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"Tree of Life: An analytical transformation of symbolism from history to multimedia design"

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ABSTRACT

From pre-historic cave paintings to WhatsApp emojis, symbols are the tool to depict the notions and feelings of masses and individuals. In the current info age, a Logo is a graphic mark or an emblem that identifies a commercial organization using a symbol, signature, or mark. Symbols are a meaningful way of simply representing a layered, complex idea. In the informative contemporary age, one can see thousands of symbols ubiquitous in multimedia design. Some prominent symbols have been carried since early human civilization and are still used in the design. The application of the "Tree of Life" is one significant symbol that has been used universally for ages. This symbol has an enriched history spanning cultures and centuries; considering that in mind, this present study takes

the "tree of Life" as a case example to explain and elaborate on how the design continuum evolves and creates a loop. This study will explore the roots of this complex and cherished symbol and investigate the present association of the same symbol in the contemporary multimedia design field.

The study will evoke multiple interpretations which are looped to form multi-layered symbolic expressions and perspectives with visual and verbal implications. Consequently, the symbol will be categorized and classified by using online research methods (ORMs) to focus on the fluidity of socio-temporal changes that accord with the contemporary expressions.

KEY WORDS: *Symbolism, history, logo, design, multimedia.*

INTRODUCTION:

When we ask someone to depict the "Stars" and "clouds" on any two-dimensional space, they often represent them through a simple symbol and color to which they associate. The viewer will also identify and perceive it in the same form. We human beings tend to denote a tangible and intangible object with some symbol and color through our intuitive understanding. Such is the power of association color and symbols. They help us to represent expressions which otherwise impossible to present.

The world around us is full of diverse symbols and images we perceive daily. The dawn of these symbols can be traced back to the pre-historic period. Through time these symbols transformed and became the foundation for present-day emojis. The journey of symbols might have even started before documenting pre-historic activities and events on the cave walls of the caves. After an uncounted number of alterations and modifications over time, today, we can conceive of the age of metaverse VR (Virtual Reality), where every image is a digital and symbolic representation representing reality, and we get even our digital avatars. We choose our metaphorical or symbolic elements to create our virtual personality.

These symbols in VR have often adopted and inspired through their representation in art. Thus, according to Smithsonian Library, in art, symbols are drawings in the solid and identifiable form used to represent an object or living thing that would otherwise be hard to show in paintings and Sculptures. For example, Symbols are tools to depict the notions and feelings of masses and individuals (Myths in words and Pictures, n.d.)

Additionally, we can further understand as a symbol is the amalgamation of abstraction to a specific expression, and the Symbols are thoughtful expressions of our intelligence and emotions. Throughout the centuries, various symbols have been cast-off in various forms and ideas associated with them. Different values and traditions are associated with these symbols worldwide. In a world packed with diverse cultures, earlier symbols had their association, often linked with religious, intellectual, and philosophical representations of various elements for communication. It includes the constant process of changes and modification because humans are perpetually looking for deeper meaning; they are associated with them.

In this quest, the symbol is famously known as the "Tree of Life" and is an iconic example of such a symbol that traveled across time and witnessed most major and minor religions worldwide. If we dig deep into the history, culture, traditions, and religions, we can find that the depiction of this symbol is present in various altered shapes and forms .all are a part of just the same extended family. This continuation is an ongoing process that creates a loop in the perpetuation of symbols and design.

In the current information technological age, where QR codes have revolutionized the world, These colors are often associated with various brands due to their symbolic value. Additionally, one of the most profound manifestations of humankind is branding. Such symbols are considered a logo that entails an integral part of the company's message, goals and values to the viewer. The idea of branding has always influenced our culture. This paper attempts to explicate the meaning of the tree of life from a few examples of the everyday use of logo and multimedia design to understand the purpose of its representation in the contemporary era.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Trees were used as symbols and literal emblems of religious beliefs for humankind. Various cultural and symbolic values were ascribed to the trees in numerous communities and cultures in the distant past. One of them is "The Tree of Life", which many cultures share. It is a most significant symbol or concept illustrated in various cultures and forms throughout the documented history. The "Tree of Life" concept undertones and has been used in diverse fields of biology, philosophy, mythology, religion, and theology; hence, the 'tree of life' is a widespread metaphor (Lock, 2016.). The idea of a tree of life pervades the world around us – from movies to coffee shops, science hypotheses to divination cards – the influence extends beyond a few references to the ancient Near Eastern texts and Christian writings. (Estes, 2020). The symbol has been incorporated in many perspectives, some time as a pictorial depiction and other times as a metaphorical depiction, to facilitate the concept of a tree of life, holding various meanings to it.

