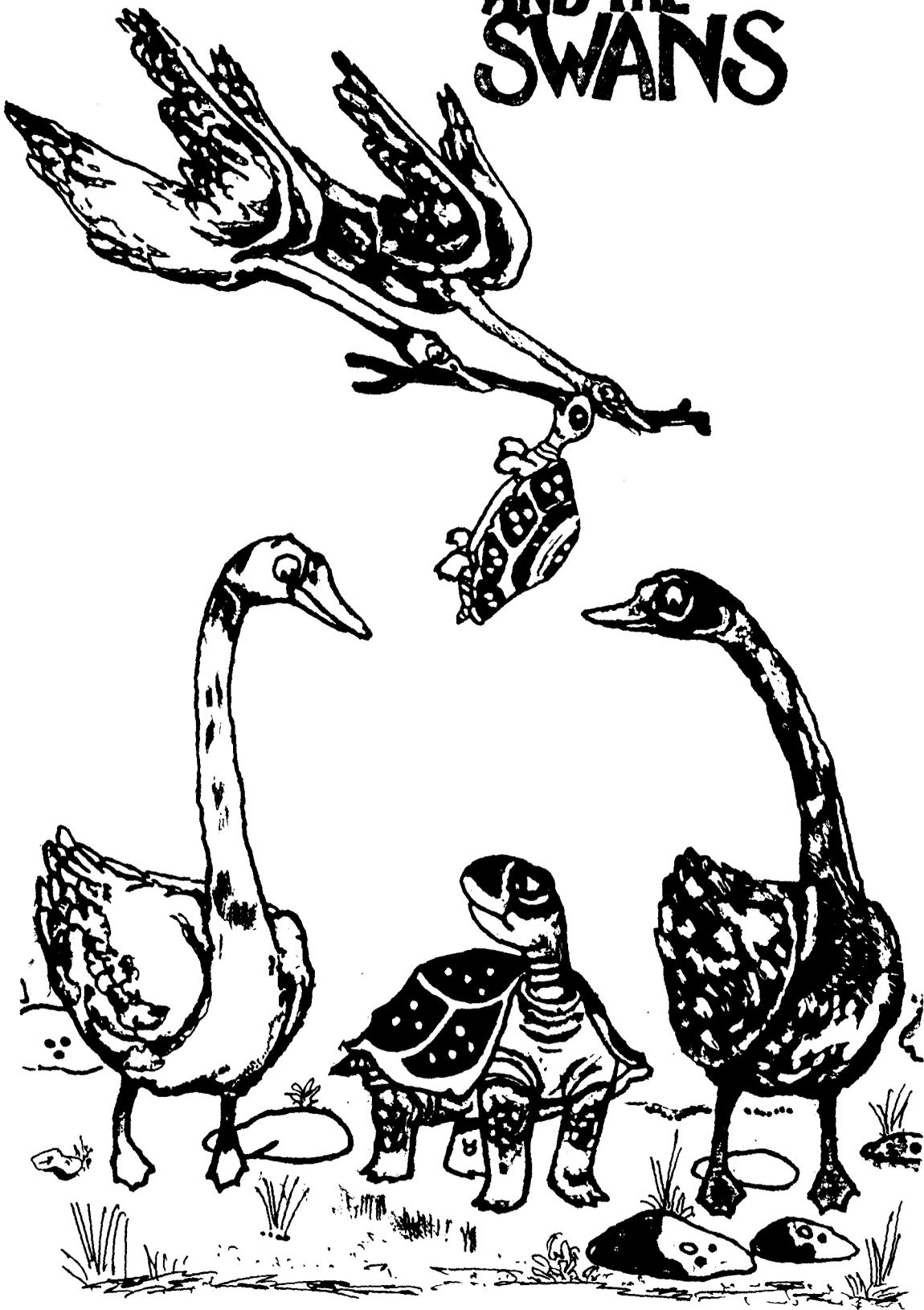


Fig.4

cosmic energy, is depicted as a many-headed serpent emanating from a tortoise, e.g. in Kangra paintings of 18th century (picture at page 131, Mookherjee & Khanna, 1989) and Rajasthani paintings of 19th century (picture at page 100, Camphausen, 1991). The tortoise is also drawn in the representation of *Chakras* or psychic centres in the etheric body of a yogi, in Rajasthani paintings of 18th century (picture at page 67, Mukherjee & Khanna, 1989).

2. It is interesting to note that probably of this mythical connection between the great physician Dhanwantari and the churning of the sea, the National Academy of Medical Sciences of India, depicts this theme in its emblem (Fig.5).



**NAMS**

**Fig.5 :** Emblem of National Academy of Medical Sciences of India.



KORO AND THE FOX CONNECTION

## KORO AND THE FOX CONNECTION

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### SUMMARY

Beside the tortoise, the fox is another animal which is connected with the traditional belief of genital loss (or shrinkage) in China (Tseng et al., 1988; Jilek, 1986). It is believed that ghosts of the dead have no penis or yang element, which is why they cannot return to the material world in human form. So the ghost, disguised either as a *hu-li-jing* or female ghost fox or as a beautiful lady, would come to collect penises (of males) or breasts (of females) for this purpose. This Koro imagery has a long mytho-cultural history and is variously depicted in different Sino-Japanese folktales (Prince, 1992). A brief account of this fox myth is presented here.

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The fox has enjoyed utmost popularity as a character in the fables of many cultures of the world. Usually the fox is taken as a symbol of shyness, hypocrisy and cunning except in China, Japan and among the Eskimos. It was once believed in Wales and Germany that witches may assume the form of a fox, hence foxes were sometimes burned in midsummer fires (Waida, 1987b).

In the mythology of the North American Indians, specially among the California Indians, the fox plays a prominent role as a trickster in folk tales. The fox there, sometimes appears as a female animal and deceives human companions, Waida (1987b) provides one such description as follows :

"A poor man, living alone, comes home at night to  
find his house in order and his dinner on the fire,  
He discovers that every morning a vixen comes to

his hut., sheds her skin, and becomes a woman. Having stolen the skin, he makes her his wife. They live in happiness for many years until she discovers the skin, puts it on, and runs away. This scenario of the "mysterious housekeeper" is also found among the Inuit (Eskimos) in Greenland and Labrador as well as among the Koriak of northeastern Siberia" (p. 406).

