
SPIRITUALITY AND ART IN RELIGIOUS FORM

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ABSTRACT

Fine arts is expression of spirituality, art object has its soul through various elements which artist put together in harmony to achieve an aesthetic value in object. Fine arts as other art is valued for its blissful expression of beauty it possesses. This paper discusses why beauty is spiritual element in composition. What is the origin of this beauty? Though beauty is a vast loaded term with many meaning but it is gained through true knowledge of nature and science to establish a truth. Truth is the ultimate beauty, truth bring out beauty. Beauty is as transcendental as experiencing god, as it belongs to nature. Nature belongs to god and thus when this feeling of beauty is enjoyed in art work it becomes sacred and religious. In the context of sculptural art when true knowledge is combined with method and material used to create a form, form becomes mind, soul and body for the thoughts that artist want to associate with his work. It is artists will how he chooses to present his forms, it can be abstract form as seen in tantric art, realistic form as seen in religious worshipping art (temple art) or semi realistic as in totemic cults. Thus the art produced under the guidance of knowledge and truth is enriched by philosophical contents keeping the ethical surrounding in mind and thus imports consciously spectators mind into realm of transcendental world. Art at this stage becomes real as it is experienced for its truth.

Philosophers, Art critics, Artist define spirituality in various ways, commonly shared meaning by all writers is "a certain kind of activity through which a person seeks meaning, especially for sacred". In The Sacred canopy, Sociologist Peter Berg writes that "every human society is always engaged in world building" and adds that religion is always part of this enterprise. In the light of first definition, it is understood "in search of sacred meaning for life" spirituality does not limit itself merely adhering to religious practices, but in the same lines one also understand human engagement in religious beliefs to spiritualize. With modern times spirituality has encompassed within itself other area, to name one, aesthetic and art as different way to spiritualize. Thus, on the basis of these two definitions dealing with two different activities of human engagement as a way to spiritualize; spirituality is then divided into two parts- religious spirituality and non religious spirituality. To, define spirituality under religious context, it study focus of human mind towards faith in God a universal way/ customary/ traditional way where group of society response to particular faith, practices associated with religion to which they belong. Whereas, contemporary literature defining spirituality in non religious context concerns understanding the depth of human existence, understanding human identity and personal development totally as a personal experience for self that can be shared as a contribution for society welfare. In a more broader concern non religious spirituality is regularly linked to "thriving" and what it means to thrive, and how we thrive in society. The means to thrive are many, but in our concern we will focus on religious art, art and artist. Artist thrives through his engagement in creativity and society thrives on the product of his creativity. As we noted with time spirituality began to take under her various types, which ultimately dealt with releasing human mind from bondage and liberates his soul. Thus, artist also calls him religious when he finds bliss in executing beautiful form. Artist aesthetic (concerning beauty in art) is considered as one of the important way to spiritualize through creativity and beauty which relates to "the sublime" that relates to the sacred, truth and to integrity. Beauty and creativity here is not merely a matter of entertainment or sensual pleasure. Humans in search of meaningful life, that can be inculcated long with adherence to set of practices when set



to discover their self through “being with” artist producing religious art is answer to their life “thrive through art, live through god”. Artistic forms of religious significance thus rightly find reason to exist in society. But how do we thrive with art? Intelligent human know well Buddhist, Hindu, Jain sculptural art are representation of some meaningful episodes associated with particular faith, beliefs and concepts, which through their presence direct senses to choose a spiritualized moral life.

A note of caution in understanding spirituality, that has to be kept in mind rite from beginning that writers might have divide spirituality into various forms, just for the convenience of organization and study. We should not engage in making any precise distinction for amount of experience each type contributes, neither claim that religious spirituality can only brings the blissful experience. Spirituality brings equal experience, yes we can admit that, it can be more or less depending upon the psychological state of human being. Since ages, man has been leaving under the impulse of religious practices to maintain a harmony of body with cosmos and nature, of which we are products, so religion and religious forms is universal way to begin “spiritual development” and because of this reason religious forms becomes one of the valued way to spiritualize. Art forms of religious quality holds foremost importance as it reinforce Philosophical, traditional values of culture as a visual witness to those beliefs that still exist as living tradition in society. Art forms visualize a particular meaningful event imagined, it can be through text, through oral tradition; delineated in expressive form appropriate to thought, as impression of inner mind in static plastic forms. Being static they have power to web spectators mind in realm of their meaning through content for which they stand all operative under the context of society. Art represent alternate ways of knowing and thereby afford opportunity to develop and hone skill analogous to contemplation. Spirituality as experience of human consciousness be it under religious context (Yogic meditating, singing, praying, enchanting mantras) or non religious context (artist creativity) shares some similar concept, for them the very demand is to liberate body and soul from lustful life, bodily transformation through contemplation towards God, for personal growth, blissful experience or an encounter with one’s own “inner dimension”.