One of the most significant examples of understanding this perspective is Darwin's evolutionary theory tree of life (TOL), confirming fundamental Truths. It states that all life is related and enables us to construct a complex tree representing life's history. In his notebooks on transmutation from the late 1830s, before he developed his theory of descent by natural selection, he invoked the Tree of Life to visualize the living being's interconnected history and classification (HELLSTROM, 2012).

The tree of life refers to the entangled life on the earth and serves as a metaphor for common descent in the evolutionary sense. The term tree of life also represents and is associated with a similar idea like the sacred tree, tree of knowledge, and tree of geneses. Such trees are believed to be linked to knowledge, paradise, and

hell. Thus, tree of life works as a medium to connect all forms of flora and fauna. It works as it works both tree of the world and the Cosmic Tree. This whole concept grew over the ages, but still, the pictorial and metaphorical depiction is a popular trend in design. It transformed with time and took various shapes and meanings over time.

Considering the above discussion, this study explores the roots of this complex and cherished symbol and investigates the present association of the same symbol in the contemporary multimedia design field. This research used online research methods (ORMs) to focus on the fluidity of socio-temporal changes in contemporary expressions to achieve the findings. The symbol will be categorized and classified using visual semiotics and analysis methods. Second, Secondary data was collected from various online library searches, Journals, Books, and web sites pages.

Additionally, this study explores the roots of this complex and cherished symbol and investigates the present association of the same symbol in the contemporary multimedia design field.

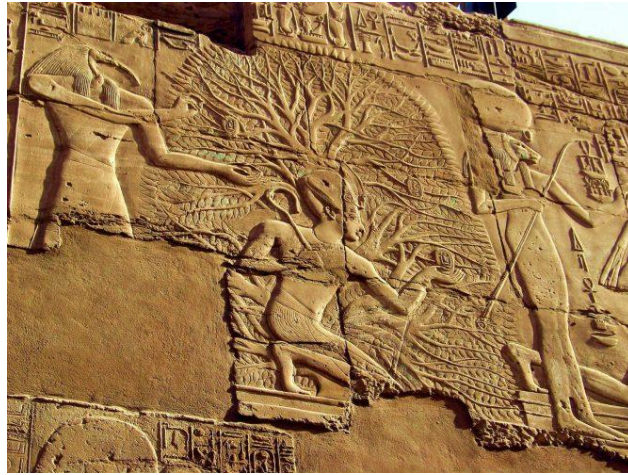
DESIGN TRANSFORMATION:

Transformation is changing state to facilitate new or enhance an existing functionality (Singh, et al., 2009). Design transformation is a process that seeks to create a desirable and sustainable change; it begins with transforming a cave wall into an imagined world of people and animals. Furthermore, it continues to transform materials into new objects. Similarly, visual and philosophical ideas associated with symbols also transform spatiotemporally. This study brings light to the design's continuous journey that evolves and generates a loop in this quest.

The Tree of Life often represents Communication in Everything on Earth. It symbolizes union and reminds us that you are not alone or isolated but rather connected to the world. It also represents Descendants, Family, and Descendants and shows how a family grows and expands over many generations. The tree is a global symbol of strength and growth as it stands tall and robust worldwide. It symbolizes personal growth, immortality, rebirth and peacefulness (Tree of Life Meaning & Symbolism, 2019).

