

Satyam Shivam Sundaram - Philosophy of Indian Art

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by Smita Khadri V

Pan Indian philosophical definition of the Supreme is very simple - 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram'.

'Sat' is the true value,
'Shiv' is the good value,
'Sundaram' is the beauty value.
This value system is the foundation of Indian Aesthetics.

The history of Art in India is as old as the civilization. The first known piece of art is 30,000 year old cave paintings in Bhimbetka rock shelters in Madhya Pradesh. Then we have the Indus valley civilization and the age of Aryans putting a very strong foundation for the development of a plethora of art forms: Literature - Vedas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Music - Sama Veda hymns, Sculpture - Harappan stone and bronze idols to Ellora caves to Taj mahal, Painting - Ajanta caves, Dance- Bharata Muni's Natyashastra the list goes on.



If this was the art of the learned and the urbanised, the folk and tribal art from the rural and analphabetic in India took on different manifestations through varied medium such as pottery, painting, metalwork, dhokra art, paper-art, weaving and designing of objects such as jewelry and toys.

The most important characteristics of Indian aesthetics is that there was no break inspite of the volatile socio-political and religious history. Art never suffered and was given the utmost priority by all successive rulers be it the Guptas, Chalukyas, Hoysalas, Rajputs and the Mughals.

Art in India was not a matter of sensuous enjoyment, nor a luxury to be enjoyed by the rich or the rulers and certainly not to amuse oneself! But had a deeper meaning and objective.

Indian artists were not concerned with the illusion of space and use of perspective as their western counterparts. Instead the emphasis was on expressing philosophical and religious concepts through a complex language of images and symbols. The artists emphasized on bringing the Gods (considered as the source of knowledge, power and wisdom) nearer to us by working along the 'beauty' aspect of the Gods.

Ancient sculptures of statues of a king or a saint is not merely to give a portray of some dramatic action or to be a character

portrait in a scene, but to personify rather a soul state or experience. This is what we find in the great Buddhas or the Natarajas. The figure of Buddha expresses the infinite in a finite form, limitless calm or Nirvana in human form. The Nataraja expresses the majestic, pure calm and forceful control, dignity and kingship of existence. The pose is symbolic of the spirit of the cosmos. The cosmic dance of Shiva expresses cosmic movement and delight and every posture brings out significance, intensity and fullness of the movement.



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This is true even to the Indo-Muslim architecture. Sri Aurobindo points out in regard to the Taj Mahal, - "The Taj is not merely a sensuous reminiscence of an imperial armor or a fairy

enchantment hewn from the moon's lucent quarries but the eternal dream of a love that survives death."

The soulful renderings of Raga Megh Malhar by Miyan Tansen, bringing down the rains and starting fires with the legendary Raga Deepak and the ability to bring wild animals to listen with attention (or to talk their language) can be pushed aside as legends but the trans effect it has cannot be negated. Kathakali, Yakshagana & Burra khata have been in parallel enthralling the rural section.

Man is considered miniature God with Divine abilities, but is oblivious of this knowledge. Man through 'Sravana' or Education, 'Manana' or Experience and Conceptualization and 'Sadhana' or Practice through the different stages of life (Ashramas) realizes the 3 - value system of Satyam Shivam Sundaram to create the Magic. As aptly define by Gurudev Rabhindranath Tagore, "What is Art? It is the response of Man's creative soul to the call of the Real."

This journey of aesthetics is a devotional journey towards Ultimate Reality with the sole purpose of merging with the Supreme ! The Indian Art is idealistic, mystic, symbolic and transcendental. The Indian artist is both Priest and Poet.

Through the ages, Indian art has managed to overcome all the external influences and litmus tests and has managed to retained the effervescence of the value system. The Indian philosophy of Art, Religion and Spirituality goes hand in hand. As aptly put by the adherents, 'it is a traditional way of life'. Art turned inward is Religion, Religion turned outward is Art and the inward realization is Spirituality.