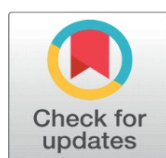
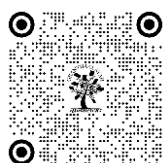


SIGNIFICANCE AND ASPIRATION OF POSTURES AND GESTURES IN INDIAN ICONOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

The inception of Indian art has been inextricably linked to religious expression. The ancient cave temples and sculptures of India offer a glimpse into the country's rich artistic heritage, featuring a wide range of gods, goddesses, and yogis depicted in various forms and styles. In India, yoga has long been revered as the premier means of achieving meditation and spiritual connection. The representation of Buddha in Indian sculpture predominantly features yogic iconography, a trend also observed in the depiction of Hindu deities such as Shiva, Vishnu, and Jain Tirthamkara. Legend has it that Shiva originated the various yogic postures and gestures, which have been seamlessly integrated into Indian art and remain an essential part of its heritage. Numerous yoga postures are associated with Buddhist and other religious contemplative practices, teachings, and activities. The systematic representation of figures in yoga, characterized by distinct postures (asanas) and gestures (mudras), owes its origins to cognitive discipline. These physical postures and gestures have been portrayed in a unique visual language, evident in ancient Indian art history. Divine gestures have long been the language of India's gods and goddesses, conveying sacred messages, timeless teachings, and benevolent protection to their devoted followers. The pantheon of Indian deities remains incomplete without these symbolic expressions, which embody the essence of their divine connection with humanity. In the realm of Indian art, the divine and human forms are intertwined with the essence of nature, where gods and goddesses are symbolically represented as well human features are harmoniously linked to the elements, reflecting a profound symbiosis between the spiritual, human, and natural worlds. The depiction of Buddha's image embodies supreme peace, with his physical features accordingly delineated. These stances and movements set Indian art apart from all other forms of art worldwide and place it on a lofty pedestal.

Keywords: Indian Art, Religion, Postures and Gestures, Spiritualism, Yoga

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of art in India, religion has held a special place. From the ancient cave temples and sculptures, we learn about various forms of God, goddesses and yogis depicting in Indian art. These gods, goddesses, deities, and yogis all had their own unique forms of iconography, which is why they held a special place in art. The depiction of gods or any individual holds significant importance in art or society, reflecting their place and significance within the cultural and spiritual context. yoga has been considered as the foremost medium of meditation in India. Meditation leads to emancipation. Indian artists were influenced by different kinds of philosophies and theories, which enhanced their

imagination and perceptions for the conceptual art. Some philosophies found as the objective of 'art and aesthetics' is as following:

Art represented as kama. Kama means aspiration, delight or contentment which predominantly signifies 'sexual pleasure'. Vatsayana opined that Kama is one amongst 64 prominent Indian art forms. To adorn oneself up for carnal pleasure is also considered an art.¹ According to Indian scriptures, there are four main landmarks in a human being's life which he has to cross. It is mandatory for every person to abide by religion as it's the religion which teaches him to differentiate between moral and immoral, right and wrong. But at the same time, he also needs a means of livelihood so that he can fulfill his obligation towards his family. The familial ties also lead to social relations. He also wants fulfillment of his various other desires like money and carnal pleasures. It is natural for a human being to seek fulfillment of his desires but after a specific time period, the man should not forget his ultimate objective which is Moksha (salvation) because salvation would help him to attain God. Indian art flourished under the influence of such ideology. The sculptures in Hindu temple are aesthetic personification of this ideology especially the Khajuraho temple (Madhya Pradesh, India). This is complete art for viewpoint. There are images of prominent gods and goddesses inside the temple. People come to worship them as they are a means of their salvation. The outer walls of the temple have relief sculpture delineating the mundane life including even sexual and erotic sculpture. These sculptures deliver the message that the worldly pleasures are meant for the initial life span. Later on, the man should aim for deliverance which could be attained by moving inside the temple.² Due to these aphrodisiac sculptures these temples are known as Kama Sutra temples. These sculptures actually delineate the significance of love in human life. These idols were engraved on the temple walls as the symbols of boom to inspire the human beings towards mundane life and later on conducted them towards salvation to meet the almighty god.