Thus spirituality is that transformation which human chooses according to his will, whose mind has awaken, thoughts are stirring body to live in a soul of conduct, whose bodies are turning towards “practice” to achieve meaning in life, to achieve God through good. Before art could be put to society judgment, we have to understand the spiritual cycle of art and artist in art form. Art and artist spiritual cycle is to be understood in light of Greek term “aesthetic” and whenever needed its comparison with, “ascetic spirituality” (a term frequently occurring for describing characteristic quality of spiritual person, who has acquired spirituality through hard practices) will be considered as both are forms that require “intense practice” to achieve desired form. Aesthetic refers to sensory perception and by extension, its contribution to the development of the imagination. To achieve beauty, art forms moves in cycle of their own, transportation and transformation of nature in forms is governed under guidance of rule to take spiritual birth. Artistic form takes their spiritual birth/ origin directly under the reference taken from nature, but what is this role of this nature and where it lies? The role of this nature is to begin the spiritual journey of beautiful art, Kant identify this source of nature within artist, to what he calls “genius” of mind. Kant adds “Genius,” is the talent(or natural gift) which gives the rule to art .Since talent, as innate productive faculty of the artist, belongs itself to nature, matter genius is thus innate mental disposition through which nature gives the rule to art. Genius mind can only operate when it has something for reference to produce beautiful at least in part, he is also consciously aware of where, he needs to look. He directs his senses towards faithful nature that exist outside the mind, that lies under the sky possessed by God. Ruskin praising “beauty in nature” which only genius mind can recognizes in “virgin nature, nature undisfigured by man,” because nature is only truly herself when nothing has done to travesty or deface her. “Beauty he says, is the signature of God upon his works”. If art would produce objects of beauty she must pattern upon the original. Nature alone



possess perfection, she is the supreme type and eternal model that's why artist when depicting body parts in Indian sculpture follow pictorial convention, taken directly inspired by nature i.e. the eyes like lotus pearl, the arching eyebrows like the Indian bow, the shoulders like the dome of the head of an elephant and the arms like an elephant's tapering trunk. Artist blend these elements in an intuitive way, to create an image which looks otherworldly. Here the devotional feelings of the artist becomes alive in the plastic form. Example of such devotion are Yakhis figures (FIG 1), Shiva Nataraja (FIG 2), Shalbhanjika (FIG 3). Artist adding influences from nature thus can be understood in Plotinus description of art as "manifestation of truly real, which is also truly beautiful". It is the embodiment of the one in the material form of this world, engendered by the activity of the artist's soul. He further states art is more real than natural object it may represent because of this participation of the artist's soul. A whole philosophical attitude is conceptualized and communicated in a direct manner. Creating beauty is thus held as a spiritual element, creativity employed to create beautiful is an intangible human capacity of a transcendental nature – it moves us beyond our self in a similar way spiritual soul towards God.

A beautiful body and beautiful art form never stands alone, it needs soul that can witness the purity of beauty whenever beauty is to be judged against ugly. But who brings light to soul. It is intellectual knowledge that lend eyes to soul, and knowledge is the seat of god, it flows from divine, thus soul is reflection of god in good beautiful form. Soul is held as most intelligent seat in form that recognizes itself with beauty from ancient knowledge, welcomes form and enters to unite with it. Soul by truth of its nature when sees anything of kinship it gets thrilled in its delight affiliate itself with kin, associate its being with kinship thus becoming supreme. It is supreme soul for which artist "practice" to bring outer expressions, supreme soul facilitates through ideal form, ideal in all respect, ideal because it can engage spectators for communication, ideal because it has grouped all abstract asymmetrical thought of artist and co-ordinate them into unity. Harmonized parts, coordinating simultaneously without any error of falling with ugly soul becomes beautiful for material, they can now communicate, their thoughts governing in them flows from divine. Soul inhabits in itself a peculiar faculty which acts immediately when beauty is to be judged in ideal form, within itself using this idea as canon of accuracy in its decision. Soul perceptive faculty discerns harmony, unity in ideal form that has controlled shapeless matter, united it and further present it to the "ideal principle".