The theme of 'female searching' is also evident in the mythology concerning the fox among the Dogan people of Mali. Amma is the supreme god of the Dogans. Amma created a twin from a primordial egg. Yurugu (or Ogo) was the male of the twin, who was impatient for the female counterpart and broke through the placenta. The torn piece of placenta ultimately became the earth. Amma transformed Yurugu into an animal, known as the "pale fox", who wandered about the earth looking for his female counterpart. (Thayer, 1987).

Among the Chinese the fox is a symbol of longevity, craftiness, power of transformation and ghosts of dead souls. In China and among the Eskimos the fox is a were-animal who appears in the shape of a beautiful woman and reduces the males (Prince, 1992; Rink, 1866). Waida (1987b) provides a beautiful account of this female transformation of the fox :

"Chinese folklore is rich in the motif of the fox who transforms itself into an attractive woman and seduces young men. Foxes are capable of this transformation through the study of Chinese classics or through erotic tricks. Foxes who study the classics acquire first the power to become humans, then immortals, and finally gods. In many stories, young foxes are depicted as sitting in a circle, listening to an old white fox at the center expounding the classics. Foxes can assume human form, if at first only briefly, through the absorption and accumulation

of *semen virile* of a male sex partner; by seducing humans, usually young men, foxes steal life essence and add it to their own. For example, an ambitious young man who has retired to a deserted cottage or temple to prepare for the state examinations is visited at dusk by a beautiful young woman who becomes his mistress. Her erotic skill is such that he becomes exhausted and dies. Fox-women sometimes sincerely love their human paramours and help them with their studies, but they seldom return the life essence they have stolen. Occasionally, the parents or friends become aware of the situation in time and call in either a shaman or a Taoist specially trained in fox exorcism and drive her away" (p. 406).

Gulik (1961) provides a very elegant analysis of fox-spirit theme of the Taoist philosophy in China. The Taoist teaching believes that the 'cosmic vital essence' of the earth is stored at its centre and the creatures who live in underground holes and caves (eg. foxes or badgers) or are aquatic (tortoise) obviously remain close to this essence. As a result of high accumulation of this cosmic energy they enjoy not only long lives but supernatural power also. The fox is regarded as an incubus since the period of the T'ang dynasty (618-906 A.D.). Gulik (1961) cites an excellent account of the mystic power of the fox from an author of that period :

"When a fox is fifty years old, it assumes the ability to change itself into a woman. At a hundred it can assume the shape of a beautiful girl, or that of a sorcerer, or also that of an adult man who has sexual intercourse with women. At that age a fox knows what is happening at a distance of one thousand miles, it can derange the human mind and reduce a person to an imbecile. When the fox is one thousand years old, it is in communication with

Heaven, and is then calleed Heavenly Fox (t'ien-hu)"  
(p. 210).

There are numerous folklores of the T'ang period where female foxes enter the dead bodies of young girls in grave-yards to reduce or play tricks on men. Gulik (1961) states one such theme from a poem of a T'ang poet :

"When a fox spirit has grown old, in a deserted grave,  
It will transform itself into a woman of winning mien  
Its hair becomes a chignon, its snout a powdered face,  
Its long tail changes into a trailing crimson robe .  
Then, walking slowly, she'll haunt the lonely village roads  
And towards nightfall, selecting a secluded place,  
She'll sing and dance, and alternatively sadly cry,  
Not raising her curved eyebrows, her pretty face kept low.  
When then she suddenly smiles, what joy does that convey !  
There's hardly a man who is not then beguiled by her.." (p. 211)

Folk belief in the fox is still alive in Japan; the fox is considered to be the most skilful of animals in transforming itself into human form, often female (Waida, 1987b). Japanese people regard the fox as a symbol of longevity, magic power for good or evil; and respect it as the messenger of the rice god Inari. Fox-fire is the *ignes fatui*. A black fox stands for good fortune; a white fox for calamity and three foxes indicate disaster (Cooper, 1993).

The *Inari* is the Japanese beneficent rice goddess *Uka no Mitama* of the Shinto religion. *Kami* is the most fundamental religious concept of the indigenous Shinto folk religion and Inari is one of the most important *Kami*, whose shrines are found everywhere, even in modern urban settings of Japan. Mythologically, Inari is associated with the concept of other *Kamis* like Ugatama, the female *Kami* of food and clothing; Sarutahiko, the monkey *Kami* known for fecundity and Ame no Uzume, the goddess, who, by exposing her genitals in an ecstatic dance, wielded the feminine

*Kami* power to bring back the life-giving sun to a darkened and dying world (Miller, 1987). These popular religious elements make the goddess Inari profoundly sacred and these shrines are places where farmers go to pray for abundant crops, for aid in contraception and childbirth. The most famous Inari of present-day Japan is at Fushimi in the city of Kyoto.

Almost in all Inari shrines there are statues of a pair of foxes flanking the main place of worship. Influence of the Chinese folk-myth of foxes is said to be the cause of these, which Miller (1987) describes as :

"These foxes, now popularly understood to be the messengers of the rice god, or sometimes even identified with the god .... were probably derived from popular Chinese lore concerning fox spirits. Certainly there exists in Chinese a large body of folktales depicting the dangers of fox spirits, who usually take the form of a beautiful woman in order to seduce and ruin unsuspecting or weak-willed man. That these tales also have become naturalized in Japan discloses a much more general pattern of a popular acceptance of Chinese cultural and religious elements; it also suggests the association of the fox as a symbol of sexual desire and Inari as a deity of fecundity and plenty" (p. 539) .

The fox is the hero of a number of Japanese tales (Globus, 1867). It is regarded there as a divine creature with mystic power and human intelligence. In certain areas of Japan families are identified for their ownership of foxes and others refuse to intermarry with them on the ground that they possess supposedly magical powers (Chamberlain, 1992). Foxes are held to possess people who have damaged the fields etc. of their owners and certain families are said to own foxes which enter the bodies of offenders and cause them to blurt out their crimes ( Thomas, 1964).

