

Harmonizing heritage: Indian traditions in contemporary art practices

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ABSTRACT

The history of art is the history of different types of visual perception and the different ways of looking at creation or nature by human beings. The principle of happiness derived from the arts plays the role of a mirror and it makes us realize the truth. For centuries, arts have been the best medium of communication and at the same time, art has also served to preserve the major moments of history in itself. Art existed before words and arts have made a very important contribution to know the history of civilization and culture of any Nation. There is a kind of life-giving force in the arts which has the ability to bind society and nature together. Living in society, when we feel that art has gone off its surface and when society starts expressing its inability to go along with it or accept it, so such art cannot become a part of any history or philosophy. In recent years, what is known as postmodern or contemporary art has withdrawn from its surface faster than ever before. Due to the variety of complex non-traditional means and materials to communicate with society through this art, art seems to go completely beyond its path. Whereas Indian arts have flourished for a long time by preserving various traditions and *Sanatani* culture of their society. Indian arts have made their significant contribution in various fields such as religion, knowledge, art, music, architecture and science.

Keywords: *Communication, Society, Postmodern, Non-traditional, Sanatani Culture.*

Introduction

जंबूद्वीपे भारतखंडे आर्याव्रत देशांतर्गते.....
अमुक स्थाने..... अमुक नामे..... अमुक गोत्रे..... ।

In the Indian *Sanatani* tradition, worship begins with the reading of this verse (*Shaloka*), which shows that a person living in *Jambudwip* is taking a pledge of his worship by sitting in a particular place. *Jambudwip* is used for today's Eurasia. In this

Jambudwip, the *Bharat-khand* is called *Aryavarta*. An important reason for the famous culture of this *Aryavarta* is its diversity which is also visible in it. The vast landmass from *Hindesia* to Central Asia has been dominated by Indian arts. The culture here has also made its mark in regions like North and South America, Europe, Asia and Africa.

Art has been a vessel of culture. The human and juicy elements pervading the various dimensions of Indian *Sanatani* culture have been manifested in its art forms. Creativity is the soul of art. Rasa or pleasure unites us from the physical to the conscious. Art highlights the diverse emotions of human beings and through them consciousness. While the root of consciousness is considered to be 'rasa', there is joy and taste, which art evokes. While Indian *Sanatani* arts have a scientific and technical basis on the one hand, on the other hand they always keep emotion and rasa as life element. To know Indian art, it is very important to know the *Vedas*, *Upavedas*, *Shastras*, *Puranas*, archaeology and ancient literature.

This virtuous land belongs to Lord Shri Ram, who is called *Maryada Suryavanshi*, with 12 kalas, and the sun also has only 12 arts. Similarly, Shri Krishna was a *Chandra Vanshi*, which is equipped with 16 kalas and we know that the moon also has 16 kalas. According to the *Upanishadas*, a person with 12 arts of Lord Rama or 16 arts of Shri Krishna is considered equivalent to God. In the *Sanatani* tradition, in which even their adorable gods are described as skilled in the arts, every art created in that tradition is superior to the one who believes in the welfare of the society.

Arts have been an integral part of culture. Arts have their own language. Whatever we all see in the society around us, we want to express it through some art or the other. Whether it is the shade of clouds in the sky or scattered colors of the sun, river, mountain or waterfall, a painter decorates it through colors. The chirping of birds, the melodious scenes of nature is decorated by a lyricist in his vocals and a dancer decorates the emotions of his mind in different postures.

One important thing is that since ancient times all arts were related to folk arts. As society became aware, the relation of arts became associated with business and the arts became person-centric. By the medieval period, the arts went under the shelter and protection of kings and were bound by classical rules. *Shastra* gave the form of a classical art to painting, music, dance and performing arts. At the same time, folk arts remained fully connected to their roots, and today only those art forms are able to develop whose roots reside in the world, whether it is music, painting, dance or acting. The harmony between classical and folk arts is their strength. With the continuous cycle of time, even though the cultures of many countries of the world such as Sumerian, Assyrian, Babylonian of Mesopotamian, Egypt, Greece, Iran and Rome were absorbed in the cheek of time, but the existence of Indian *Sanatani Sanskriti* is still safe and even after being mostly destroyed due to many attacks of nature and human cruelty, the stores of Indian art that remained are still famous all over the world. These arts, the carriers of *Sanatan Sanskriti*, have some of their own characteristics, due to which the flags of their fame are still waving all over the world.