Ideal principle act as a judge to both soul and beauty under the possession of "ideal principle" art has reached highest spiritual journey and there is no doubt of beauty falling with ugly, it has reached "sublime state". Art aspires to move higher and higher, at highest level it reach god, it reaches sublime. Sublime is the highest form of feeling in human, of experience that leaves body soul and goes to unite with god, once one come under direct influence of sublime now he need not to consciously align his mind with god it unconsciously unites with highest. Let's bring in another sculptural example from Indian art history that can help us understand what effort of artist spirituality is reflected in his spiritual sculptural form. Our example is "The form of Shiva Nataraja, lord of the dance" and artist has to depict Shiva doing cosmic dance of creating and destroying the universe and his two bodies destructive and creative has to be fused into one form". To depict essential details from story artist delineate Shiva's hairs flying wildly suggesting body in dancing rhythm to *damru* held in his upper right hand. Rhythm becomes heart beat for cosmos (*maya*), and it comes into being through the beneficent action of the creative dance. Abstract reality like cosmos is represented as ring encircling deity which springs from the fertile mouth of the *makaras* on the sculpture base. Complementing this moment of creation is the simultaneous destruction of cosmos, symbolized by the flames edging the circle and single flame held in the gods left hand symbolizing cosmos set on fire. Artist has depicted creative hand with drum and destructive hands of Shiva on a same level with slight variation. The lower hand offer solace to his devotes by performing the reassured *abhaya mudra* of benediction. The



blissing hand is further affirmed by the lower left hand's pose of *gaja hasta*. The "flag" position of the hand is formed by dropping the finger into an imitation of an elephant's trunk, here points to the left foot as it springs from the back of the dwarf of ignorance. This symbolic pose when viewed by devotees has power to release from the suffering of *maya*, while the right foot crushes with the full force of dance, the back of dwarf. Artist adds important interesting details to pose such as poisonous cobra in dwarf hand metaphorically suggesting an ornament to Shiva worn by him in his blessing right arm, goddesses *Ganga* received by him. Thus one can rightly compare hardship involved throughout artistic aesthetic process similar to ascetic spirituality both bodies put their energy to drive out unnecessary ugly, bad and dark from bodies to attain a garb of spirituality. Ugly elements in art are asymmetrical distracting thoughts, unharmonized parts such as unnecessary design detail, spirituality means to live with beautiful, as no one wants to live with ugly soul, artist will never want his art to be ugly. Ugly soul is dead soul, full of greed, cowardice but also brings death to the art, dirty soul is friend of unclean pleasure. Artist focusing to bring out beautiful in art object, thus condition his body and mind to learning with knowing self and then identifying that learning with god. Thus our one concern of spirituality in fine art has to be understood in this relation of artist to god, through form. Spirituality thus is held as a highest "motivational force" of will; assist cognitive, effective thought, spirit and soul pushes body in upward domination of intellect learning. Another example to understand "motivational force" through visual example is Buddhist art during Asoka period is witness to King's developmental journey to spiritualize, penetrating him in study of Buddha *Dharma*, to the love of *Dharma*, to the inculcation of *Dharma* and distanced him from homicide after devastated Kalinga war. During his phase of change and realization, impact of spreading *Dharma* was so profound, it journeyed beyond border everywhere dictating messages of *Dharmavijaya* through missionaries, through art based on life and teachings of Buddha *Dharma*. Along these lines, one notes line of similarity, artist is spiritualizing by dedicated his art to society and king Ashoka is living with art, art remains central to both in spiritualizing. Till now we have been engaged in tracing the hardship of artist to bring out soul in art, but who is the speaker for artist's soul art or society, its first art and then society. How? "Inner vision" operates here, it trains (form) soul to remark noble pursuit of another soul (artist), forms soul speaks of beauty produced not by the labourers of art but by the virtue of men known for their goodness; and those in search of soul in form must also search the soul of those that have shaped these beautiful forms. But how are you to see a virtuous soul and know its loveliness? Withdraw into yourself and look, and if you do not find beautiful yet, act as the creator of statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So, do you also cut all that is excessive, bring light to that is divine, labour to make all shine out from it the godlike splendor of virtue, until you see the perfect goodness shining with divine light, spreading radiant light in mind of those who know the purpose who knows the aesthetic of life. Artist through his forms makes relation with the society, as mentioned in beginning. Spirituality also concerns with "what are means to thrive, and artist states "thrive through art, thrive through God".

