"BHARAT KI LOK SANSKRITI" (PARAMPARA AUR PRATIBIMB)

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(Gujrat)Teachers in the Indian cities in ancient times used to retire to a nearby grove to teach and to practice religious meditation in peace and quiet. By the fourth century BC these groves had been transformed into great monasteries and universities, famed throughout the Orient.

The universities of Nalanda, Takshashila, Ujjain, and Varanasi attracted students and scholars from all parts of Asia. Here thousands of boys and girls studied literature and philosophy, architecture, painting, sculpture, and handicrafts, as well as mathematics, astronomy, medicine and surgery, metallurgy, and engineering. Nalanda was both a Buddhist monastery and a university, rivaling the Hindu university of Varanasi. It remained famous for more than seven hundred years, and exerted great influence on the art and culture of the Orient.

In 629 AD the famous Chinese traveler, Hiuen Tsang, came to India and spent several years at Nalanda. In his memoirs he tells us that at that time there were nearly 10,000 students and monks living at Nalanda. He found the equipment and environment of the university well planned, both practically and aesthetically. Hiuen Tsang described the view of Nalanda, as one entered through the gate, thus:

Impression of China

"The richly adorned towers were arranged in regular order; the pavilions, decorated with coral, appeared like pointed hilltops; the soaring domes reached up to the clouds, and the pinnacles of the temples seemed to be lost in the mist of the morning. Pools of translucent water shone with the open petals of the blue lotus flowers; here and there the lovely Kanaka-trees hung down their deep red blossoms; and woods of dark mango-trees spread their shade between them. In the different courts the houses of the monks were each four stories in height. The pavilions had pillars ornamented with dragons ' and beams resplendent with all the colors of the rainbow …rafters richly carved - columns ornamented with jade painted red and richly chiselled, and balustrades of carved openwork. The lintels of the doors were decorated with elegance and the roofs covered with glazed tiles of brilliant colors, which multiplied themselves by reflection, and varied the effect at every moment in a thousand manners.

After the Moghuls invaded India, they continued to support the universities, until their empire began to decline in the eighteenth century.

Indian Literature

Most of the early literature of India was written on palm leaves -a very perishable material which time has destroyed. This is one of the reasons for the scarcity of written historical documents dealing with ancient India. That which survives has been written down later from memory by people who had learned it by rote.
The earliest literature extant is the *Vedas,* or books of knowledge.

Of these, the *Rig-Veda* dates back to at least 1500 BC. It is full of poetic descriptions of natural phenomena and rituals to be performed on various occasions, and speculations on the beginnings of the world.

Indians turned out a vast body of philosophical literature of varying merit. In India, as in Greece, bards and story-tellers handed down epic poems from generation to generation, of which the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are the most famous. Starting as a narrative poem long before the Christian era, the *Mahabharata* took on additional episodes until it became seven times the length of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* combined. It is a stupendous compendium of tales of violence and civil war, of fables, fairytales, and love-stories, and of philosophical dissertations and rules of conduct. Embedded in the *Mahabharata is* one of the greatest philosophical poems in the world's literature-the *Bhagavad Gita,* or the Lord's Song. This remarkable poem, which attempts to discover when a war is just and must be fought, is supposed to have been composed as early as 400 BC.

Dramatic Arts

Dramatic art was highly developed by the fifth century AD Plays were given in halls of palaces or the courtyards of the wealthy, as was done in Renaissance Europe. The players performed on a raised platform, but without scenery. Actors had to learn singing, dancing and pantomime as well, because there were no plays without songs and dances.

Poetic Imagery

Indian plays were characterized by beautiful imagery, poetic imagination, nobility of expression and a happy ending! Though they lacked what is generally known today as "action," they seem to have made up for it, as far as the Indian audience was concerned, in lyricism, style, and the combination of music and dancing with action. Since the plays were written for the pleasure of the wealthy, the leading characters were often royalty or members of the nobility. But plays dealing with lesser mortals were not uncommon. And

contrary to popular Western belief, comedy was well represented, and satire was not neglected.