Similarly, some voluptuous figures have been delineated on the outer walls of Buddha monasteries, perhaps to impart the message that the temporal pleasures are transitory. The eventual goal of every human soul is to merge with divine soul. The Hindu mythology used these distinctive founts to impart sanctified message to the people.³

The second function of art is attractive hypothesis which is lila. Lila means a game which emerges from a feeling of inquisitiveness. These are the feelings of lofty strength, blissful in existence and an aspiration to express the diverse potential covert in truth. The cosmic dance of Shiva is also mythological formulation of Lila. Similarly, Lord Krishna while dancing in moonlight in Vrindavan city (Uttar Pradesh) created so many facsimiles of himself to be with all his beloved. In Indian mythology the different activities in the life of pantheon of gods have been formed as leela. The different incidents from the life of lord Rama have been chronicled as Ramleela which are presented in the form of play before the famous Indian festival Dussehra till date. Lord Krishna, the most prominent among the Indian gods is renowned for his leela. These pursuits as leela have been an integral part of Indian art. The utmost attention was paid to the aesthetic sense in their depiction in art. This leela has not only been a part of sculpture or painting in Indian painting but also dance and poetry have been a comely medium of leela. Next, art as maya is also related to lila. Both varieties are the form of expression. Lila is sort of free, impulsive, aimless, playful depiction of feelings, but maya production is a serious, meticulously designed imagination. The term originated from 'ma' meaning to evaluate, form, presentation. It has been used in Upnishads very scrupulously. Maya has been actually a magical potency. It has been used to ancient India for specific purposes like to make the things appear and disappear. Another important category of Indian

philosophy is art as yoga. Yoga is a primordial, cerebral and corporeal restraint which has a tendency to have supernatural and enchanting implication. This term has been taken from yuj which means repression or stick together, where both body and mind work in unison for a common purpose. Art as yoga has been considered a discipline of Hindu era which occupies a pivotal place in the reign of artistic production.⁴

Yoga has a number of features related to art. Indian sculptures have depicted Buddha mostly in yogic features. The evidence of such features can be seen since Pre-historic or ancient India. The seals excavated in Indus Valley civilization also contain seals with yogic postures. Hindu gods like Shiva, Vishnu and Jain Tirthamkara have been depicted mainly in yogic posture. Yoga originated from Shiva. It is assumed that it was Shiva who initiated the various yogic postures and gestures and they have been an integral part of Indian art. There are many yoga postures which are related to Buddha and other religions' contemplation, teaching and other activities too.

In Yoga the proper delineation of the different moves and attitudes of figures owes its origin to the cognitive discipline which is inception of progression of diverse postures (asanas) and gesticulation (mudras). A broad physiology regarding position is that of standing (Sthanaka), seated (asana) and laid out (sayana) position. Human body has a number of curves. These curves are called bhang. Bhangs or contravene from axis of body can be acknowledged as supplementary poses of the standing posture.⁵

There are so many bhangas. The first one sama-bhanga is a rectilinear and upright pose, a pose of steadiness in which the two perpendicular moieties of the body are proportionately incline and the sutra or the vertical line passing precisely along the middle position of the body corresponds to its perpendicular axle. This pose is also acknowledged as samapada-sthanaka. The expedience of this pose delineates the almighty in his indubitable tranquility and persistence. Abhanga means slight curve in human body and it portrays the posture of a little bend with toned down delineation and daintiness. Dvi-bhanga is the pose of twain bends in the body. In the tri-bhanga also known as the pose of triple flexion, the curvatures are full of buoyancy and suppleness. Tri-bhangas has been most commonly used to depict beautifully Indian feminine configuration. Most of the artefacts depicting full feminine form to gain fame are in tri-bhanga posture and they exhibit feminine physical attributes quite vividly. This pose is intended to equip the body with the extreme 'plastic effect'.⁶

As far seat position is concerned sama-bhanga is similar to vajra-paryanka in Buddhist statuette. This posture is mainly connected with the panorama of his enlightenment at Bodhgaya (Bihar, India) and connotes his staunch resolution when he seated on Bodhimanda under the Peepal tree and became a Bodhi himself. A little flaccid posture is known as padma-paryanka or padmasana. In this pose the legs are just congregate on the lotus seat but soles are not reversed. The body posture is quite relaxed in ardha-paryanka or lalitasana in which one of the legs elegantly hangs downwards and the other leg is playfully raised upon the seat or what is known as maharajalita (kingly).⁷ Similarly hand postures and other body postures are most prominently and commonly portrayed in Indian religious art. Leonardo da Vinci has remarked that man has twain major targets to paint human being and the intent of his spirit. It seems that he means the symbolic elements in art when he refers to painting men. He feels painting man is easy but, the other one is arduous because the intent of soul should be delineated through the frame of mind and the motion of the limbs. It is worth mentioning that he has insisted on "by the

movement of the limbs and not by the facial expressions". This theory is well exemplified in Indian art. Even at the juncture of innermost desire, the visages of gods and human beings don't appear contorted but keep an astounding equanimity. The quick and direct motion of limbs displays the movement of mind. These gesticulations are different poses of the body, standing seated or special movements of the limbs, especially the mudras which mean the positions of the hands.⁸

