

Education of Art in Ancient India

Reetika Garg*

According to Rigveda 'all truth, goodness and beauty emanate from the Lord. Art is eternal, unending,....The express consciousness of the beauty of God is called art'. According to Chitrasutra, all the work of art including painting played an important role in the life of the society. In the vedic age, the artist had established himself as a respectable member of the society. Even Ribhus had been awarded the status of godhead on account of their creation skill. First of all the mention of sixty-four art found in the thirtieth chapter of the Yajurveda and later Vatsayayan stated sixty - four types of art in his book Kamasutra. The sixty-four arts were not equally popular among the citizens, but a few like painting, music, singing, dancing, drama and instrument playing etc received prominence. Education in fine arts like music, dance and painting was considered essential for unmarried maidens of affluent families. Even the ancient stories were replete with instances of young lovers exchanging paintings as loving gifts.

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"The creative energy of God, which man receives in a limited form is art".

- Indian aesthetics

* Assistant Professor, Department of Drawing & Painting, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, Rajasthan (India) E-mail: <reetikagarg101@gmail.com>

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1. Introduction

According to Rigveda “All truth, goodness and beauty emanate from the lord. Art is eternal, unending. The express consciousness of the beauty of God is called art.” The art and culture of India has established the unity of oriental civilization down the centuries. Here spiritualism, religion and art have recognized constituent factors of social harmony. The impact of Indian art, culture and philosophy can be very easily perceived on the art, culture and philosophy of many countries of the world. The healthy tradition of art has existed in India since ancient times.

This paper is an outline of the scenario of art education in ancient India. In the modern period, all aspects of study are related to art and education of ancient time. First of all the stone age started in India from where we get the glimpses of rich knowledge art, culture and technological advancement.

Apart from the drastic climatic and environmental changes, the essential process of development is a progressive change in emphasis from core to flake tools. Varied bone tools have been recovered from all excavations of the Mesolithic period. The first urban culture or Harappa culture gradually evolved from these pre-existing cultures. The earliest indigenous cultures which are of interest in the historical study of art, science and technology are those which center in Harappa in Punjab and Mohenjo-Daro in Sind; the so called Indus Valley Civilizations which represents the bronze age of India. When talk about technological education, the prominent characteristic is that of standardization. Cities are built to a uniform plan, resembling the layout of a chess board and off well-fired bricks of a controlled size, and domestic pottery is turned from the wheel in specific form and capacity.¹

Archaeological excavations and explorations revealed the spread of Harappa culture over an area of about 840,000 square miles. Besides the Indus Valley proper, its spread includes Makran Coastal areas in southern Baluchistan upto Sutkagendor near the Iranian boarder, northern Rajputana, Kutch, Saurashtra and Gujarat upto the Narmada and East Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and the region almost upto Delhi. Harappa culture (2300 B.C. 1750 B.C.) died a mysterious death and for this, various agencies' have been attributed.

2. Ancient India and Art Education

Ancient India covers a period of more than 2000 years and educational methods ideals and institutions could not remain unchanged through this long period.² The growth of Indian education of art and science is influenced by the Vedic people. In the hymns of the Rigveda there is found the first account of the way of life of the Aryans, their recognitions of and devotion to one supreme cause, their realization the behind the phenomena of the natural world, which appear shifting and changeable, there is constant principle (*rita*) or order in events. Despite the gradual development of philosophy, the personification of the primeval forces of nature, for instance, sun God Surya, or the God of fire, Agni, continued. Sacrificial altars, at first mere heaps of turf, evolved into elaborate designs demanding arithmetical and geometrical calculations. Vedic literature gives us only fragmentary information concerning the early stages of Indian education. The wisest procedure is to examine the whole evaluation in the light of Indian literature.

The Vedic age was not generally the age of deep and critical thinking, but one of religious and vigorous living in the midst of the forces of nature, personified and gods, as living on the earth, in the sky and in the heaven beyond. Men offered oblations to the gods and asked for cattle, crops, wealth, prosperity, health, longevity, progeny, victory, peace and happiness here and in heaven after death. Occasionally, some wondered as to whether there was any overlord of all the gods.

