

Indian Art and Religion: The Ultimate Philosophy Through the Ages

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ABSTRACT

Just as cultivation is vital for existence of human beings, similarly art is an inherent part of human life. It is believed that in India, religion and art were born simultaneously because in early Indian art the primordial goal and subject matter was religion. It originated in a globe imbued with a deeply spiritual ambience whose infinite conglomeration of hues is core of Indian culture. Indian artists skillfully articulated the capital aim of Indian art, which were meditation and salvation. Every artisan was more like a saint who dedicated his art to society and religion. Indian art is essentially established on philosophical theories which consequently led to the creation of such an art which was a synthesis of aesthetic sense and internal discernment. This eventually led the common man to euphoria and helped him to perceive God.

Keywords: Indian Art, Religion, philosophy, Beauty, Meditation, Salvation.

INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of art, in addition to promoting the welfare of society, is to create a unique condition of pure well-being that, at first, brings happiness to the creator and, later, to the viewer. Enchanting people is another immediate role of art, which is to artistically delight human senses and mind. The 'cosmic' belief holds that it is more important for art to enable man to reach a condition of harmony with the cosmos. This directs his mind and spirit toward the drive of freedom, or "Moksha." It is widely agreed that art should serve these functions. It should be appealing and pleasurable for the wisdom and realization and it must be able to elicit an environment and a feeling of joy (anandam). Indeed, creating art is a moral action that enhances one's sense of self. And it should direct the artist and the spectator away from their dominion to a place where he can encounter celestial phenomenon.¹ Tolstoy defined art as a human activity in which the artist experiences and lives other people's emotions, and other people or viewers are likewise touched by these sentiments and go through the same sentiments. He states that, in certain ways, art is also edifying idea that aims to unite people into a "universal brotherhood".² The artists of yore had a religious bent of mind. They were well acquainted with religious scriptures (theological).³ Art and religion are intrinsic to each other. Hence both art and religion were procreating concurrently.⁴

Since ancient times portraying religious figures had been a spectacular ability. According to the shastras, whenever the subject of embodiment of god & goddesses came under deliberation, the artisans were under directions to contemplate or meditate before exploring the form or icon of the subject under consideration.⁵ In fact, there is no distinction between a spiritual or creative individual. The self-discipline of a true artist is similar to that of a yogi who achieves a state of detachment. His focus at this moment is on an imperceptible strength. Nothing at all can now stand in the way of his inventiveness. Both artists and yogis, in their own unique ways, enhance and embellish their surroundings. Both go beyond mere self-interest and make an effort to benefit the civilization.⁶ Such ascetic, single-minded creation produces pure art that engages the audience as a partner in its spiritual enjoyment.

When an artist is completely successful in making an impression on the spectators and deliver the enviable fruition to the viewer, he can be regarded as a true creator. An artisan acts as a medium to devolve a perception to the viewers. Now the question arises why an artisan act as a medium for the viewers? Because he feels that

it is obligatory on his part to share his valuable experience. Therefore he acts as an emissary to share his aesthetics experience.⁷ Since the ancient times in India the ultimate aim of human being was Moksha (salvation). Indian artists made immense contribution by helping the spectator to experience the internal divine beauty rather than the external exquisiteness of god. Indian intellectuals felt that instead of delineating a perfect physique, such an image should be executed which will lead to the betterment of humanity.⁸ Therefore since the very conventional times in India, whenever the artists preferred a symbolic structure or theme in religion, the main contemplation or endeavor was to articulate internal consciousness rather than outer precision. It was neither their tendency nor their aim to portray human body in ideal proportion or anatomy.⁹ “Because an artistic endeavor is not only the execution of a superior art piece with miscellany of stone, wood or colour but material which has evolved as a mentally glimmering shared catalyst. This idea of terming an aesthetic attempt as a mentally scintillating shared incitement is the foundation of all Indian aesthetic pursuit.”¹⁰ As the true purpose of art is aesthetic ecstasy, this aesthetic experience transforms human beings completely.¹¹

Indian artists followed these art norms from their heart not from their intellect. It was more important to connect an image to people’s heart. Hence Indian artist is considered an equivalent to a sage because such artists have created a form of god in the minds of people.¹² Indian artisans have depicted Indian mythology through the ideal perception of pantheon of gods. Most of the Indian deities have been delineated with multiple arms and heads. Goddess Kali is executed in a fearsome form (fig. 1). She has been portrayed with her tongue lolling out, red protruding eyes, carrying a bowl of blood in her hands along with a number of arms and the body of devil underneath. But even this frightening image has an affirmative aspect for her devotees as she had put an end to the power of evil. Kali epitomizes the end of damnable energy. This image of goddess Kali enthalls her devotees and gives them a feeling of being protected. In the same way lord Ganesha has a head of elephant. God Hanuman has been delineated as monkey god. Lord Brahma has four heads and four arms.

The sporadic depiction of a deity with multiple heads and arms is often done to represent the diverse aspects of the Almighty’s disposition. Similarly when god Shiva is revealed having triple heads, it betokens his intrinsic personality and ‘flaking faces’ depict his ferocious and ecstatic countenance.¹³ Indian hieratic art treats representation as an instrument of liturgy and sanctified empathy. The deities of Vishnu and Siva represent endurance of spiritual exposure. God Vishnu, symbolized with four hands, holds conch shell, helm, mace and lotus symbols (fig. 2). His four hands delineate four progression eras. The four symbols connote sound, motion, law and purity. An ardent disciple of god Vishnu venerates him as icon of ‘psycho-cosmic’ worth. God Siva betokens annihilation through which ‘psycho-cosmic’ verve endures new revival.¹⁴ This delineation of different gods and goddesses has nothing to do with human anatomy. But this perception of ideal anatomy is accepted more by people due to their significant contribution.



Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Goddess Kali and God Vishnu by Raja Ravi Verma.

Sources: <https://images.fineartamerica.com/images/artworkimages/mediumlarge/3/goddess-kali-rama-ravi-varma>, <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/51/75/f9/5175f93665489302073a9f99f055574b.jpg>.

Therefore, in Indian art, beauty is something symbolic, so in the delineation of figures denotative proportion has been used. In Indian context the meaning of exquisiteness has been inner breath (prana). This distinctive connotation of beauty is not only confined to India as innumerable illustrious philosophers around the world have given different concepts of beauty with the same essence. Emerson says that beauty is God's signature. According to Kant, beauty is undistinguished definition of joy. Beauty is in the mind of the beholder and not in the object.¹⁵ Kant also said that something that is a component of celestial delight is beautiful. Beauty or aesthetic creation has these stages: "Impressions, Expressions and combination of spiritual and aesthetic pleasures".¹⁶ According to Hegel aesthetic refers to the beauty of the art and not the natural elegance. He feels that religion is not incomprehensible but a way to illuminate the mind.¹⁷

The salvation has been the focus of traditional Hinduism so whatever they did throughout their life span was aimed at deliverance. Hence, Indian art has been given the name of sadhana (meditation) which is an endeavour by the mortals to attain their ideal goals. The Hindus don't sense any discord between the quest of aesthetic delectation and refinement of morality.¹⁸ In fact if we concentrate on ancient Indian art we find that all forms of art have been actually a medium of meditation. Especially the relief sculpture of Bharhut, Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh) and Amaravati Stupas (Andhra Pradesh), Ajanta cave Paintings, sculptures of Ellora caves (Maharashtra) and the Golden period of Indian art (Gupta Period) has been a potent example of meditation. These artists used to be more like saints. Their sole motive was to expand their religion with true dedication totally devoid of any selfish motive. Here art was kindred to emotions of a common man and it has been a specific characteristic of Indian sculpture.

Buddha idols sculpted during this period reflect a live experience which is also called inner breath or prana. When a person comes in a contact of these sculptures, then he also becomes a part of deep mystical meditation. Famous sculpture 'Buddha preaching the first sermon from Sarnath' (fig.3) is world renowned due to this particular characteristic. 'Buddha Subduing the Maddened Elephant' (fig.4) is another example of Indian artists' dexterity which proliferate the glory of Buddha. A mad elephant bow in front of Buddha immediately seeing His grandeur. Indian art does have a spiritual aspect other than entertainment and adornment.

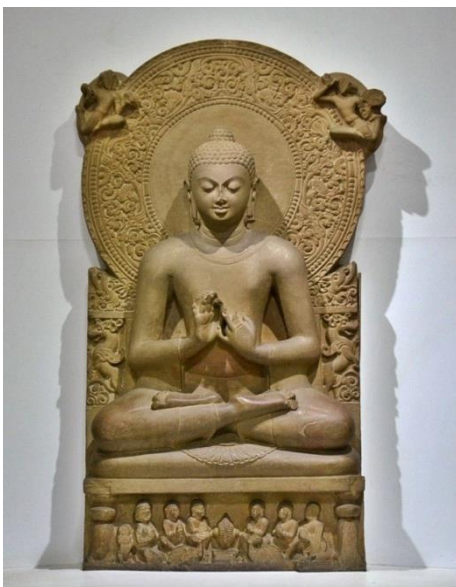


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Preaching Buddha from Sarnath and Buddha Subduing the Maddened Elephant from Amaravati School.

Sources: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddha_Preaching_his_First_Sermon_\(Sarnath\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddha_Preaching_his_First_Sermon_(Sarnath)),

<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/b5/08/24/b50824ac030924064c3f354e7a13025a---in-buddhist-art.jpg>

Indian art was truly a form of contemplation. Consequently this art had a unique blend of aesthetic values and mysticism. This exclusive art form used to leave a deep affirmative religious impact on the masses. This form

of art was created with reverent feelings. So no artefact bears the name or stamp of any artist. The true followers of religion were completely dedicated to their art for the service of religion. Indian art is incomplete without the religious ambience. It does not have a distinct entity from the profound epigenetic and hypothetical motives that encourage it. Therefore Indian artists did not use the art only for embellishment and entertainment but also for a specific objective. So it is believed that in India, religion and art were born concurrently. It originated in a globe infused with profoundly spiritual atmosphere whose infinite accretion of hues is the basis of Indian ethnicity.

Consequently, it is almost impractical to detach these metaphors from holy milieu that allows these similes for the artistic idea of the artist which is escorted by a reason always other than merely a creative. Indian artist always tries to perform as an arbitrator amid the ordinary and phenomenal mind. The bond between art and religious belief might amalgamate.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Art has been actually a basic need of a human being since the times when he used to be a caveman, he cannot survive in a insensible society in the absence of art. Art has always linked man to humanity and religion. So man raised himself above the nature to create ideal forms of gods and goddesses through his own perception. Such a delineation of art could be done only by such artisan who had gained power from yoga meditation and a metaphysical thought. Art also makes a human being enlightened and edifies him a lesson of ethics. Indian painters employed art for a specific purpose in addition to aesthetic enhancement and pleasure. It was only through art that the man could rouse his spiritualism and he moved towards moksha consequently he could attain both beauty and bliss simultaneously. The subtle metaphysical and sacred perspectives have broadened their roots not only up to Indian art but also have efficaciously influenced and propel diverse artisans. Both religion and art have been primarily momentous facts of civilization.

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