

RELIGIOUS ART AND SIGNIFICANCE OF DHYANA IN INDIAN ART

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Abstract

I question to myself being an artist, why were magnificent Hindu temple, Buddhist Chaitya Halls or Jaina Temple with elaborate detailed sculptures and paintings were created. What can be the 'other purpose' of religious art apart from educating mass. The answer to it is, art forms related to religious themes were medium of 'dhyana' or 'yogic meditation' to get insight into self, 'dhyana' transferred the meditating body into realization of 'self actualization', not only of body but illuminating mind and soul chakra with wealth of spiritual knowledge. Root of any culture lies in having the knowledge of their religion and its practices. Common to all religion is the knowledge of consciousness, when awoken near soul towards god. The aim of spiritual education was to learn relation between man and god, self and nature. This paper thus focuses why in India under gurukul education system the education first begins with teaching scriptures. In Indian gurukul system of education, the first emphasis of teaching was focused to pass in young mind the traditional root of Indian culture. The aim was to train young mind through active learning of traditional values and living in a body of divine self. The youngsters were put under rigorous practice of learning scripture and mantras. Once the learning process ends under a learned priest young minds are set free, to spread the knowledge they have learnt and at the same point testify their inner changes. At this point religious art becomes important since it is the divine image that keeps them near to the achieved perfection. Perfection is realizing our being and analyzing the four stages of consciousness.

Keywords : *Traditional value, Consciousness, Transcendental learning, Divine self, Being, Self and Identity.*

The concept of Indian religious art was to express its traditional knowledge sought through religious scripture, Yoga sutra, Vedas, Itihasas, logic, astronomy and Upanishads passed down by Brahman priests, which emphasis on various ways and methods to harmonize body with the cosmic cycle. These text became reliable and accepted source for progression by those who aimed to seek insight into the highest knowledge of being. The journey of transformation was like meditation and it passed body through various stages until the desired perfection reflects. A systematic and structured plan was devised for the meditator since childhood. Education with traditional religious values was the earliest and first form of monastic education as has been a tradition in *gurukula* system of education. In *Guru- Shisya parampara*, the youths were versed to *gyana- dhyana* tradition, by learned priests, so that youth can pass the ancient learning roots to their future generation. The system was devised to pass in young youths an endless journey, the timeless and continuous truth of body, its relation to God, God and self, mind and matter, mind and God. The science behind teaching process was to near the pupil in coordination with the natural cosmic cycle created by God. As darkness pushes itself from black shadow into radiating energy each morning with bright new hope and fill itself with experiences, similar impression is to be achieved when one begins to trace his journey through proper meditation, gained through reliable path. The first form of meditation begins with listening to the *mantras*, then learning the *mantras* and then orally reciting and understanding the meaning behind *Saloka*. Learning and understanding *mantras* was emphasized at first stage of development as it is equivalent to attaining self consciousness, the ultimate property of the soul. Learning thus defines attention attached with meaning of high degree or with selective consciousness. Thereupon learning was prioritize as first form of meditation with consciousness. According to Calkins “consciousness is frequently an equal term with “experience and “psychic”. It describes the “sum total of our mental experience”¹. It is the interconnection of our “psychic process”² or a series of idea connected with each other, or an “orderly succession of changes”³. It is “co ordinate psychic activity,”⁴ synthesis change, or an orderly succession of change.” It is characterized by the pursuance of future ends, and is a synthetic unity⁵. Conscious active learning is emphasized initially in meditative process as it has capability to awaken in meditator a noble connection with his gestures. The characteristics of active consciousness learning is associate with positive adaption, where the mind is leaving the neglect and journeying towards the “inner divine” or “divine self”. The practitioner is passing deep into the perception of his inner image and outer image, he is nearing into the next level of inner perception, learning is taking mind into realm of experiences. Simultaneous to learning, meditator aim was also to harmonize wisdom with rhetoric. Reciting *mantra* consist of word (*sruti*) and *Vak* (speech). When word and speech are understood, the meditator body enters into the cosmic person, ‘he bethought’ himself near to the *Brahma* or the