The Indian dramatists were not afraid of innovation; the following two lines of admonition to the audience, from the prologue of a play by the famous Kalidasa, who lived in the fourth century, might even apply to the present day:

"Wise men approve the good, or *new or old;*

The foolish critic follows where he's told."

The most famous names in the early Indian drama are those of Bhasa, Saumilla, Kaviputra, Kalidasa, Bhabavuti, and Sudraka. Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* and Sudraka's *Little Clay Cart* are both known to American audiences.

As early as the sixth century BC, Indian folk tales had found their way to Asia Minor. Many of them were translated into Arabic and Persian, and then into European languages. The animal fables of the *Panchatantra* (the Five Books), stories from the Buddhist *Jatakas* (tales of the many incarnations of the Buddha), and tales from the *Suka Saphati* (Seventy Tales of a Parrot), passed through the East into Europe, enriching the literature of every country they touched.

Local Variants

There are many other examples of the migration of Indian folk tales. In the *Panchatantra* there is the tale of the father who comes home and is greeted by the mongoose he had left to guard his child. Its jaws are covered with blood, and thinking it has killed the child, he slays it. Then he finds the child asleep in the cradle, a dead snake by her side. This tale reappeared in the well-known Welsh story of Llewellyn and Gilbert, the mongoose and the snake reincarnating as the locally familiar hound and fox.

Indian stories have found new homes in the *Gesta Romanorum,* the *Decameron* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales.* The tales of the Magic Mirror, the Seven-League Boots, Jack and the Beanstalk, and the Purse of Fortunatus, have been traced to Indian sources. The Pardoner's Tale is derived from one of the Buddhist *Jatakas.* The stories of the Three Caskets and the Pound of Flesh are also of Buddhist origin.

Indian music, like medieval European music, can be divided into folk music and court music. The basic difference between Indian and European music lies in the fact that the former has confined itself to the development of melody and rhythm, whereas the latter is based upon harmony. But this very absence of harmony and counterpoint tended to develop great complexity and subtlety in melodic line and rhythm in the music of India.

Indian Music

Indian music music is divided into a number of *ragas* and *raginis*, each one of which has a special name. A *raga is* a composition in a certain scale and mode, and evokes a definite mood. Variations on the *ragas* are called *raginis* or wives of the *ragas.* Tradition does not allow any changes in the structure of *ragas,* and *raginis,* which has been established over the centuries. The reputation of an Indian singer or instrumentalist does not depend upon a literal rendering of the *raga* or *ragini,* but on the individual improvisations of the artist. The *ragas* and *raginis* are mere skeletons which the performers build up with flesh and blood through their own artistry. Since each scale contains 22 notes (consisting of tones, semitones, and quarter-tones), the Indian musician has a wide choice of embellishment. Each season of the year and each hour of the day and night have their appropriate *ragas,* or *raginis.*

Some of the finest examples of Indian architecture, sculpture and painting are to be found in the Hindu temples, the Buddhist shrines and monasteries, and the Moslem mosques of India, just as the cathedrals furnish similar examples in medieval Europe.

Of the early cities of India mentioned in Hindu literature nothing is left visible today. Built of wood and sun-dried bricks, they have fallen prey to the ravages of time. Some may still be buried under the earth, waiting, like Mohenjo-Daro, to be discovered.

Many of the earliest temples and monasteries were hollowed out from the sides of cliffs, affording excellent shelter both from the heavy rain and the glaring heat. Superb examples of these are still to be seen at Karla, Ajanta, and Elephanta.

Indian Architecture

The earliest structure that has survived is the Buddhist stupa, a mound of solid brick or stone to mark a sacred place or hold a shrine. The great stupa. at Sanchi is representative. It is hemispherical, with a flattened top, and rests upon a high circular terrace. At the four cardinal points are ornamental gateways, lavishly carved. The supports of these gates are covered with elaborate reliefs, and the spaces between the bars are filled with animals, winged griffins and human figures in the round. The main characteristics of Hindu decoration are already visible in these gates-a loving kinship with all nature, exuberance, and neverending rhythmic movement.