Antiquity

The history of Indian art is very ancient. The earliest examples of Indian painting date back to prehistoric times when man used to draw on the rocky walls of caves. The language of communication of human beings of this time was painting. The paintings of thousands of years old Bhimbetka caves are the best example of this. From prehistoric times, Indian painters had learned to make beautiful paintings of wild animals, reindeer, bear, elephant, deer, buffalo, goat, sheep and hunters and depicted them very beautifully on the rocky walls of caves.

Primacy of religion

Indian arts have been religion-oriented rather than culture-oriented. In the true sense, religion has been the basis of Indian arts. Indian arts have always been animated by religious as well as spiritual feelings. For this reason, Indian art can also be called the guide of

ordinary life. Here art was not art for art's sake, but it gave importance to the realization of the Self, so that one becomes oriented towards the Absolute. Indian architecture, sculpture, music, dance, drama and painting have been propounded from the core of philosophy based on religious beliefs, ideas and traditions.

Artist as a *yogi* or *sadhak*

Just as a *yogi*, having attained the state of meditation or *sadhana*, realizes the expanse of inner and outer nature by sitting in one place, so the Indian painter expresses the vastness of many times and places from one place through which he brings his creation to the Earth, The sky and Hades are combined together as imagery. Unlike Western artists, he is not confined to one visible aspect or visual periphery of the scene or figure, but he has always opened the eyes of the mind and adopted the celestial vision and presented a story or event completely on the same canvas like the Creator of the universe.

Philosophy

Indian arts have been a symbol of eternal truth because they have always been manifesting the spirit of *Satyam*, *Shivam*, *Sundaram*. In Indian art, more primacy was given to inner and spiritual beauty along with external beauty. The Indian artist made tireless efforts to express spiritual experiences and establish philosophical truth in society. The best artist based on *Parmarth Satya* has the power to embody the Supreme Truth through the posture, posture, gesture of his work. The bronze statue of *Cholayugin Nataraja* Shiva is a very beautiful example of this. This work presents a brief representation of the principles of *Shaiva* philosophy to the entire world by incorporating the five actions of creation, state, destruction, *tirobhava* and grace in the dance of Shiva.

The harmony and idealism of non-human nature

The Indian artist has always considered the conscious and unconscious world as an integral part of creation, which is visible in his works in a different form of human and natural world. The representation of human and supernatural divine powers, the coordination of man and woman, hardness and hoarseness, softness

and purity, etc., many opposing and complementary elements are found in Indian painting. In the form of Goddess Durga, the combination of womanhood, motherhood, purity, valor, and tenderness and in the form of Ganesha, Hanuman, Garuda etc. is shown the coordination of human, animal and bird. Along with this, many ornaments in the background of the paintings have been depicting natural vegetation, trees, plants, flowering leaves, etc.

Symbolism

The theme is expressed or sounded by Indian arts. Over time, its basic purpose has been not merely to create beauty but to create something absolute. Indian arts have been inspired by the inspiration of religion based on the basic principles of philosophy. That is why in the arts of India, more importance was given to symbolism than grossness. For example, the swan symbolizes God, the sign of the swastika symbolizes the sense of welfare in life, the duality of religion and karma, the dynamics of time and the continuous flow of life as a symbol of the cycle. Apart from this, there are many examples, on which it appears that Indian art has been full of symbolism.

Traditionalism

Indian arts have mainly developed from traditional styles. But this does not mean that the art here became static, without development, only morphological. To be based on traditions means to create a kind of discipline and orderliness. Be it music, dance, drama, painting, literature or architecture, Indian artists were immersed in the creation of works by getting inspiration from *samadhi* and meditation while studying the traditional rules of a particular proportion and style.

Public commitment

Through Indian arts, the artist has always reflected the holistic life of the people. The artist made the activities occurring in the society and other contemporary topics the subject matter of his creation and fulfilled his responsibility towards the society very well. Indian artists have played a very significant role in making every subject matter obtained from nature useful to the society.

Anonymous art

Another great feature of Indian art craftsmen is that they kept their name and identity mostly secret and gave more importance to creation than to the creator. The experience expressed by most of India's artifacts is universal and universal. That is why no one knows the name of the painters of Ajanta, the sculptors of Ellora and Elephanta, while those paintings and sculptures are appreciated all over the world.