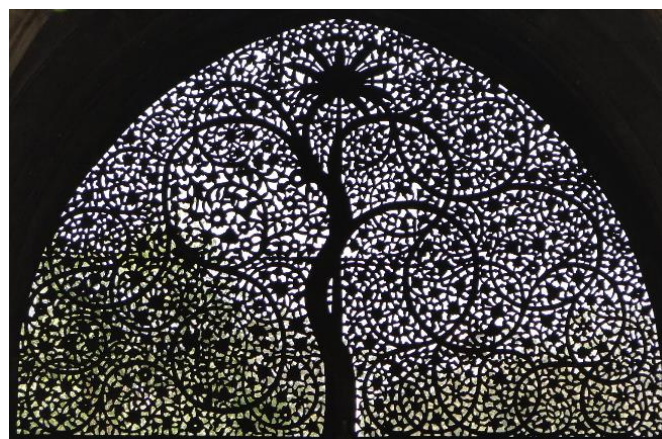
The 'Tree of Life' is a mystic tree recognized all over several ancient cultures, expanding back into the distant past to the oldest cultures and civilizations in the world. Different religions call out it by different associations, each with its mythology. However, they all have similar spiritual or literal meanings addressing the source of life. The symbol "tree of life" is widely used to present the divine connection and interconnection with other beings.

The relationship of trees with Life, both in the plane of the earth and that of the gods, is a universal concept that reaches into space and time. Evidence of the people who gave trees of special status and linked them to the spirit world can be found in almost every religion and culture. The Tree of Life represented events that made all things possible for the ancient Egyptians. The framework of the Tree of Life reflects the order, process, and creative process. The ancient Egyptians worshiped the Sycamore trees' sycamore trees, which they considered to be shrines of the holy spirit. Dense, green trees are one of the oldest species known for their longevity and durability. (The Tree of Life: Meaning and Symbolism, 2022)



*Depiction of the tree of life at Karnak temple, Luxor, Egypt
Image Source: (Ancient Egypt Axis , n.d.)*

Along with Christianity, the concept of the Tree of Life is part of the Christian, and Islamic version of the creation of life, often referred to as Genesis. In Christianity is depicted as the Genesis in the Old Testament Bible. Its emphasis on the tree of knowledge and their symbolic relationship with God. The Islamic concept of a tree of life can be seen on the woven carpets, engraved, and sculpted on monuments, and it is likely to have been inspired by Sassanian and Assyrian art representing the Earth Tree / Tree of Life. It is called Sidra, or Tuba, which grows in Paradise in Islamic literature. In Christianity, it is figuratively connected with divinity (Bose, 2018).



*Sidi Saiyyed mosque, Ahmedabad
Image link: (Artstor , n.d.)*

In Hindu mythology, "kalpavrisha" known as Kalpataru, is a mythological wish fulfilling tree, the charismatic tree said to fill

all the desires. It is described to be originated during the churning of the ocean. The idea of Kalpavriksha emerged from nature worship, an integral part of all ancient cultures, including India. Like us, the firm belief that trees possess a soul of their own has led to such reverence that we can still find groves held sacred if we look around. It is believed that the abode of souls and deified gods bring us good fortune with rain, sunshine, good harvests, growing livestock, and women's fertility. While most tree spirits are considered to be kind, some appear to be evil, "evil spirits," or "ap-devta." Such winds cause damage, so people avoid approaching the trees where they live.



*The Kalpavriksha (a mythological wish-fulfilling tree) leaf carved in marble at the Adinatha Jain temple at Ranakpur, Rajasthan.
Image Source: (Kalpavriksha , n.d.)*



*the temple built by Asoka at Bodh-Gaya, around the Bodhi tree.
Sculpture of the Satavahana period at Sanchi, 1st century CE
Image Source: (wikipedia , n.d.)*

The idea of Kalpavrisha, the tree of life that fulfills wishes and is believed by Hindus and many cultures. In Buddhism, "Bodhi tree" is a sign of knowledge, as it is a well-known fact that Buddha attained enlightenment under this tree.

Representation of the Bodhi tree is seen in Sanchi. While we can say that the Bodhi tree symbolizes knowledge, kalpataru, on the other hand, signifies wealth, kindness, and spiritual guidance for those seeking (Bose, 2018). According to Jain's cosmology, in three hours (unequal times) of the descending arc (avasarpini), kalpavriksha provided everything needed but yield by the end of the third aara from them declined. Other texts describe eight species of trees, each of which has a unique appearance (What is Kalpavriksha in Jainism?, 2008).

Other than the major religion, the depiction of tree of life can be observed in the various folk arts in India. These folk arts and their culture are rooted back in centuries, and at present, people are still involved in a similar process, with the addition of contemporary implications.