Abhya-mudra is possibly the initial one to be delineated in art. It connotes the manna of courage. Samadhi (meditation) mudra also acknowledged as dhyana mudra (meditation), is affiliated to figures of Buddha. It gesticulate profound assimilation in contemplation. Two more traditional gestures linked with Buddha's figures are bhumisparsha mudra and dharmachakraparivartan mudra respectively. The bhumisparsha mudra is connected to the locale of enlightenment at Bodhgaya. The dharmachakraparivartan mudra connotes the immense occasion of the twining of the wheel of religion by Buddha in the deer park where he had delivered his first discourse. Gesture language was first of all used in Buddhist sculptures. His hands and fingers have been delineated as having specific pose and meaning.⁹

Most of the hand postures (mudras) have been borrowed from dance gestures. It was mandatory for every artist to have erudition of dance during the classical age of art. The diverse emotions can be communicated through different limbs in dance. Through these mudras infinite worldly things, even the names of gods, trees and river can be conveyed. These gestures are a complete language. It can be also called mute language.¹⁰ These physical postures and gestures also have been portrayed in a specific way. These have a peculiar language which can be seen in the history of ancient India. These gestures have been used for gods and goddesses who bestow their devotees with specific messages, teachings and protection. The pantheon of Indian gods is incomplete without these gestures. Indian artisans have been substantially impressed by natural beauty and surroundings. Nature not only bequeathed her bounties on them but also taught them a lot. They got colours, brush, medium, canvas from nature. They painted on stones, in caves and the bark of the trees. They portrayed natural elements in art symbolically in a fabulous manner. The human physique portrayed in guise is drawn from discontinuous components of natural surroundings and its realization is in romanticized shape. The Puranic myth of Tilottama's inordinate beauty and charisma which was contrived in complete homogeneity with nature had to be called to the mind of the artists. These measures were formalized in definite aesthetic commandments to be adhered to by all the future artists. The devotion to these norms aided them to become properly coached and orderly for the delineation of conceptual exquisiteness. Human features have been delineated symbolically in the history of Indian art. Female eyes are especially restive. Multiple metaphors have been used by 'Indian aesthetic' norm to betoken multifarious sentiments and dispositions. The frolicsome revelry of khanjana, a small bird with dancing pace defines the scurrying feminine gaze and female eyes have been called kanjana nain. These words have used since the ancient times to appreciate the beauty of female eyes. The dainty feminine demeanor is aptly compared to that of deer, a mild guileless creature. As gods and goddesses have been shown symbolically, similarly the human features in Indian art were connected to natural elements. The presentation of Buddha's image symbolizes paramount peace, his physical features were also delineated accordingly. His half closed eyes resembled lotus petals depicting deep meditation and serenity. His shoulders or torso was in solid form having an elephantine character symbolizing his might who mesmerized the people with his dominating aura while teaching them spiritual lessons. The artisans have depicted the neck of gods as well human beings like a conch shell which is also called Kambu Griva. The bodies of females and goddesses

have been delineated by blending natural elements in it. Their long, deep eyes have been depicted in fish and almond shape.¹¹

The next term Ganya-mana (appraise analysis/amplitude) is used for knowledge of measurement in art. This style applies to mostly architecture and sculpture. The homogeneity of quantification according to Indian sculpture in the length of face is eight for men, nine for goddesses, ten for insignificant gods and eleven for premier gods. In Indian Philosophy anubhava is the term of art which holds that artistic creation proposed to create in the spectator approachable emotive status. The countersign of a person to an art object is conveyed by anubhava. It's not astonishing to ascertain that there are different terms to specify the attribute of the object and to indicate the ignited rejoinder of the theme. These two different expressions are known as rasa (juice, essence) and bhava (expression).¹² The term rasa emerged with the art of early man. This can be experienced in many paintings. It seems that early man experienced the different feeling of surprise, joy, pleasure, enthusiasm with his sagacity. There was a lot of consternation in his life apropos natural disasters, struggle with animals, enemies, and so on. He would have definitely been exposed to the feelings of amazement and delectation while confronting his enemies as well as visualizing nature in her callous and comforting demeanour. Had his life not been inundated by the conglomeration of emotions, then these manmade paintings depicting brawn and beauty would not have been possible.¹³