Yonebayashi (1964) provides a masterful account of the Japanese folk belief in fox spirit and mental illness, often in epidemic form ! Possession of foxes or *Kitsunetsuki* is one such culture-bound illness common in certain rural areas of Japan :

"Beliefs that evil spirits in the form of a fox (*Kitsune*), dog or snake attach themselves to human beings are widespread in rural areas of Japan. One such area is Izumo, famous in Shinto legends. Possession by foxes (*Kitsunetsuki*) is especially common. If a person feels possessed by one of these animals his personality changes, he may become mentally deranged, and often his face resembles the animal by which he feels possessed. The belief is held that certain families (*Kitsunemochi* families) have a sinister association with tiny evil foxes, usually invisible but sometimes visible, which may attach themselves to others and cause in them the mental disorder of *Kitsunetsuki*. These families are regarded with dread; they are ostracized by the village communities" (p. 95-96).

The most fascinating aspect of *Kitsunetsuki* is its mass response and psychic infectivity. The community identifies families with high and low risk on the basis of their domicile (migration) and economic status (rapid accumulation of wealth) as 'Kon families' who are more prone to fox possession and less prone families or 'Asagi families'. There is a widespread belief in "Kitsunemochi", i.e. families hereditarily possessed by foxes without any overt mental symptoms. The psychiatric aspect along with its epidemic potential is nicely describes by Yonebayshi (1964) as follows:

"The belief in *Kitsunetsuki* also creates a psychiatric problem. It is believed that a person who comes into contact with a member of a *Kitsunemochi* family runs the risk of being afflicted by the magical foxes. Some people are more susceptible to such "infection" than others. For highly susceptible

persons it may be sufficient to pass the gate of a possessed family to become possessed. It would be inconceivable for the son of a white or non-possessed family to marry the daughter of a possessed family (Non-possessed families are called Shiro or white). As stated before, possessed by a fox a person becomes mentally deranged. He may consider himself as a fox" (p. 96-97).

The popular folk treatment for this malady is the prayer in the Shinto shrine where a Shinto priest (Kannushi or Guji) prays to the god for exorcism of the patient from the animal and brushes off the evil spirit from the body of the patient by his sacred sweeper (Gohei). The predominant cultural construct operating in the background is the traditional belief in "soul replacement", i.e. the intrusion of an outside agent (possession by ancestors, gods or animals) into the self (Wittkower & Rin, 1965). It is pertinent to mention at this point that the popular Chinese legend also says that a trickster fox posing as a respected citizen may remain in the society without anyone ever seeing his fox form (Carse, 1987).

Davis (1980) discusses at length the Japanese folklores concerning the fox and fox-spirits. The Japanese fox myth considers it to be a yin creature. The ordinary earthly fox or *Kitsuni* may change to a fully celestial fox or *tengu* if it collects adequate supply of yang or male principle. Prince (1992) cites examples of this belief in Japanese folktales of fox-women :

"This beliefs serves as the basis for many tales in which a young man unexpectedly encounters a beautiful maiden who seduces him to follow her to a distant place where they marry, have children and prosper. The fox-maiden's sorcery renders her lover forever incapable of loving another woman. In due course the fox-maiden resumes her vulpine shape and disappears. The abandoned husband recovers from

his spell to find himself totally bereft; he may come to himself while eating dead leaves and walking on all fours like an animal or awaken in an open grave or sitting in a cemetery; he realizes that his wife, children, wealth, his world have all been chimerical" (p.127).

Fister (1985) also describes a Japanese fox lore which states that at the age of 500 years the fox will change colour from red to white and at 1000 years it will disappear from the earth permanently, though it may reappear to wreak havoc in the form of natural calamity such as thunder and lightning. It is interesting to note at this point that the Koro affected area of Hainan island (China) is known as Leizhou (Tseng et al., 1988) which means the "thunder region". Prince (1982) draws an interesting folk-social link of this finding :

"...the name "Leizhou" as meaning "thunder region" finds explanation; we now understand that heavenly foxes may return to earth as thunder and lightning and therefore that this peninsula is an area of high density of fox spirits intent upon seizing as much male sexual energy as possible from the population . That several girls thought to be fox maidens were killed during the epidemic also becomes intelligible" (p.128).

Prince (1992) in this context refers to a collection of Japanese art print on fox lore by Addiss (1985). One such print "Fox in a Thunder Storm" (Page 154) shows "violent lightning flashes emanating from a dark cloud from which a pale faced fox looks down upon the landscape; in the foreground two figures huddle under umbrellas amid a violent rain storm" (p.130).

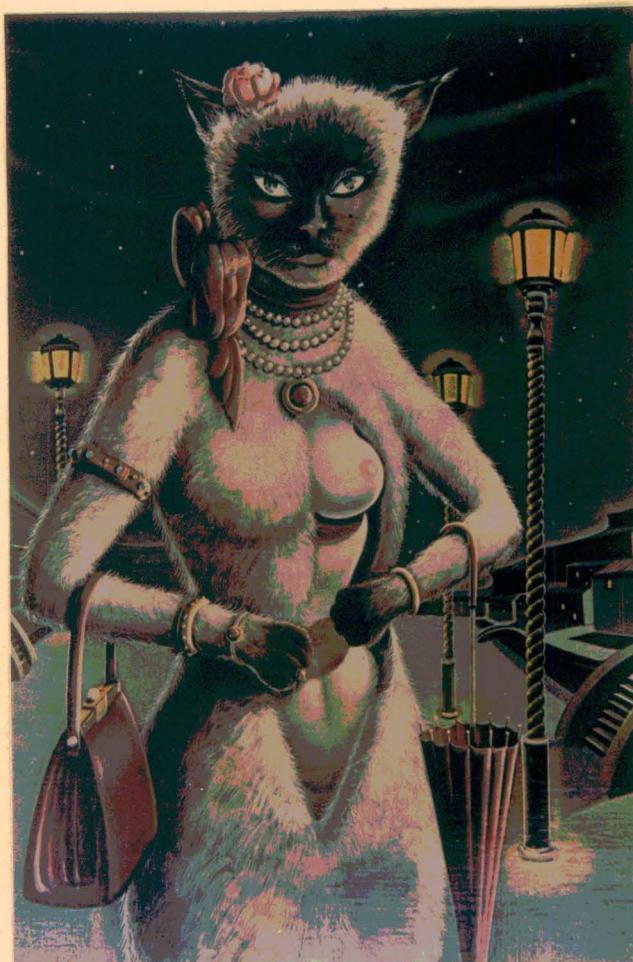
Prince (1992) also mentions another such Japanese art print, included in the Addiss (1985) collection, is 'The Fox Woman Leaving Her Child" (p.126) which shows "a mother leaving her house with her child anxiously gripping the trailing edge of her gown;

beside the door through a screen it is clear that the mother has been transformed into a fox in that her head and arm seen through the screen is the head and paw of a fox" (p.130).