Tree of Life in the Gond painting signifies all the goodness in life. It represents tree of life with the happy birds inhabiting the tree, it stands for harmony and togetherness. It symbolizes that when a tree is nurtured with love, it thrives and strives to bring peace and happiness to the people who nurture it. The many intertwined branches signify the many facets of life itself and how they are integrated.



**Madhubani painting, 'Tree of Life', by Artist Vidushini from India.
Image source: (unicefusa.org, n.d.)**



**Kalamkari - Tree Of Life
Image Source: (flickr.com , n.d.)**



**Gond - Tree of Life.
Image Source: (Shyam, Bai, & Urveti, 2020)**

In the northern region of India, Madhubani paintings, another leading folk art from India, depict the tree of life in their pictorial depiction. It is believed that trees provide for all the necessities humans require to live a basic life, not limited to humans but also birds and animals. The tribe worships nature in various forms rather than idol worship. The motif in the Tree of Life can be seen in the hand-drawn textile Kalamkari, which again symbolizes the mythologies and a metaphor for the common descent of life on earth.

After learning the depiction of Tree of Life in various religions let us find out its reflection in the painting of a prominent artist. This beautiful mosaic mural piece by Austrian Symbolist Artist Gustav Klimt, was created between 1905 and 1911 and is known as "The Stoclet Frieze". It is a series of painting with three panels called "Expected" (left), "Tree of Life" (center), and "Fulfillment" (right) (Heather, 2018). It was made during Klimt's 'Golden Age' period when he often adorned his art with a gold leaf. The materials used by Klimt, include Ceramic, Gold-plated tiles, Pearls, and marble. Klimt said of the work that "it was probably the last phase of my decorative development," and he was praised with Art Nouveau whimsy. (Heather, 2018)



The Stoclet Frieze, Detail: The Expectation, Tree of Life, 1905-1909. Artist: Klimt, Gustav (1862-1918)

Image Source: (gettyimages, n.d.) (gettyimages, n.d.)

In this artwork, Klimt deals with the ancient symbols of the tree of life, which represents the connection between all things in heaven, hell, earth, life, and death. The "Waiting Panel" includes a woman in a patterned dress that appears to have been inspired by ancient Egyptian art. Her dress is very ornamental and stretchy as she approaches the floor. The "Fulfillment" panel includes a couple locked in a hug. Her clothes appear to bind them both together. The interiors of the garments with mathematical patterns mimic those found within the tree itself.

This iconic painting later inspired the exterior facade of the famous building "New Dwelling Hall (tree house)" at the Massachusetts, College of Art and Design in Boston.

Another interesting example to discuss is a contemporary installation work by a Delhi-based Artist by Delhi-based designers Sarthak and Sahil at the Victoria & Albert Museum, which welcomes visitors with Kalpataru wishing tree.

Artist stated, "The installation is a modern-day interpretation of the Kalpataru that doesn't only celebrate light in its literal sense but also as a metaphor for the celebration of hope, prosperity and ecology" (kalpataru wishing tree, 2015).



kalpataru wishing tree at v&a museum spices christmas spirit with hindu mythology

Image Source: (kalpataru wishing tree, 2015).

Tree of life in games of thrones: In the popular series, Game of Thrones represents a tree called "heart tree" is the center of a godswood. A Weirwood tree with a carved face played an essential role in the series. Weirwood is a deciduous tree found throughout Westeros with bark and blood-red leaves and has magical properties. The trees superficially tap into a magical

network running throughout the world, and trees are the sacred tree connected in some ways to the old gods of the forest.



Image source: (Game of Thrones (Telltale Games) - The Weirwood Tree, n.d.)

Tree of Life in the movie "Avatar", the Mother tree, also known as the tree of souls, was an important spiritual site for the Omaticaya family. It is also called the voice tree because it is associated with the ancestors' words. Their voices are heard in contact with the emotional line and the tree.


The fictional story of film science is based on an unknown planet that contains a home tree so ancient that the trees of the alien Na'vi tribe could inhabit it.




*Tree of souls from Avatar
Image source: (Jr., 2019)*

the Tree of Souls, is represented to serve as a way for them to communicate directly with the earth through the tree's seeds. The tree has the ability to connect directly to the human nervous system with physical contact with extended root fibers, even though humans do not have a nerve line (Jr., 2019). The sacred Tree symbolizes the cultural and spiritual traditions, love, and respect for those Walking the Red Road of spiritual understanding and personal growth (Jr., 2019).