absolute reality. The ordinary body at each stage is developing. The body is continuously in the process of becoming. In this process of becoming, *Vak* holds importance to personhood, as it is the mean by which *Brahman/Atma* manifest. It is through *Vak* the human self articulates the highest differential consciousness. *Vak* is the first faculty of cosmic person created in *purusa*. Thus through recitation of *mantras* continuously one learns to differentiate between transcendental spaces and temporal order. Adapting and adopting religious knowledge, thus was foremost part to realize own self, the knowledge of self actualization became for the meditator a cycle of philosophical learning throughout life. Highest knowledge according to Sankara is like *Sat*(real), he defining *Sat* states “*sat* is which is experienceable, stable, permanent and lasting. In *Gitabhasya* Sankara states that awareness (*Budhi*) which does not alter its object is *Sat*(real)⁶. In *Brahmsutra bhasya* Sankara affirms that the object of right knowledge remains same and constant. Transcendental knowledge is regarded as the highest knowledge in ‘*dhyana*’ meditation. Sankara defining transcendental knowledge states, it is that state which transcend the ordinary being, transcendental means ‘to reach’ and grasp entirely, the learning and wisdom. To ‘transcend’ a knowledge through learning is to connect to the consciousness what is called ‘*Brahman*’ or absolute reality. *Brahman* in *RigVeda* or in Vedanta school of philosophy is interpreted as ‘to grow’ or ‘to swell’. According to Sankara, *Brahman* is the ‘highest self’ and self of all. *Brahman* modify itself into *atma* or internal self. Meditator now has learned the path of wisdom, without having to verbalize anything, the mind’s nature is visualized in its innate state, as the complete form of the deity. Ordinary body, speech, and mind, along with collection of energetic mind, knowledge of five *tatvas* (of which body is said to have composed) are inherently enlightened. *Dhyana* and knowledge (*jnana*) compliment each other, while recollection (*smriti*) and wisdom (*prajna*) inspire each other, the soul roam in the realm of awakening and contemplation. *Dhyana* practice (meditation) and doctrinal studies (wisdom) by its nature extends in practitioner a new form and it for him the accomplishment of concentration. His soul now falls within the domain of secular ties. With spiritual learning at *gurukul* the young minds are departed to live and choose a life style of their own. The one who chooses to become ascetic or spiritual ascetic head towards monasteries or temples or ashrams and chooses to spread the knowledge of spirituality. At this juncture, comes the play of art. Art aids as a form filled with tranquility which each time reminds them of their path, so that they can keep continuity with their perfections. Indian sculptures were carved with an expression, with a sentiment of spiritual grace and tranquility. Artist fashioned each sculpture with full devout, carved every part with great care and aesthetic canons. The genius of Indian art aimed at making the expression of head and body the exclusive exponent of the religious emotion of the soul. Indian religious sculptures exalted both body and soul, for artists these two components were interconnected and were spiritual in nature. Whenever a meditator

sees figures filled with such tranquility, aesthetic his principal aim promotes his mind to achieve that perfection of his body and soul that can match to the one he is aiming to become alike. 'Emotional expression' of figure like its smile, inward turned eyelids, hand positioning, sitting posture serve the purpose for 'dhyana'. Artist desire in his sculpture to connect divinities as much as possible to the emotions of human. Smile in sculptured divinity served as ideal representation of reassurance nature of divinities. In Indian art the forms mainly for 'dhyana' were calm in expression. *Dhyana* meditation means to be perfect and simply sincere to who we are. Meditation means to discover a perfection and God given potential to live divine life. He through his gained wisdom can emphasis on the art of reasoning (*purva*) and (*uttara*) to deduce a logical inference from question arising from *purva*. He is now in total control of his being. He who can concentrate his mind on 'dhyana' has realized his being from non being, he is free from all evil and blemish. Being is self, an identity; which has analyzed the four states of consciousness i.e. matter, life, mind, intellect and bliss.

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