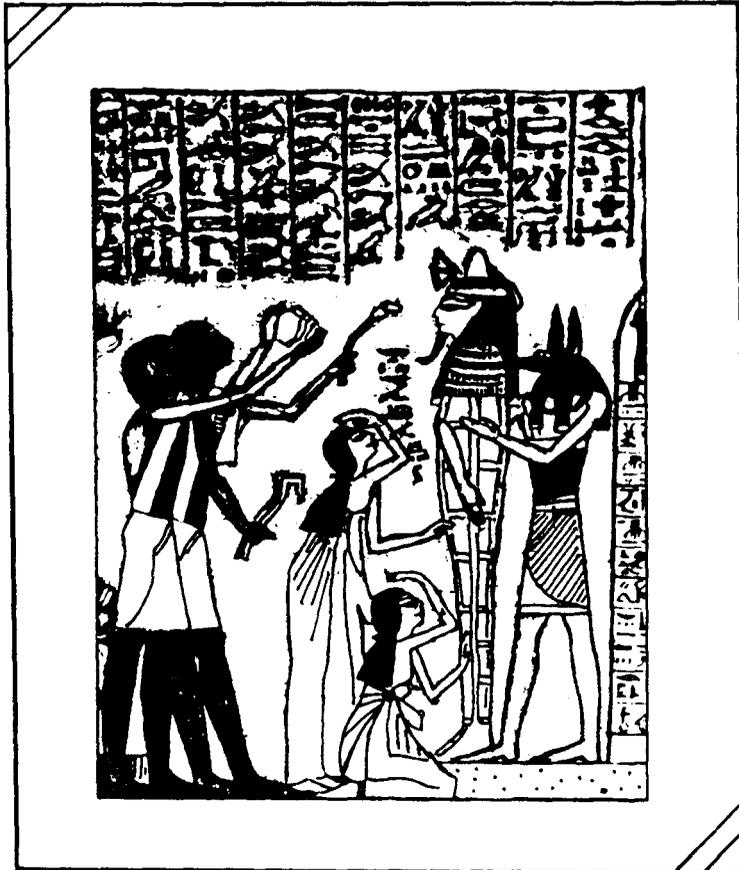
This description reminds one of the imagery of 'Cat Women' drawn by Albert-Reiss titled 'Rencontre la Nuit' (Encounter at Night) (Fig.1). In fact, on the Gold Coast, the cat is perceived as a good omen and it is believed that the souls of the dead pass into cats (Bosman, 1700; Muller, 1673) since many centuries.

The fox is related with many social customs and mythical beliefs in various cultural groups of the world. In Scandinavia according to the finish mythology, the aurora borealis is known as the "light of the fox". In Europe it is one of the forms in which the corn-spirit appears (Frazer, 1950). A fox tabu is found at Inishkea (Thomas, 1964). Among the Buriats, a Mongolian group of inner Asia, the fox is known as a guide to the land of the dead. The legend says that when the hero Mumonto lifts up a large black stone and shouts "Come here" a fox appears in the opening under the big stone and replies, "Hold fast to my tail" (Waida, 1987b).

The jackal, a variant of the fox, similarly represents various symbolisms and myths. In Egyptian mythology the jackal-headed (black) god Anubis (Fig.2) guides the soul from this world to the next after death. In India, the Santals (a tribe) have a rich folklore on the jackal or *Toyo*. The jackal is described as having a human voice, possessing great supernatural powers granted by the Sun god (*Chando*) and the Moon god (*Ninda Chando*), the supreme deities of the local faith. The jackal has been depicted both as a benevolent (protective, pleader and judge like; wise and helping) and malevolent (wicked, cunning) creature (Fig.3). The wisdom of the jackal in rendering judgement on human disputes is a popular theme of many Santal folktales like *Toyo bica* ("The Judgement of the Jackal") and *Toyoreakkhisa* ("The Astuteness of the Jackal"). A widely used Santal proverb on wisdom refers to the "wit of seven jackals". There are many Santal rituals concerning the jackal. For example, if a jackal crosses the road



**Fig.1 :** This late night fantasy painted by Albert Reiss, "Rencontre, la Nuit" (Encounter at Night) showing a surprise encounter with a cat woman as she is shedding her outer skin. This theme is also used in some Japanese folk paintings, in which cats are shown transforming themselves into women (Smith, 1974).



**Fig.2.** Anubis, the jackal-headed Egyptian god, taking the soul of the mummified body to escort the soul to the Underworld (Cooper, 1993).



Fig.3. Jackals are in different human functions.

from left to right, it is a bad omen for the viewer (Bodding, 1990). This custom reminds one of a similar ritual involving turtles observed in the Indonesian culture (Jilek, 1986).



## ANIMALS WITH EROTIC SYMBOLISM : A BRIEF TRANSCULTURAL ACCOUNT

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Animals have varied symbolic meaning in different cultures from the dawn of human civilization. Usually animals, in a collective sense, depicts instinctual life, fertility and power - both good and bad. The most common theme of semblance of animals is the worship of universal power which the gods have revealed in the various forms of living creature. Among the Maoris, animals are the ancestral people. A Mother Goddess is usually the Lady of the Beasts. Lord Siva in his aspect of *Pasupati* is the Lord of the Beasts and the Egyptian mythology depicts various animal-linked gods and goddess like Horus (with hawk head). Anubis (jackal headed) and Khnemu (ram headed) etc.