Following the works of individual designers and examples of movies and series which contain the use of similar symbols in different other aspects, this table below will put some more light on a variety of representations by some of the brands and other expressions, which defines that how the symbol "tree of Life" is inspired from and concepts in the time loop.

S.N	Logo	Image	Description	Symbolic Representation
1.	Banyan Tree: First logo of State Bank of India (from 1955-170)	 <p>Image Source: (SBI LOGO, 2022)</p>	The first sign of the State Bank of India was adopted in 1955, representing the Banyan tree. However, the sign was abandoned as it invited criticism that the Banyan tree did not allow any other plant to grow in its place.	This represents solid roots and branches that can spread and grow in all directions, signifying growth, success, and stability, reflecting the purpose of the financial institution and

				its approach (SBI LOGO, 2022).
2.	Bihar Museum 2015-present	 <p>(Bihar Museum Identity, 2015)</p>	<p>Based on the Bodhi Tree, the attractive logo signifies the Tree of Knowledge. A clear, concise design that successfully represents the museum and its history. (Bihar Museum Identity, n.d.)</p>	<p>This symbol renews the glory of Bihar by associating it with the bodhi tree. The Trees depicts great masters, knowledge, and a way of life as the Board of Wisdom (Bihar Museum Identity, 2015).</p>
3.	Dabur		<p>Dabur India Limited is a leading Indian consumer goods company for more than 100 years. The brand represents itself by providing natural</p>	<p>The tree symbolizes nature and is regarded as a provider of shelter, food, and protection. It also</p>

		Image source: (Dabur Logo History, n.d.)	Image source: (Dabur Logo History, n.d.)	solutions for a healthy and complete lifestyle. The company's original logo was the Banyan Tree. (Dabur Logo History, n.d.)	represents its relationship with nature and the use of natural elements in the products.
4.	Foreset Essential	 <p>Image source: (Tree of Life , n.d.)</p>		Its luxury brand shows Tree of Life with many branches as its logo. It reflects the idea that their products are close to nature. (Tree of Life , n.d.)	The corporate gold and white color scheme of the visible company reflects beauty, elegance, and splendor. It makes the logo look classy and evokes a sense of quality and efficiency. According to the company, the Tree of Life symbolizes the Law of Nature and the fact that all living things on our planet are related.

A balance between modernity and tradition creates endless design opportunities for designers in the contemporary world. After discussing examples from history to tradition to contemporary, we can see that various religious traditions seem to differ when analyzed according to their outer characteristics. But, The amalgamation of the same symbol with modern material/ expression gives them a new identity in different associations. If looked at from a generalized perspective, their doctrines and practices reveal that they share similar features, represented symbolically in the 'tree of life.'

CONCLUSION:

The current paper highlighted the evolution and application of the tree of life symbol in various cultural narratives, contemporary visual media narratives, and various brands' emblems. Multiple versions and interpretations have been observed throughout the transformations. Right from ancient times, tree worship resulted from humans' natural reverence for nature which provided for basic needs and much more. Tree worship is globally inherent in all major and minor religions, art, literature, and other social narratives, showing the continuation of veneration to trees. Trees were always considered more than ordinary. They have been seen as representing life itself.

In the contemporary world, the idea of including trees or the tree of life symbol by multiple brands or as a narrative representation in films and art is more than a notion of worship. Today thematic inclination is more towards the environment, representing the tree of life or related symbol for abstract the connection between brand and nature. It shows their intention to associate and represent themselves as a nature cohabited brand. In the film, narrative depiction enforces tree of life as a source of life and a chain connecting the human and god.

Over time and across spaces, the multiple variations and variegated meanings of one single symbol have been created. This design transformation and narratives show how design and patterns evolve and transform over time and space. Sometimes, keeping their core value intact or sometimes mutate with incomprehensible complexity. This is possible as the interactions and transitions of the symbols create information loops that serve as feedback to initiate and innovate further transformations resulting in multiple variations and interpretations. Further research should be guided towards understanding interactions and transitions and the creation of information loops they trigger and how these information loops further influence new visual and associated interpretations.

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