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ART AND RELIGION: CONCEPT OF EARLY INDIAN ART THROUGH AGES

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Abstract: The origin of Indian art can be traced to prehistoric settlement in the 3rd millennium BC. The distant past when there was no paper or language or the written word, and therefore no books or written document, is called as the Prehistoric period. Religion was not the sole purpose of this era. But after the prehistoric times of India, the central idea of art remained religious conviction. India has always been drawing foreign countries towards it due to its wealth and beautification. Consequently exotic cultures and art started flourishing here. Art and religion took birth simultaneously in Indian tradition. The role played by religion right from the emergence of art is still the same because both art and religion are an integral part of each other.

Key Words: Indian Art, Religion, Artist, Society, Tradition.

Introduction: The origin of Indian art can be traced to prehistoric settlement in the 3rd millennium BC. The distant past when there was no paper or language or the written word, and therefore no books or written document, is called as the Prehistoric period. Paintings and drawings were the oldest art forms experienced by human beings to articulate themselves using the cave wall as their canvas. Subject of early works confines to simple human figures, human activities, geometric designs and symbols. In India, remnants of rock paintings have been found on the walls of caves located in several districts of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Bihar and Uttarakhand. On its way to modern times, Indian

art has had cultural ascendancy, as well as religious impact such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Islam. In spite of this complex mixture of religious traditions, generally, the prevailing artistic style at any time and place has been shared by the major religious groups (emy.blogspot.com).¹

There was a long gap after pre historic (2700 B.C to 1500 B.C) period in India. Religion was not the sole purpose of this era. But after the prehistoric times of India, the central idea of art remained religion. Buddhism emerged and maintained its primacy in India for centuries. As a result, Buddhism lingered on as the main subject matter of art till the 11th C.A.D. Even after that, art was wholly concerned with religion which was basically inspired by Hinduism. Buddha was born in 5th century B.C. Before his arrival there was not much stress on religion in India. The Buddhist followers propagated Buddhism not only in India but also in neighbouring countries. Beautiful examples of art have been found in Maurayan period. Buddhism was the main subject matter from Maurayan art (3rd century B.C.) to Pala miniature (7th Century. A.D.). Mauryan Emperor Ashoka wanted to propagate Buddhism on a large scale at a very quick pace. So he got monuments, pillars, relief sculptures made. The Maurayan art in India was the first form of art initiated exclusively for religion. *Jataka* stories known as pre birth stories of Buddha are also delineated. Right from Buddha's meditation stage like *Buddhisatva*, all major events of Buddha's life of early stage of meditation to become a Buddha have been executed beautifully. The main component of India i.e. Hinduism was also moving simultaneously along with Buddhism. In reality Buddhism was also an offshoot of Hinduism. Buddha belonged to a Hindu family. He wanted the common people to understand humanity on an intellectual level and to adopt this pious religion. But after his demise, his followers gave this religion an entirely new entity.

India's trade relations with other countries and the attacks by the foreign invaders had begun even before the Maurayan Empire or during the Maurayan Empire. As a result different cultures and art styles were also established in India. India has always been drawing foreign countries towards it due to its wealth and beautification. Consequently exotic cultures and art started flourishing here.² The best example of this trend is Kushana dynasty whose king Kanishka was mesmerized by Indian art. He came to India to establish his kingdom and he made an immense contribution to Indian and Buddhist art. His efforts have been given him the name of "Second Ashoka". Kanishka was a foreigner and the artisans who had followed him to India had instinctive foreign art in them. The Kushan art was highly influenced by Greek or Roman art. It had adopted

the style of Greek art to a large extent. All the artifacts executed during the reign of Kushana had a deep impact of Greek art and this technique of art has been given the name 'Greco Roman'.³

Buddha has been portrayed with moustache and an entirely different hairdo, not as shown in previous sculptures of Indian period with curly or snail shell hair. His wide open eyes don't show any aspects of meditation. It seems as if he is a dominating king communicating to his subjects. The prominent characteristic of Indian sculptures in Sarnath sculpture is Inner Breath or *prana* which was completely lacked by Kushana art. But still this art form tried its best to Indianise itself. These sculptures had a good quality. The presentation of Buddha in Kushan art has been unparalleled so far. Since that very era, other art forms and activities too have been entering India. The paramount example of foreign art is Mughal art which was basically Persian art. Babur established both his empire as well as supremacy in India. Gradually his successors especially Akbar and Jahangir beautified this distant art by blending it with Indian art so much that this Mughal art became one of the most prominent Indian art forms.