Rasa is a magnificent and exclusive perception of Indian aesthetics. According to Indian thinkers, rasa is an inner knowledge which is nothing else but a divine ecstasy.¹⁴ This rasa can be attained when the approaches are decontaminated, by using imaginative powers of the viewer.¹⁵ An art work can be termed as 'rasavant' (delightful). The viewer who enjoys rasa of art is the 'rasika' (pleasure taker) and the joy of aesthetic sentiments that prevails during the process or that state which has been carefully thought of and understood is theoretically called 'rasavadana' (pleasure experienced). When an artist creates a work of art, he does not know whether or not his art creation will generate rasa for the reviewers. However, he is greatly attached to or is in love with his theme and he devotes all his constructive approach to give shape to his theme. Later on, the work of the artist, done with a true feeling, becomes a source of rasa for the 'rasika'.¹⁶ Indian intellectuals have linked rasa both with Brahma and delectation. Brahma has been discussed in India with innumerable aesthetic imagination. Consequently, rasa is naturally related to beauty, secondly being linked to delectation, rasa notion can be foundation for the aesthetic axiom. Brahma has been acclaimed and Brahma's disposition manifests delectation. Therefore, both rasa and delectation connote Brahma. Similarly for a viewer aesthetic experience also embodies gratification. This is what the principle of art spells for art.¹⁷ Indian art conception talks about twain types of delectation known as enigmatic anadam and mundane anadam. Enigmatic anadam is considered infinite and more pleasing where as mundane pleasure is connected to avarice and is egocentric. Contrary to this enigmatic anadam comprises of altruism and philanthropy and it yields up more delight. ¹⁸

Parmana is another important category of Indian philosophy in which conceptual proportion is more important than physical attributes. As a matter of fact, art is a cognitive progression. The primary elements of Indian art were not to substitute nature or human rather its premier nature was to comprehend distinctive elements. Even the artisans of classical art or early Indian art had never felt the need to use an icon. Similitude is that norm of art which makes it mandatory for the painting to resemble object or model especially a portrait. According to

Indian concept of art similitude does not merely delineate any element's external correlation but rather it portrays that object's inner feelings or character. The portrayal of Indian religious figures has manifested that the artisans have configured the religious icons comprehending those sentiments of the devotees which resemble portrayal of their faith not with any external delineation. The portrayal of outward representation has been a secondary act for the Indian artisans.¹⁹

If a human being is an artisan he has been bestowed upon by god with the beautiful prowess so that he can serve the religion through his art and accomplish his religious goals. But Indian artisans were also obliged to acquaint the people with divine to lead them towards the path of salvation which they could accomplish only through their celestial art. This spiritual realization could be experienced only through images executed by them. Therefore, an Indian artisan is considered an equivalent to a sage because such artists have created a form of God in the minds of people.²⁰

The traditional Hindus had been obsessed with the salvation. Whatever they did throughout their life span was aimed at deliverance. Therefore, Indian art has been given the name of sadhana (meditation) which is an endeavour by the mortals to attain their ideal goals. The Hindus don't sense any discord between the quest of aesthetic delectation and refinement of morality.²¹ In fact if we concentrate on ancient Indian art, we find that all forms of art have been actually a medium of meditation. Especially relief sculpture of Bharhut, Sanchi (Madhya Pradesh), Amaravati stupas (Andhra Pradesh) and Ajanta Painting, Ellora Caves (Maharashtra), the golden period of Indian art (Gupta Period) has been a potent example of meditation. These artists used to be more like saints. Their sole motive was to expand their religion with true dedication totally devoid of any selfish motive. In India art does not mean any enticing artistic piece or comely god or goddess like Venus or God Apollo. Here art was kindred to emotions of a common man and it has been a specific characteristic of Indian sculpture especially during the golden period of Indian art i.e. Gupta period. Buddha idols sculpted during this period reflect a live experience which is also called inner breath or prana. When a person comes in a contact of these sculptures, then he also becomes a part of deep mystical meditation. Famous sculpture 'Buddha's preaching the first sermon from Sarnath' is world renowned due to this particular characteristic. Indian art does have a spiritual aspect other than entertainment and adornment. It also delineates the path of salvation and spiritualism.

2. CONCLUSION

In real sense art was a meditation through the ages. Therefore, this art had a unique blend of aesthetic values and spiritualism. This exclusive art form used to leave a deep positive religious impact on the masses. This form of art was created with reverent feelings. So, no artefact bears the name or stamp of any artist. Their foremost goal was to percolate religious message or teaching along with their own meditation. The true followers of religion were completely dedicated to their art for the service of religion. Indian art is incomplete without the religious ambience. It does not have a distinct entity from the profound epigenetic and hypothetical motives that encourage it. Therefore, Indian artists did not use the art only for embellishment and entertainment but also for a specific objective. So it is believed that in India, religion and art were born simultaneously. It originated in a globe imbued with a deeply spiritual ambience whose infinite conglomeration of hues is core of Indian culture.

Consequently, it is almost impractical to detach these metaphors from holy milieu that allows these similes for the artistic idea of the artist which is escorted by a reason always other than merely a creative. Indian artist always tries to perform as an arbitrator amid the ordinary and phenomenal mind. Nevertheless, the frame of mind requisite by Indian artist hardly fluctuates from that essential for religious art from the primitive to the contemporary. The bond between art and religious belief might amalgamate.²² It was only through art that the man could rouse his spiritualism and he moved towards moksha consequently he could attain both beauty and bliss simultaneously.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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