Animals depict power, both physical and sexual and thus different symbolic use of animals in varied instinctual and emotional urges is a common theme from time immemorial. Animal cult occupies a major portion of world folklores, mythology and totemistic rituals and taboos which is obviously beyond the scope of present discussion. The following brief note will discuss some common animal symbolism in relation to sexuality and procreative power and thus attempts to see that like tortoise, few other animals are also used as the symbolic representation of erotic acts and sexual power.

**ASS** : Ass symbolizes humility, patience, stupidity and fertility. An ass's head is regarded as a source of fertility (Cooper, 1993). The ass is famous for its sexual playfulness and virility and in Greek mythology is often identified with phallic/erotic male deities such as Dionysos and Typhon. It is also sacred to Priapus as the procreative principle. On Greek vases the ass is often shown with an erect phallus and some Greek men believed that carrying of a testicle of an ass as an amulet would increase their sexual potency (Camphausen, 1991). It is also interesting to note that the most

famous classical story of erotic adventure, magic and religion is known as "The Golden Ass", written by Roman/Algerian author Lucius Apuleius (born 123 A.D.).

The reference of Ass in erotic literature is not uncommon, be it in the oriental or occidental. In the Indian erotic classic, Srngararasaprabandhadipika, 'The Light of Love' a love position is called *Gardabha* or Ass position :

" When, with lotus-feet  
set well-apart on the ground, she bends,  
placing a hand upon each thigh,  
and you take her from the rear,  
it is *Gardabha* (the Ass)".

(Sinha, 1988).

In Indian mythology Ass is referred as the carrier of celestial chariot of demon King Ravana when he abducted Sita. Ass is also the *bahana* or carrier of the Hindu goddess Mother Sitala, who protects against epidemic diseases like small pox or measles.

The theme of women having intercourse with animals endowed with robust sexual power goes back as far as the early rock drawings of Africa. In 19th century the famous artist Achille Deveria (1805-1857) recaptured this theme of bestiality and depicted a series of animal intercourse by female including a painting of intercourse by a 'donkey the ridiculous.' These illustrations are widely distributed in privately printed editions of the erotic novel 'Gamini' written by Alfred de Musset (Smith, 1974).

**BULL** : Bull is usually the symbol of masculine principle in nature, the solar generative force sacred to all sky gods; fecundity and male procreative strength (Cooper, 1993).

As an embodiment of the procreative power, the bull is associated with the fertilizing forces of the sun, rain, storm,

thunder and lightning and hence reflect both the dry and humid principles. Bull symbolism is common among all Sumerian and Semitic cults. In Chinese, the bull is one of the animals of the Twelve Terrestrial Branches.

In Egyptian mythology the erotic reference of bull is spectacular. The bull Apis is an incarnated form of Osiris. The bull is worshipped under the form of Mnves or Merwer and is sacred to the sun god Ra who, as the Bull of Haven, daily impregnated the sky goddess Nut. The thigh of the bull is the phallic leg of Set as fertility and strength.

In Hindu mythology the bull symbolizes erotic strength, speed, fertility and the reproductive power of nature. Lord Siva, the god of creation with unbounded phallic strength, rides a bull 'Nandi' (Fig.1). Bull is also a form of Indra, the King of heaven, in his fertile aspect, who is also well known for his remarkable hypersexual impulses.

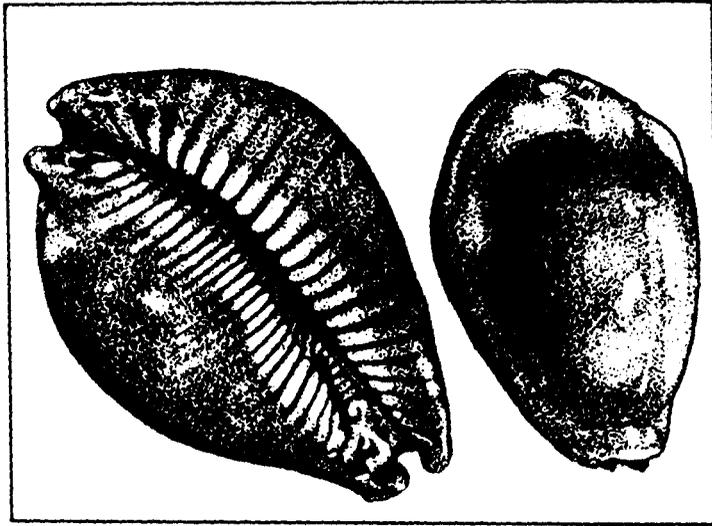
In Iranian mythology the bull is related with the creation myth. The bull is regarded as the soul of the world, its generative power is associated with the moon and rain clouds in fertility. The bull is considered as the first created animal from whose soul came the germ of all later creation.

**COWRIE SHELL :** Cowrie (Fig.2) is the symbol of fertility, the Great Mother, the feminine power of the waters and the vulva (Cooper, 1993). In many cultures, the beautiful cowrie is regarded as the symbol of divine female genital or *yonis* and thus is used as a fertility charm. Cowrie shells are held sacred in many traditional societies of Polynesian Islands, Africa, India and the Mediterranean area. *Kauri* is an Indian goddess who is connected to both, the sacred *yonis* and the cowrie shell.