Modern Indian painting

When we talk about modern Indian arts, we all know what was the contribution of Bengal School of Art in the freedom movement to bring *Swaraj*. The famous leader Abanindranath Tagore, who led the 'Bengal School of Art' in the field of art, created a portrait of 'Bharat Mata' (Figure-1) which became established as the image of Mother Nation. At the same time, Sister Nivedit, inspired by the speeches of Swami Vivekananda, awakened a sense of pride in Indian science, history, art, religion and literature and launched a movement to revive Indian art with Ananda Kumar Swami and E. V. Havel to challenge the western prejudice that Indian art is influenced by Greek art. We are not unaware of the work done by the paintings of Nandlal Bose to awaken the society. He expressed the spirit of *Swadeshi* through his art.



Fig. 1: Bharat Mata
Abanindranath Tagore

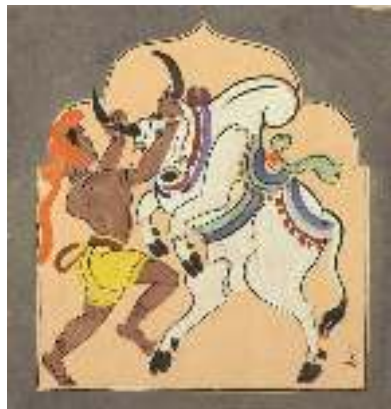


Fig. 2: Bull Handler
Nandlal Bose

Nandlal Bose opposed foreign paper and rendered his paintings using handmade indigenous paper. Together with his proficient disciples, he prepared a series of paintings through which he worked to awaken the soul of Indian life.

In South India, Raja Ravi Varma depicted Hindu gods, *Pauranik* scenes and Indian life through paintings and the paintings were reproduced from printing presses and distributed in homes across the country in the form of posters and calendars. In this transition period, the classical art on the basis of which the arts were being created was tried to be stopped for political reasons only because many new groups had started to flourish before us and that art form has also faltered and has become almost dormant at present. From this time onwards, the subjects and mediums of art were changing suddenly, and at the same time the artist became personal and started tampering with art and culture by pretending to freedom of expression.

Period of independence and art

During the period of independence, there was a stir in the field of Indian art and art had now reached the era of art churning and contemplation. In the art of this period, the orthodox tradition did not have the same place as intellectualism or logic. Traditions have been universally respected in Indian ancient art and blind imitation was not given much importance until modern times. Even before the period of independence of India, through the English education system, the arts here have been proved to be the art of tribal and backward areas, and they have been described as beyond the usefulness of that time. By the 1940s, new ideas began to flow freely in India and many artists took the new tendencies of Western art styles to realism, surrealism, totalitarian, constructivist, impressionist, expressionist and progressive tendencies in their works and Indian traditional styles began to be despised. The artists of this period showed their faith in the present and created art by absorbing the fascinating form of the present of the Western art world. Groups of artists began to form at many places and gradually Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi became the main centers which established their supremacy with independence.

When we talk about the present, we find that the expression in Indian arts is becoming psychological, symbolic and complex, which has become a big challenge for today's art lovers. There is an urgent need to understand or use symbols to understand contemporary art. Contemporary abstract art is becoming beyond the comprehension of the common man. Due to the ambiguity of the artworks, the viewer is not able to assimilate it. Contemporary art is becoming a language whose meaning is not found in the dictionary, but in order to taste it, the viewer must also have knowledge of traditional and contemporary art.

Indian contemporary art

The identity of any civilization has been identified only by its art and culture. In whatever period an art is created, all the arts of that period are called contemporary art. The art that provides pleasure to man in life is truly called art. The importance of arts in Indian thought can be known by studying the Natyashastra written by Bharatamuni, where he has clearly written:

“न तज्ज्ञानं न तच्छिल्पं, न सा विद्या न सा कला”

अर्थात् ऐसा कोई ज्ञान नहीं, कोई शिल्प नहीं, कोई विद्या नहीं, जो कला न हो।

Contemporary means moving with the times. What was formerly called modern art is currently defined as contemporary art. The art of continuous new experimentation is also referred to as contemporary. If you look at the works of young artists who are currently struggling, you find that they are facing amazing complexities. The meaning of contemporaneity is different for every person. Some consider abstraction as contemporary art, some as new experiments and some as non-formalism. The arts have always been contemporary, which automatically becomes ancient with the passage of time. The connoisseurs of Indian culture also believe that contemporaneity is not an ism, nor has the arts ever been uplifted in India with the help of art ism. The concept of ism has been flourishing in western countries so that all of us have also studied it in Indian art education and moving from freedom to independence, many art colleges have been established in this

period and we have all been carrying art education based on western system.

