

Influence of Religion on Indian Art – A Study

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Abstract : *India* has a very rich cultural and spiritual heritage in the form of art and architecture. These art forms depict the ideology and beliefs of the people who made them. They help us to gain an insight into their lifestyle and learn about their religious beliefs. The uniqueness of Indian art comes from its spiritual inspiration and it continues to inspire the new generation of budding artists. It is universally accepted that art and culture is the mirror of society. Even during stone ages, uncivilized people used cave drawings to express and communicate their experiences and thoughts.

India is a land of art and culture. Art is an expression of people that connects them to their roots and culture. Indian art is considered to have originated during the Indus Valley Civilization, around 2500 BC. Indian paintings during the time were often inspired by nature, and spirituality, making it stand out in terms of religious content and aesthetics, an aspect that is appreciated worldwide even today.

Indian art is so intensely associated with Indian religion and philosophy that it is difficult to appreciate it fully unless one has some knowledge of the ideals of religion that governed the Indian minds. In Indian art there is always a religious desire, a looking beyond. From the buoyant carvings of the temples to the gleaming wall-paintings of Ajanta, to the intriguing art of cave sites and exuberant temple traditions, the Indian art offers an array of amazing visual delight.

As per the definition, “Religion is nothing but a community of people who collectively support one idea of almighty and hence live in accordance with its norms.” Indian artists inspired from Mythological tales of such religions, have created such beautiful paintings that have become a benchmark.

Key Words – Indian art, Influence, Mythology, Religion, Spirituality, Paintings

I. INTRODUCTION

Art is something that has been around since the civilization began on earth. The art has been created by millions of different artists and has been influenced by many things specially religion. The use of images of God and goddess became widespread after the second century. This religious art has defiantly been around for centuries and plays an important role to the history of religions.

Religion has, over the years, inspired Indian art. Religious beliefs, such as, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam have provided various themes which had enabled the variant art forms in India to flourish. In fact, it would not be completely wrong to state that in India art is religion and religion is art. Since very beginning Indian symbols of art voiced the same truth as Indian philosophy and myth.

As a tool of creative expression, communication, and self-definition, art is an intrinsic facet of human existence that revolves around the religions. As a stimulus for creativity, religion is the spiritual stimulus that conjoins humanity with divinity through spiritual experience and mythology. Be it music, sculptures, paintings or any other art, religion always played a major cameo in each.

India, a land of farmers, artists, sportsman, actors, and businessmen, is known to nurture quite a few religions itself. These religions not only influence the political scenario but also tend to lay the foundation of some impeccable artworks since centuries. The states and union territories sprawled across India have their own distinct cultures, religions and traditional identities, that are displayed through various forms of art and craft prevalent there.

Religious belief of Indians encouraged them to build aesthetically beautiful places for worship. The beauty and grandeur of Mosques, temples, Gurudwaras and churches and other religious places are a visual treat for the eyes. All these places have intricate carvings, brilliant interiors and glorious minarets / pillars & domes. Some of these places like Konark sun temple in Gujarat and Akshardham temple of Delhi, Basilica of Bom Jesus church in Goa, Haji Ali shrine in Mumbai and Golden temple in Amritsar are known for the display of finest intricate work on them.

These religious places leave us mesmerized and thinking about the amalgamation of the architectural craftsmen and exuberant art of that time. The beauty of these places leave us dumbstruck and sometimes we wonder how much of hard work had gone into it.

II. INFLUENCE OF HINDUISM

“You can reach the same sea by different routes”. This is what Hinduism has always preached. Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in this world, which is quite liberal from starting. And this is why so many tales of multiple deities are easily available and believed in Hinduism.

According to the Hindu mythology, there are four aims of life of each human being, everyone should aspire to experience all four like Dharma, the righteous living; Artha, wealth acquired through the proper profession; Kama, the sexual love; and finally, Moksha, the spiritual salvation. Some of paintings are available depicting these goals of life.

The Hindu deity Lord Krishna is the most depicted god in Indian paintings. These paintings can be found throughout the country, done in different styles. The Tanjore paintings, Mysore paintings, Rajputana and Madhubani paintings are known for depicting various events of lord Krishna's life. His role in the epic Mahabharata, victory over evils, his birth and other various episodes of his life has been captured on the canvas by many artists.



Kalighat painting



Mahubani painting depicting Raas Leela

Other Hindu gods like Lord Ganesha, Lord Jagganath, Sri Ram, and Lord Rudra etc. have been portrayed by painters on miniature and scroll paintings. Some artists of Rajasthan are known for their beautiful scroll paintings. Some other the highly appreciated styles of paintings generated from Hindu religion are: Kalighat paintings of Bengal (inspired from Goddess Kali), Phad paintings of Rajasthan and Rajput paintings of Amber and Jaipur. Apart from paintings, murals were also quite famous art style in ancient time that can be seen on almost every temple in Southern India.