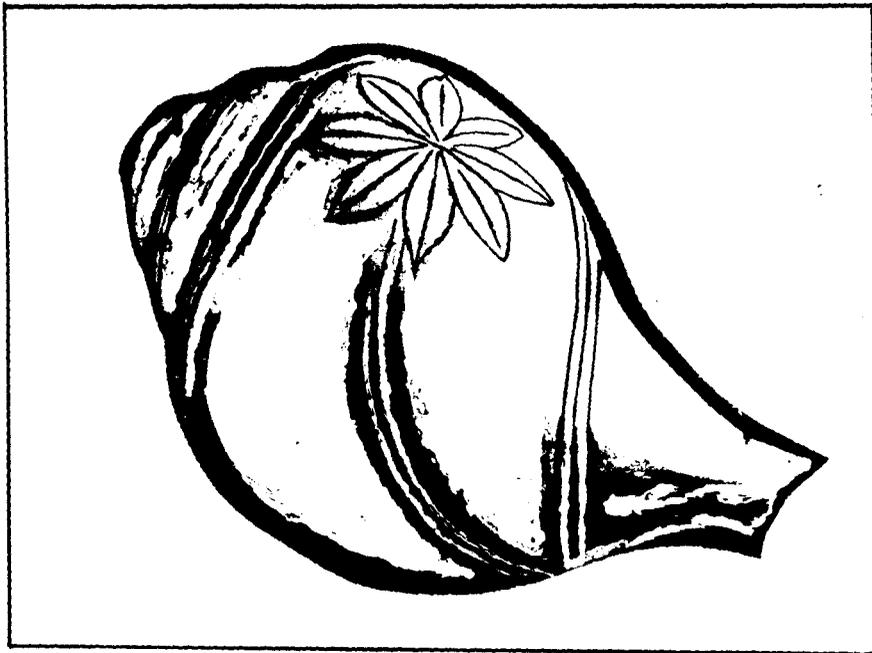
Even in the present day Hindu households cowrie shells are taken as the symbol of prosperity and thus constitutes an integral part in the worship decoration of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, wealth and fortune. She is also regarded as the



Fig.1. Glass painting of Shiva and Parvati, with Ganga, Ganesh and Nandi. Maharashtra, 19th century (Blurton, 1992).



**Fig.2.** Cowrie shells are used as charms against evil and as money.



**Fig.3.** Natural Conch shell trumpet, emblem of the Creative Sound (Rawson, 1992).

mother of all things, the *Shakti* or divine female energy.

Cowrie shells were one of the earliest mode of currency in Africa and Asia and are also in use into the 20th century among some tribes of Papua New Guinea. Golden cowries are strung together and worn as necklace by people in Fizi and Tonga. Some are worn as charms against evil or sterility. The 'cowrie pattern' in art is a funerary and death pattern, depicting both life and death.

**SCALLOP** : A shell or marine mollusk, is an ancient European symbol for the *yonis*, used from the far northern shores inhabited by the Norsemen to the borders of Greek civilization (Camphausen, 1991). It is interesting to note that the English word *scallop* has its root in the Norse *skalpr*, meaning "sheath" or "vagina". The Greek name for the shell is *Kteis*, which also refers not only to this specific shell and cowrie as well, but also a popular term for the outer and visible female genitals, a term equivalent to the Latin *vulva*. Shell is the emblem of Aphrodite/Venus, who rides on a scallop shell.

Alessandro Botticelli (1445-1510 A.D.) in his famous painting "birth of Aphrodite/Venus", he used the *Kteis/Scallop* in this art as a representation of the *yonis* of the sea, out of which the goddess of love was born.

Mollusc shells are symbols of the moon and virginity. In Chinese, it is feminine, yin principle. In Graeco-Roman funerary rites the shell signifies resurrection; it also indicates a journey across the sea; also sexual passion as the two halves being held closely together.

**CONCH** : (Fig.3) It is another related molluscs, often used in erotic or generative context. In Hindu mythology it is sacred to Lord Vishnu, god of the waters. The primordial creative word 'OM' was issued from his conch. Conch is variously used with

different symbolism in different cultures, like Islamic, Mayan, Graeco-Roman and Buddhist. In Chinese conch is a symbol of royalty and a prosperous voyage.

The medieval Indian erotic texts depict four female archetypes of which *Shankhini* or the Conch Lady is one. The psycho-sexual temperament of a Shankhini lady seems to be hot-tempered, but she does not become a passionate lover until the third quarter of the night when she enjoys foreplay with more elaborate types of sexual union. Her yoni is said to be always moist and she has abundant salty love juice (Camphausen, 1991).

In the Indian erotic classic *Srngararasaprabandhadipika*, the *Shankha* or the conch love position is described as :

"When she draws up her knees  
and you clamp yours about her raised thighs,  
trapping them in a tight knot  
while riding saddle upon her buttocks  
and kissing her, it is *Shankha* (the Conch)."

(Sinha , 1988).

The erotic symbolism of cowrie or conch also influences the 20th century western artist, two examples of which are not out of place to mention. The one is from Michel Desimon, the oil painting 'Les Biens de la Terre' (Blessings of the Earth), where a classical nude female painting appears amidst two romantic, sexually symbolic objects : in the left a conch shell, a symbol of female vagina and in the background a labyrinth, where paradise can only be reached after a long search through the maze - to its heart (Fig.4), (Smith, 1974).



Fig.4

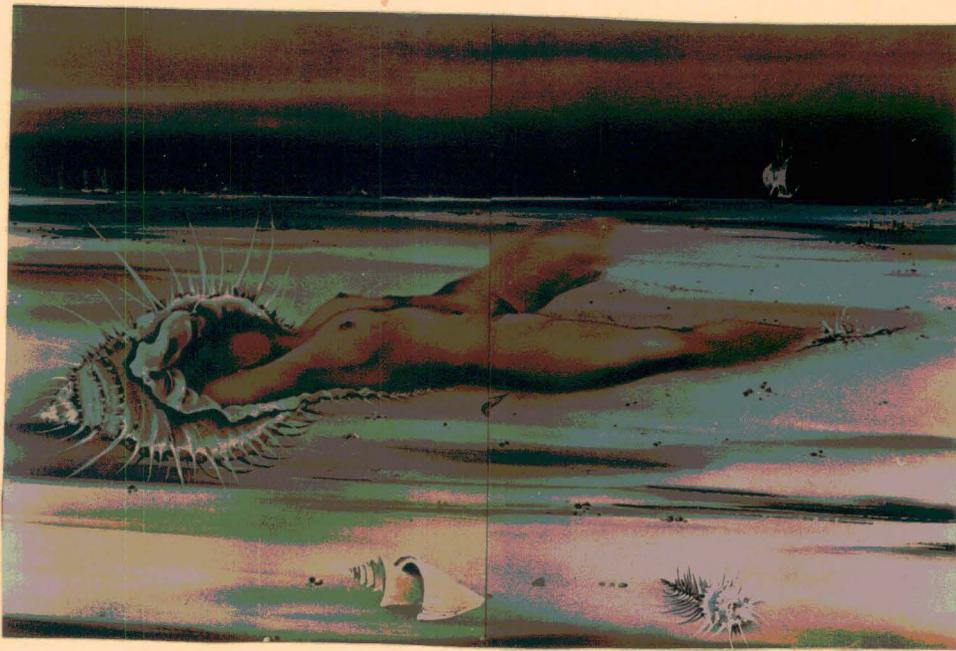


Fig.5

The second one of French painter Bernard Louedin, the famous art piece 'Naissance de Venus' (Birth of Venus) where in the midst of romantic erotic fantasy the female nude figure is coming out of a vulva-like conch shell on the sea shore where two other shells symbolic of phalli appear in the foreground (Fig.5) (Smith, 1974).