According to Chitrasutra, all the works of art including paintings played an important role in the life of the society. The polite education of a citizen the educated urbane man of town included knowledge and skill of several arts in addition to erudition in literature, rhetoric, grammar, philosophy and allied subjects.³ In ancient Indian literature the word 'shilp' stood for art and 'shilpi' for the artist. The word 'kala' has definitely been used in 'Rigveda', 'Shatpath Brahman', 'Shadvinsh Brahman', 'Sankhyan Brahan' and 'Atharvaveda', but it has been used merely in the sense of 'efficiency in work, skill or craft'.

In the Vedic age, the artist had established himself as a respectable member of society. 'Ribhus' had been awarded the status of Godhead on account of their creation skill. In those days, art was used to stimulate sex but in the word 'Kala' (art) came into use much

later and gradually, the term was construed as a synonym for culture. First of all the mention of sixty-four art found in the thirtieth chapter of the Yajurveda and later Vatsayayan stated sixty-four type of art in his book Kamasutra.⁴ Sixty-four arts were not equally-popular among the citizens, but a few like painting, music, signing, dancing, drama and instrument playing etc. received prominence. Instruction were also given to the effect that the citizens ought to learn these arts and those who were conversant with them were accepted as cultured. As regards their contribution to the prosperity of civil life, the exposition of Vatsayayan is extremely clear and unambiguous. He maintains that these arts were completely traditional.⁵

Education in fine arts like music, dance and painting was considered essential for unmarried maidens of affluent families. The ancient stories are replete with instances of young lovers exchanging paintings as loving gifts. Painting-Chitra-Kala was recognized as an essential part of the curriculum in the upbringing of children of 'good families'.⁶

Art is actually the best means of communications. Art and creativity act as a link between natural world and the inner spiritual world. It gives us the mental peace. Artists in ancient India generally dedicated himself to his art and very rarely inscribed his name on any piece he created to perpetuate himself. It is said; citizens connoisseurs of art, accomplished courtesans, painters and sculptors among others studied standard texts on painting. Such widespread studies naturally brought forth principles of art criticisms as in 'alankara-sastra'. Kautilya deems it a responsibility of the state to support art-masters that spread knowledge among youngsters.⁷ The Ajanta paintings establish beyond doubts that painting had prominent place in Indian religion and society, and if the classical form of painting had existed, the principles and methodology characteristic of it must have been there.⁸

The artists of Ajanta created valuable treasures of the art world. They were the inheritors of an ancient tradition that painted and decorated palaces, temples and caves. The theories, principles and techniques followed by those artists came down to them through oral traditions bequeathed by a long line of artists spread over several generations.⁹ These artists were guided and inspired by the techniques and principles of Chitrasutra of the Vishnudharamottarra

Purana. Basically Chitrasutra is the part of the Vishnudharmottarra Purana which deals with the art of painting. According to Chitrasutra 'Great paintings are a balm on the troubled brow of mankind. The purpose of art is to show one the grace that underlies all of creation, to help one on the path towards reintegration with that which pervades the universe'. So the ancient artists of India was trying to follow these principles in his art. Another important texts of ancient India are 'Ashtadhyayi, Natyashastra, Kamasutra, Chitra-lakshanam, Shilparatna, Puranas' etc.

So the main characteristic of ancient Indian art has been its remarkable unity and consistency. Another important feature of the ancient Indian art was its vision of life and its world view. That inward vision and a sense of peace and tranquility are its hallmarks. E. B. Havell an eminent art critic, who was the principal of 'Calcutta art-school' in British India, praised the ideals of Indian art and the underlying spirit behind it.

3. Conclusion

Thus, in the view of the available texts, art works, description and record of ancient literature, we can say that the art and science of painting, drama, dance, music, sculpture etc. were fully developed and had reached its peak. Indians were not only sufficiently proficient in art work during the ancient period but art had become a part of their life styles.



Pic. - 1 : Bodhisattva Padampani (Ajanta Cave)



Pic. - 2 : A View of Ellora Cave

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