Even today, nothing has inspired artists more than the mythological tales of Mahabharata and Ramayana. There have been several artists across the India who had exhibited different scenes from these religious mythologies in their paintings. For example, a Malaysian artist showcased the entire story of Ramayana through his 16 X 178 inches painting. The Mysore and Tanjore paintings of Indian art were also inspired from the religious epics.

The great artist, Raja Ravi Varma, also known as 'The Father of Modern Indian Art' was an Indian painter of the 18th century who attained international fame and recognition for portraying scenes from the religious epics of the Mahabharata and Ramayana. Through his beautiful paintings, he successfully gave faces to Indian God and Goddesses.

III. INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism has influenced the artists from the time of its origin and continues to inspire them even today. Ajanta caves in Maharashtra have stones carved in the shape and imagery of Gautam Buddha, depicting stories from his life. It is mindboggling to see how hills were cut to make caves, and how huge rock was transformed into huge human figurines with limited resources.

Buddhist art was originated in India and was based on the life story of Prince Siddhartha or popularly known as Gautam Buddha in the 5th and 6th century BCE. The name Buddha means "The Enlightened One." About many centuries ago, in the era when Buddhism was spreading, a lot of mural artists showed their existence through carvings and painted walls. Today, in the temples of Ajanta and Ellora, we can have a glimpse of exotic murals on the walls, roofs, and ceilings carved by the ancient mural artists.



Meditating Buddha

Initially, Buddhist art was made visible in anthropomorphic depictions of Gautam Buddha in Northern India. The oldest Buddhist art is in the form of symbols' such as the wheel of dharma, Stupas and the Tree of Enlightenment. Two major places where the Buddhist art took its first step were Gandhara (now located in Pakistan) and the region of Mathura in Uttar Pradesh.

Buddhism is the only religion that spread peacefully across Asia. Indian artists always found the life and tales of Buddha as inspiring and hence has created out some captivating Buddha paintings reflecting the same. The massive Rock sculptures and paintings on the walls of tombs were quite famed during the dawn of Buddhism.

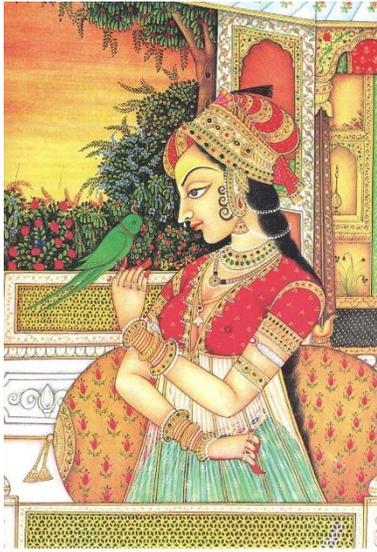
IV. INFLUENCE OF ISLAM

This Mughal era, which is also known as the medieval time, was the period of the spread of Islam. Islam religion introduced the essence of Persian art in India. Indian paintings underwent a great change after coming in contact with Islamic culture. The Islamic practice of painting the walls with the figures of ladies blowing trumpet was followed by the Hindus painters. The Ajanta style was gradually replaced by the pyramidal structure of the Sultanate and Mughal period. Pictorial art in the Islamic model was followed by the Hindu artists.

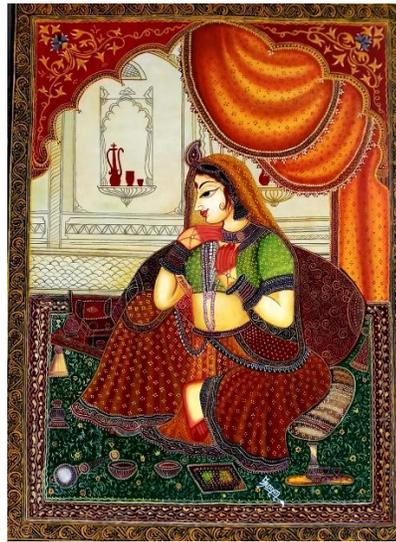
The painting in Hindu shrines on Tanjore, Jaipur, Rajputana, Bengal and other places were followed by the Mughal style. Calligraphy developed during the Mughal period was also imitated by the Hindus. Themes of Ramayana, Kaliya dahana etc. were followed in the same style. The Hindu houses, streets and places of worship were also painted in Muslim style.