**DUCK** : In Chinese and Japanese traditional belief system duck is symbolic of conjugal happiness, fidelity, felicity and beauty (Cooper, 1993). The duck and drake together depict the union of lovers, mutual considerations and fidelity.

**DOVE** : The mythological research has shown that dove was regarded a sacred bird to pre-Christan Syrian, Greek and Roman goddesses like Astarte, Aphrodite and Juno - all female deities who are noted for their connections with sexuality and fertility. The dove with an olive branch is an emblem of Athene as renewal of life.

In Chinese, the dove acts as a symbol of longevity, faithfulness, and filial piety. In India the dove is known as a bird of sexual passion and its Sanskrit name *paravata* also means 'lust'.

**ELEPHANT** : Elephant is generally regarded as the symbol of strength, fidelity, long memory, patience, wisdom and conjugal felicity (Cooper, 1993). In India, China and in Jewish lands the elephant is considered a symbol of powerful sexual desire.

In India this animal is worshipped as elephant headed god, the lord Ganesh and the goddess Matangi. In Sanskrit Mathanga means elephant. In Buddhism the elephant is regarded as sacred and has a erotic link with the birth of Gautam Buddha. He was born out of a miraculous impregnation of his mother by a white elephant in a dream (Fig.6). The white elephant is also the Jewel of the Law, the *vahan* (carrier) of the Bodhisattva.

In Indian mythology the elephant is linked with the creation myth : the world is supported by elephant. Indra, the king of Vedic pantheon, who was known for his remarkable addiction to



**Fig.6.** Queen Maya, Buddha's mother, dreamed of an elephant before his birth. 2nd Century B.C., Indian bas-relief (Cooper, 1993).

intoxicating *soma* juice and beautiful women (specially married to holy sages) rides white elephant named *Airavata*. Kama, the Hindu god of love, sex and erotic pleasure has the elephant as his carrier (Fig.7). Radha, the main character of the gopis of Lord Krishna is associated with this animal. In Sanskrit Radha means 'she elephant'.

It is of psycho-anthropological interest that Indian texts on love and sexuality (eg. Kama Sutra or Ananga Ranga) speak of four female archetypes that symbolize natural objects and animals. These are : Chitrini (fancy woman); Padmini (lotus woman); Hastini (elephant woman) and Shankhini (conch woman). The nature and character of a Hastini female is as follows (Camphausen, 1991):

"The *hastini* seems to prefer mountain scenery for sexual union and is said to be difficult to satisfy, partly because of her large yoni, partly because she is given to some of the more extreme desires, in love as well as food. The *hastini* enjoys much clitoral stimulation and is not adverse to a little rough handling. Her love juice is said to taste and smell like an elephant's tears in spring. The smell of these "tears" refers to the smell of "sweat" or musk, that collects on a rutting male elephant's forehead" (p.75).

It is interesting to note here that in at least three Indian erotic classics viz. *Ratirahasya* (written in eleventh century by Pandit Kokkoka); *Panchasayaka* ("The Five Arrows", composed early in the fourteenth century by Jyotirishvara Kavishekhara) and *Srngaraarasaprabandhadipika* (uncertain date, written by Harihara) the mention of love positions has been made which symbolizes an elephant's act (Sinha, 1988). These are :

"When your mistress lays  
breasts, arms and forehead to the carpet,  
raising her buttocks high,  
and you guide your penis into her yoni,  
it is *Aibha* (the Elephant)" .

- *Ratirahasya*.



Fig.7. Kama with 'Panchyashar' (Five love arrows) on elephant (Sinha, 1988).

"Lying on her side, facing away,  
 the fawn-eyed girl  
 offers you her buttocks  
 and your penis penetrates the house of love :  
 this is *Nagabandha* (the Elephant)".

- Panchasayaka.

"You lift her ankles high;  
 she draws up  
 and extends her legs as though she were  
 crawling through the air :  
 this is *Hastika* (the Elephant)" .

- Srngararasaprabandhadipika.

The well-known Behemoth of Hebrew legend, who was once worshipped in the city of Elephantine on the bank of river Nile, was an elephant whose "strength is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly" (Camphausen, 1991).

**FISH** : Fish has the usual symbolic meaning of generative power, namely, phallic, procreation, fecundity and life renewed and sustained. It also symbolizes the power of waters and is associated with Mother Goddess as genetrix and with all lunar deities (Cooper, 1993).

In Chinese fish symbolizes abundance (fish and abundance are homophones); wealth; regeneration and harmony. A solitary fish depicts a lonely person, an orphan, widow or bachelor. A pair of fishes portrays the joys of union, marriage and fertility. Fish was the emblem of Kwan-yin and of the T'ang Dynasty.

Egyptian mythology portrays fish as the phallus of Osiris. Two fishes are the creative principle; prosperity of Nile and fertility.

Greek mythology also attributes fish to Aphrodite as love and fecundity.

In Hindu mythology fish is stated as the form of first incarnation of Lord Vishnu as saviour of the mankind from the devastating cosmic flood (Fig.8). Golden fish is also the symbol of Varuna as the power of the waters.

In social custom of India, fish is a mandatory item in marriage rituals as it depicts wealth and fertility. Two fishes touching nose-to-tail depict the yoni. This symbolism probably inspired the French artist Moarch Eveno who encased the figure of a nude woman within a fish. The painting (Fig.9), which is on wood, is titled "Le Poisson de Profondeurs" (The Fish of the Deep) (Smith, 1974).