Emerging in early 1990s, contemporary Indian Art is characterized by a rise in postmodernist practices based in performance, video, installation and digital media, in addition to traditional disciplines such as painting and sculpture. Experiments with these new mediums are often the results cross-pollination and collaborations across varied artistic fields such as film, fashion, theater and animation. The movement originated with India's economic liberalization of 1991, and saw a boom period in early 2000s.

The careers and interests of many contemporary Indian art practitioners that began in the 1990s and 2000s have been shaped by the increased presence of private institutions, rapid technological shifts of the information age and the demands of a globalised art market. Indian art received little global attention until the economic liberalization in the 1990s, which resulted in increased interactions and participation of foreign curators, collectors and art institutions in Indian art. New galleries, art fairs and artist residencies have also provided spaces for contemporary art theory to interact with the history of art. The boom period of the early 2000s saw a surge in Indian art sales to foreign collectors through Indian galleries and auction houses like Saffronart, which expanded the Indian collections of foreign institutions and boosted the careers of many living artists.

Figure 3 is a sculpture made by Bihar born, Delhi based artist Subodh Gupta. He is a painter, photographer and sculptor and his most frequently used subjects are steel cooking utensils, pots and tiffins. He creates dense compositions with a profusion of these shiny objects or more carefully composed still lives which brilliantly express their intrinsic shapes and surfaces often presented on a monumental scale.

Figure 4 is a painting made by Bombay based artist Vasudev Kamath. In this painting, Vasudev Kamath has shown Shri Krishna surrounded by monkeys. Krishna's hands and body are tied with

ropes and the monkey is giving them to the butter pot while the other monkeys are speculating while eating butter.



Fig. 3: The Yellow Sparrows
Subodh Gupta



Fig. 4: Krishna with Monkey
Vasudev Kamath



Fig. 5: Origin of Saraswati
Nand Lal



Fig. 6: Pahari Couple
Nand Lal

Figure 5 and 6 are created by Dr. Nand Lal, Assistant Professor, Himachal Pradesh University, using acrylic colors on canvas. Figure - 5 shows the origin of the Saraswati river from the snowy

Himalayas where the river flows from the mountains to reach the plains, showing the emergence of a civilisation. Based on the theme of the Indus Saraswati civilization, this painting is a beautiful example of postmodern art.

Figure 6 depicts a pahari couple with a young man wearing a pahari cap playing the flute while a young woman is depicted in her flute adoring a mesmerized goat with a contemporary theme. In the background of the painting, the artist has depicted a group of men women performing the pahari dance and playing the instruments.

Conclusion

There is an urgent need today to preserve traditional arts and promote contemporary arts as they are an essential component of Indian culture and heritage. There is a need to give equal importance to traditional art along with contemporary art of any nation. Both the streams can move simultaneously otherwise a tree without roots can never stand on the ground. Traditional arts are our roots, without nurturing them, contemporary arts can never develop. Cultural and religious traditions here have largely been shaped and transferred from generation to generation due to creative forms. Traditional arts have also influenced all cultural expressions such as literature, music and dance besides helping to shape Indian creative techniques and styles. India's art often displays motifs and symbols that have deep cultural and spiritual significance. It is only spiritually refined that an artist is able to create abstract art, while the future generation is engaged in emphasizing on creating new without understanding the classical arts by considering abstract art as an easy medium of expression and a source of earning money without hard work. The arts which have been performed following the path of spirituality have always gained fame. Whether it is the ancient cave paintings found in every corner of the India or any contemporary artwork displayed in the current triennial, Biennale, National Art Exhibition, or India Art Fair, it is complete in itself only when it is accepted by the society. Bidding for art buyers and exaggerating them and selling them is like misleading the society. Whereas the true art seeker

does not create his art for the purpose of selling the artwork because the artist gives birth to any work by becoming a mother. Just as a mother loves a child born from her womb more than her life, in the same way an art seeker loves his work. He is not worried about the market whether his work will sell or not. He performs his art selflessly and when he gets any appreciation, he also sells that work at a fair price. The form of contemporary Indian painting is moving away from Indianness and based on the tradition of western creation technique. This is creating a serious problem for the future of Indian modern art. If this form of pictorial traditions continues to develop, the elements of Indian art philosophy will disappear in the future. Art will disappear from society and will be confined to intellectuals and artists only.

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