The Muslim rulers also influenced Indian art. Emperor Akbar, Jahangir and ShahJahan are known for changing the face of north India by erecting beautiful Mughal architecture and monuments. Buland Darwaza of Fatehpur Sikri, Taj Mahal in Agra and Shalimar Bagh in Kashmir are some primary examples of Mughal art and architecture. Some of the best works of artists in the Mughal Painting style still exist. Along with this, one can also find a pinch of Mughal paintings in Rajput paintings too.

The Mughal buildings are also known for having engravings of the hymns from the holy book Quran over the main entrance. It is considered a Mughal trademark. Mughal Empire ensured an exotic blend of an Indo-Islamic form of art, which was first introduced in Delhi. Artists during this time period made some exceptional paintings, sculptures and miniatures.



Mughal painting



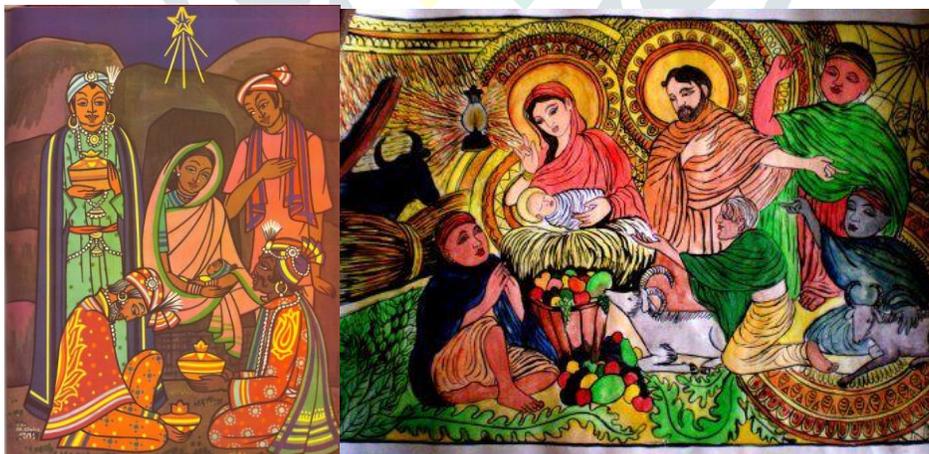
Rajasthani Mughal art

Muslim art was a unique and a beautiful blend of Indo-Persian style. North Indian Muslim painters of 11th century would paint on miniature paintings in tempera on paper. Mughal era revolutionized the style of miniature paintings. Mughal rulers would take royal painters along with them while leaving for hunting parties or invading another kingdom. The artists would draw paintings depicting the king's heroics and exploits. Some of the best works of artists in the Mughal Painting style still exist in museums and monuments.

V. INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity marks the beginning of an era where artists focus more on disclosing the hidden personality of Gods. The western influence that pushed Christianity in India made artists to focus on copying the scenic beauty of nature in the paintings.

In each era, the Painters are known for using different colors mediums and styles to bring history to life thereby expanding one's imagination of past religious events. The depiction of facial expressions are unique and awesome. A painting of Mary holding baby Jesus, helps today's generation to visualize Mary's humility. The painting of the crucifixion of Jesus is another important piece of art where Painters use realistic colors to demonstrate Jesus's agony, suffering and humility thereby bringing us back in time by more than two thousand years through the use of a single painting.



Baby Jesus

Note that before Christianity, Indian artists were never known to do landscape or modern painting but more of artworks based on the mythological tales. Paintings or any art style of this time period was a complex amalgamation of Hindu, western, and Islamic aspects, few can be seen even today.

VI. CONCLUSION

All in all, India and its art sector have a history to depict the saga of those religions. In return, these religions are known to supply space to Indian paintings, sculptures, music, or allied art in their inheritance. While religion influences art, art also features a reaction to religion. The religious influence of art has defiantly been around for hundreds of years and plays a crucial role to the history of art. These art works help folks that are trying to find peace, security, and hope.

Religious paintings are expressions of spiritual themes and principles from the attitude of people who are of various denominations and non-secular groups. Religious paintings are used for both decorative and reflective purposes.

Religious paintings idealize, glorify, suggest, and tell the story of a faith. They keep religious traditions alive and make it easier for people to see an idea or event that is otherwise difficult to imagine through the utilization of mere words. They speak to the minds and hearts of various individuals and are useful for convincing unbelievers to adopt a specific religion or Religious culture.

When the religious art moves out of the religious community and into the broader world of culture, it is one of the ways the meaning and interpretation of the art can evolve. This is also an opportunity for the art to bring the world to religion.

India, the world's largest democracy with cultural and religious diversity inhabits differing types of Indian art and paintings that belong to different religions and follow various cultures, traditions, and customs. Altogether, this is often what makes our country the foremost diverse of all of them in some ways.

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