In Roman mythology fish is an emblem of goddess Venus as love and fertility. Similarly in Scandinavian mythology fish related to Frigga as love and fertility. In Sumero-Semitic mythology the fish is the sacred symbol of Ea and of Tammuz as phallic and masculine but when it is associated with goddess Ishtar, it represents the feminine, love and fertility.

**FROG** : It is regarded as a rain-bringer and symbolizes fertility, fecundity and eroticism (Cooper, 1993). In many culture frog is related with the creation myth : the Great Frog supporting the universe. Egyptians believe that the green frog of Nile is new life and prolific generation, fertility and the reproductive power of the nature. It is also an emblem of Isis. The Graeco-Roman faith regards the frog as the emblem of Aphrodite/Venus as it depicts fertility, licentiousness and harmony between lovers.

**GOAT** : Goat is symbolically used to indicate the male sexual energy inherent in the process of fertility and creation. Mythically goat is linked with the image of Greek/Arcadian god Pan (Greek: "everything"). Often he is symbolized as an ithyphallic figure, half goat and half man (Fig.10). Pan is also the god of fields, forests, flocks and herds and wild animals. He enjoyed all the



**Fig.8.** Fish Incarnation of Lord Vishnu, Ranganath Temple, Brindaban, U.P., India, 18th century.



Fig.9



\*\*

**Fig.10.** The Greek god Pan : half man, half goat.  
\*\* Pan as seen in a stone relief found at Pompeii (Goodenough, 1987).

pleasures of life and played sweet music on his Pan pipes. The word 'panic' also comes from Pan's name, because it was believed that he was responsible for all the mysterious sounds of the night that frightened people. The major nymph of Basque (a goddess or witch) is Mari, who is depicted as having a goat's foot.

**Satyr**(Greek: *saturói*) is a mythic creature and is usually depicted as half man and half goat, stands as a symbol of elemental unrestrained male libido and passion (Camphausen, 1991). Their unquenchable thirst for erotic adventures, a form of sexual obsession or erotomania, makes them the male equivalent of a nymphomaniac. Such a condition of sexual hunger in human men is called *satyriasis*.

In Egypt the sacred ram of Mendes was called "the lord of young women", to whom the women in Egypt gave themselves in order to have a "divine offspring" (Evola, 1991). In Graeco-Roman culture the goat stands for virility, creative energy and lust. The goat is sacred to Zeus Dictynnos, who was suckled by the goat Amalthea, whose skin became the aegis, the protector and preserver, and whose horn was the cornucopia - which stood for abundance and plenty (Cooper, 1993). Aphrodite is the "rider on the goat" as it was her sacred animal. Dionysus was believed to assume the form of a goat, probably as a divinity of vegetation. In Northern Europe, the wood-spirits *Leshi* are believed to have the appearance of a goat and goat is also a form in which the corn-spirit is supposed to appear (Frazer, 1950). In Transylvania a goat dance is performed at weddings, probably as a fertility charm (Thomas, 1964). In Hindu mythology, the Vedic fire god *Agni* rides a he-goat. In Teutonic myth, the chariot of Thor, god of thunder and fertility, is drawn by goats.

**GOOSE/SWAN** : The goose and swan are often symbolically interchangeable. In Chinese, the goose is a symbol for yang or masculinity, a bird of heaven that represents conjugal happiness (Cooper, 1993). Goose is linked to creation myth in many culture, eg. in Egyptian myth the Nile Goose is the 'Great Chatterer', the creator of the world and laid the Cosmic Egg from which the sun (Amon-Ra) god was hatched. In Hindu mythology, likewise *Brahma*,

the creative principle was born out of the Cosmic Golden Egg laid by a goose/swan. Goose or swan is the emblem of Brahma. In Greek mythology goose stands for love, a good housewife, attribute to Hera, queen of heaven.

In Graeco-Roman, the swan is a form of Zeus/Jupiter who has erotic relation with Leda (Fig.11). Leda, mother of Dioscuri and Helen of Troy, Helen and one of the twins, Polydeuces, being the offspring of Zeus, who impregnated her in the form of a swan. It is also associated with Juno as queen of heaven and Priapus as fertility. Goose also symbolizes Eros as love and the white swan is purity and grace and represents the Virgin Mary in Christianity.

**HINDU MALE ARCHETYPE :** The Indian classical erotic texts (Kamasutra by Vatsayana and Ananga Ranga) classify man into three basic types in accordance with the similarities with animal erotic temperament and semen quality. These are :

1. The **Hare** (Sanskrit *Sasa*) who is affectionate, attractive to women and has splendor, well-shaped hands. His semen tastes sweet and of pleasant odour.
2. The **Bull** (Sanskrit *Vrsa*) is passionate in sexual union and has a strong body with deep armpits. He is capable of repeated orgasm.

Bull is the sacred carrier of Lord Shiva (Fig.12).

It is amazing to note that this animal character was captured by no famous a man like Pablo Picasso in his erotic drawing where the sexually aroused man has hooves and horns like bull ! (Fig.13).

3. The **Stallion** (Sanskrit *Avsa*) type is overendowed with similar fluid and is constantly tormented by erotic lust. His semen tastes salty, smells like a goat and has the yellow colour like butter.



**Fig.11.** The goddess Leda is seen in the ecstasy of orgasm, as she enjoys sexual penetration by the god Zeus in the form of an enormous swan. Although many great artists, including Michelangelo, have used this theme, none has shown the unique coupling of goddess and bird with such intensity. Sketch of Musee Ingres, France. Photographed by Albert Ferlin (Smith, 1974).



**Fig.12.** The humped bull mount of Shiva - Nandi. Granite, Southern Deccan, 16th Century (Blurton, 1992).



**Fig.13.** Pablo Picasso did his most erotic series of drawings in 1968 at the age of 87. In this free style the man has a bull-like satyrs in front of a nude lady (Smith, 1974).

The erotic Indian classics also divided man by using animal comparisons into four types according to their penis length. The hare and doe type males have penis length of six finger-breadths; the bull and mare type males have nine finger-breadths and the horse and elephant class has twelve fingerbreadths (Sinha, 1988). Animal sexual symbolism occupies an important part in the discussion of sexual acts and temperaments and partner's compatibility to each other in the Kamasutra.