The architecture and decoration of the shrines, monasteries, temples and mosques were conditioned by the manner of worship: the Buddhists gathered together for worship, whereas the Hindus worshipped individually, and the Moslems prayed out-of-doors. Thus Buddhist edifices contained assembly halls,

but Hindu temples contained shrines only large enough to hold images of the deities and small porticos for the guardians of the temples. Many of these temples had attached halls open on all sides, not for purposes of worship but for public gatherings.

The great era of Hindu temple-building began in the sixth century at about the time churches and cathedrals began to cover Christian Europe. Temples in the north of India are typified by tall, lean towers reminiscent of the European spire, while those of the South are recognized by their broad gate-towers. Southern temples often served as places of refuge for peasants and their precious cattle in time of war; hence the gate-towers are called *gopurams*, literally meaning shelter for cattle. The temples at Khajuraho and Madura are excellent examples of these two forms of architecture.

Early Sculpture

In India, sculpture was a handmaid of religion. Most of the Indian sculpture consists of a torrent of temple decorations resembling the outpourings of tropical nature which surrounded the sculptors. These decorations illustrated the Hindu mythologies and commemorated the experiences of Buddha through many incarnations, much as European sculpture illustrated the life of Christ and stories from the Bible. Indian sculptors carved magnificent images of animals for natural representation as well as for symbolic purposes, and their symbolic bulls, elephants, lions, and peacocks. In the cave temple at Elephanta the carvings of bulls, eagles and elephants, and the colossal *Trimurti* or the three aspects of God as Creator, Preserver and Destroyer, furnish excellent examples of Indian sculpture. Other examples are to be found in the many giant statues of Buddha and bronze statuettes of various deities, of which the *Nataraia,* or Siva as a Dancer, is prized by collectors.

Fresco Paintings

One of the oldest pictorial processes of India was fresco-painting, i.e., painting on a prepared surface of lime spread on a wall of wood, brick or stone. But as it was largely used in an exposed situation, or in buildings which were not very durable, there are no examples of, them left before the second century AD.

That they did exist is proven by many allusions to them in the early literature of India. Aside from references to frescoes applied to exteriors of buildings, we learn also of "picture halls," where religious subjects, mythologies, exploits of heroes and even portraits, were painted directly on panels of the walls.

The earliest examples of fresco painting in India are those of the cave temples of Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta. By the fourth century, Indians were already using a kind of canvas for their paintings-a piece of cloth prepared with a ground of lime. Later, very fine paper was used.

During the Hindu period painting remained primarily concerned with religious motifs, under the patronage of royal courts and monasteries. The Moghuls helped the development of a purely secular school of painting. Artists in the courts of the Moghul emperors were encouraged in painting portraits, in illustrating legend and history or contemporary life, both in murals on the walls of palaces and villas, and in exquisite miniature paintings.

In pre-Moghul days painters never signed their names to their work, so the identity of most of them is completely lost to us; the, few names of great artists that have come down to us, such as Shringadhara, Jaya, Parajay, and Vijay, are found in contemporary literature. It was only with the spread of secular painting during the Moghul period that painters began to attach their signatures to their work. Paintings of the most famous of these artists can be seen in various museums of India, Europe and America.

Although most of these frescoes, and the statues and statuettes in bronze and cast copper, deal with mythological and religious subjects, portraiture and depiction of rural and urban life were not uncommon. The Indian sculptors remain anonymous, too; the few names, such as Bimbasara, Dhiman and his son Bitpalo, and Hasuraya, are found only in the literature of the period.

Skilled Craftsmen

Minor arts developed a high degree of excellence in India, and the craftsman was an important member of Indian society. Being often under the patronage of, and catering exclusively to, the priests and the nobility, the craftsmen lived and worked mostly in the monasteries and the big cities. Goldsmiths turned out exquisite ornaments, sometimes inlaid with tiny pieces of ruby, sapphire, emerald or topaz, showing his skill in massing color harmonies and creating), rich decorations out of almost valueless bits of stone. When the Indian used gems, he did not facet them but only smoothed them off, thus obtaining a deep and glowing, rather than flashing, effect. Damascening, ivory carving, working in copper and bronze, and other minor arts were also practiced by the Indians. *).*

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