Religious art forms operate as language of cultural past tradition handed down through stories, epics, scriptures, songs and its meaning in present is governed by "cultural adherence to its value". The deeper spiritual connection artist makes concerns with society to keep tradition alive or to revive the faith. Art will always function as a response to human concern of life experience and ideas. In cultured cultural life reminds us we are spiritual creatures, whether through religion or secular practices. How are we actually engaged through art to spiritualize? Artistic expression through its content provides opening for spiritual discussion, visual as a part of the spiritual process, validates the search for meaning and understanding the mysteries of "being". Art thus fulfills demand of every religious community be it Hinduism, Buddhism or Jainism. One directing his sight on Buddhist sculpture "The Buddha preaching the law" will direct his engagement with his yogic pose, seated in *Dharma Chakra Mudra*. His Sanghati as a



dress of saint, two heavenly beings celebrating the miracle of the sermon at Sarnath and below six devotes paying homage to "the wheel" symbolizing doctrine of Dharma, solar disk ancient symbol for supreme deity and for knowledge, behind Buddha image one also sees two lions symbolizing regal roar and authority of Buddha's message. Society when engage in meaning making of such elements in composition finds themselves in soul of divine, they had got the meaning of life which they were searching, understand develops moral conduct. Their mind has stirred in the light of spiritual knowledge, now setting themselves in dharma through teaching of Buddha in his message of Noble truth elaborating knowing the pervasive reality of suffering - material craving as cause of suffering, the possibility of overcoming suffering by true understanding and proper discipline and finally pursuing an eight fold path towards the cessation of suffering to attain Nirvana. Nirvana is not an encounter with a transcendental God but the absence of all separate identity, and thus the achievement of ultimate tranquility through becoming an accurate reflection of our nature. Buddhist teaching of Eightfold Path further consist in right understanding; right thought, free from craving, right speech free from lying, malicious gossip; right action by avoiding killing, stealing, and all misconduct; right living by not only using the wrong mean; right effort by striving to purify oneself from evil thoughts. Buddhist seeks to reach nirvana through a combination of moral behavior, concentration, and wisdom. Sensory experience comes from beautiful forms, Carl Jung describing art states images are expression of deep human experience and our authentic self. They are the natural and primary language for the psyche and only secondarily do we move to conceptual thought. Jung saw images as clue to the unlived life that moves toward some form of outward expression and urges other to look at the image of their life in symbolic way so as to reveal deeper meaning and their fuller, more authentic selves. The art help us to access this storehouse of images within our self and create a sense of meaning.

Art is thus feeling of divine sensuality, that first consciously activate self, places self/soul with divine, or feels divine entering him, having fused one with another there goes mind near and near; lost in senses of that beautiful, that ineffable that is the sanctuary of transcendental force. It is artist aesthetic activity in form that has withst and for their purity fit for meditation. Art and aesthetic has spiritualized though its beauty, has raised figure further that radiate out divine energy and has stood to the thoughts and faith of society. Forms beauty is also a part of consideration because beauty acts as a primary factor known for importing senses to higher faculty and has alone potentiality of creating spirituality in art. Artist soul is spiritualized when his work has liberated soul of people who are now turning their bodies in meditation, enchanting mantras and singing in praise of God.



Figure No. 1 Yakshi



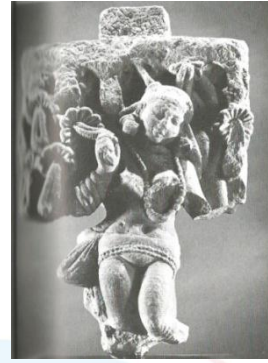
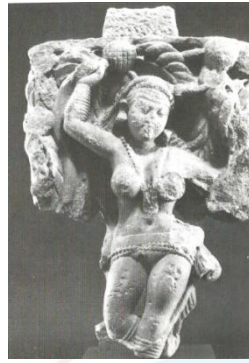


Figure No. 2 Shalabhanjika

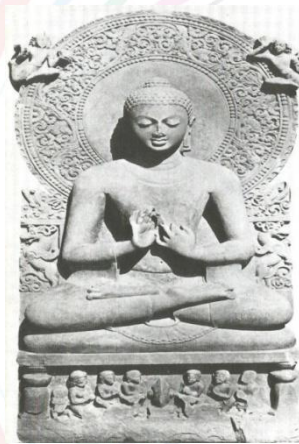


Figure No. 3 The Buddha Preaching The Law Figure No. 4 Shiva Nataraja

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