'Wheel' – The Basis of Movement
In the Context of Indian Culture, Thought and Art

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Abstract

Wheel is defined as a tangible circular object revolves on an axis, and while fixed beneath a vehicle enables it to move over the land. The earliest wheel in history is the potter's wheel (c. 500 BCE), and when its horizontal position was changed to vertical it became the very basis of the movement. The physical wheel emerged in every culture on the globe, universally marked as a vital part mainly of the land vehicles. In India, particularly in Hindu belief wheel is interpreted also in mythical, metaphysical and artistic contexts. In this regard, several unwritten saga and written accounts on wheel are popular in both local and in the classical realms. Termed as 'chakra' in Sanskrit, the wheel is mentioned in multifaceted contexts. For example, the earliest Indian scripture Rig Veda mentioned 'Thy two wheels' (Rig-veda X, 85, 12.16) pointing at life; in Upanishads wheel is associated with the cosmos; in metaphysical milieu it is referred to the time (kalachakra), virtues (dharmachakra) etc.; further to this, it is mentioned as a divine weapon (sudarshanachakra) and power (shakti) of the Supremes (in Ramayana, Mahabharata); also in multiple numbers it adored the divine vehicles (ratha) as mentioned in various Hindu scriptures (Puranas); Besides this, as a desired subject to ancient Indian sculptors, the wheel is seen in sculptural form in various Hindu temples. Added to this, one of the most celebrated aspects of the wheel is the 'Ashoka Chakra' which with an extreme admiration adorns the Indian National Flag forever. Thus, this paper will present the 'wheel' in Indian context as not only an indispensable body of a physical vehicle, but also an insightful concept in Indian culture, thought and art as well. The selected visual examples included will be from the historical sites in India.

Key Words: *Wheel, Indian Context, Culture*

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