These foreign art forms also brought the language, thoughts, beliefs, culture and aspirations of their soul but still India accepted these art forms whole heartedly. The principles of ancient Indian art forms discussed in Upanishads and Vedas worked as binding force in all art forms including Indian as well as foreign art forms. We can say that this inherent sublimation served the purpose of a 'golden thread' in Indian art. Indian art has a specific objective i.e. to propagate religion. This theory has been of supreme importance among all the principles of art.⁴

The artists of ancient times were mostly religious persons so they had a complete knowledge of *Shastras* and *Puranas* (theological scriptures). According to the *Shastras*, whenever the subject of personification of god & goddesses came under consideration, the artists were under instructions to concentrate or meditate at first and then to research the form or image of the subject under consideration.⁵ In fact art and religion took birth simultaneously in Indian tradition. The role played by religion right from the emergence of art is still the same because both art and religion are an integral part of each other. Art is the rudiment for evangelizing the religion and religion moulds the art. Right from the beginning, giving an image to religion icons has been an incredible specialty of the intellectuals.⁶ When an artist of holy inclination comes to know the artistic interests of the people, he tries to make use of the same images, motifs of their interest and try to create a religious bent in the subconscious mind of the people in the very language of the people, because only

religion brings forth the tender feelings reside in it.⁷ These artists made immense contribution to the propagation of particular religion.

An artist can be considered a true creator when he is fully successful in leaving an impact on the viewers. Only that creation will be entitled as a 'work of art' which is able to give the people, the enviable fruition. The artist is the only person through whom the thought can be easily conveyed to the people. However, the question arises as to why the artist takes responsibility to establish contact with the viewers? In fact, many artists feel that it is their ethical responsibility to convey to other people their valuable experience. In other words it can be said that in order to give the aesthetic experience to the viewers that he had, the artist acts like a messenger. 'A painted canvas or a carved stone has so much power that it awakens an aesthetic experience in a willing viewer'.⁸ This 'aesthetic experience' changes the complete personality of a human being because the real goal of art is aesthetic joy.⁹ The society and the artist along with its aesthetic elements, plays an important role in social service. This beauty of his art piece is not based on external form. It is not essential that the piece of art or inspiring element of art should have superficial beauty. The necessary part is that the beauty which the artist conceives during the execution of the art piece and the viewer or the beholder experiences thereafter, this state is called aesthetic experience.

For Hegel, aesthetics means beauty of art and not the natural exquisiteness. For him, religion is not basically inexplicable, but is a means to enlighten the mind. A real artist is one who gives expression to sentiments in an unambiguous manner. An executor of a work of art is called its inventor and when a viewer gazes at that piece of art, he becomes its 'co-creator'. In this way, the artistic creation becomes the common creation of both the executor and the viewer.¹⁰ An artistic endeavor is not only merely a 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.

Art can provide a usually comprehensible artistic-religious terminology that will facilitate the diverse religions to transcend the barrier that divide them. Such an expression of art signs will of course draw on the insight of both art and religion, because art cannot subjectively enforce its own symbols upon religion. The supportive impact of art and religion on social issues widen beyond art's role as the transmitter of those ethics that the artist perceives through the influence of religion. Art contributes its own aesthetic values; in fact the values that are simply conveyed through art images-benevolence, justice, love are so personified in

the form and feeling and rich sumptuous formation of the art work that these carried values are enhanced by the aesthetic values of the art formation in which they are presented. Religion and art have from the beginning taken a major place in human experience. They are certainly, two of the mainly significant facts of civilization, and no nation has failed to develop art forms and religious rites or beliefs. One considerable way in which art can cooperate with religion is by acting as the means of mutual respect and appreciation among the various religions.¹¹ Religion is the way of life in India. Upshot of religion can be seen on the faith, philosophy and existence of community. It is even replicate in the diverse approach of Indian paintings. It would not be wrong to presume that profound spiritual and holy viewpoint have extended their roots till Indian art and effectively influenced and motivated various artists.

Conclusion: The artists of ancient times were mostly religious persons so they had a complete knowledge of *Shastras* and *Puranas* (theological scriptures). According to the *Shastras*, whenever the subject of personification of god & goddesses came under consideration, the artists were under instructions to concentrate or meditate at first and then to research the form or image of the subject under consideration. Art can provide a usually comprehensible artistic-religious terminology that will facilitate the diverse religions to transcend the barrier that divide them. . Religion and art have from the beginning taken a major place in human experience. They are certainly, two of the mainly significant facts of civilization, and no nation has failed to develop art forms and religious rites or beliefs. Religion is the way of life in India. Upshot of religion can be seen on the faith, philosophy and existence of community.

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