

# 4. The Heritage of Indian Art – Kapila Vatsyayan

The cultural heritage of India lies in its recognition of sustaining an inner landscape of man which is the centre and the recognition that it expresses itself in an outer landscape of man comprising myriad petals of a lotus flower. Whenever, however, the vision may have come, it is clear that had this not been the guiding star of this country, it would not have been possible for it to have a staggering multiplicity of racial strands, languages, religions, philosophy systems, social structures and artistic expressions, all webbed together in one wholeness.

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The proverbial staggering multiplicity is held together as planets in a single astronomical orbit. Stated differently, all manifestations in time and space, varied and different, are the rainbow colours of a single white luminosity. Whoever came to this country, fell into this pattern.

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This unseen but real Indians transformed all those who made India their home. The Indian arts, particularly its poetry, architecture, sculpture, painting, music and dance reflect this vision and evolves methodologies of structure and form through multimedia communication systems only once again to evoke this wholeness.

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Two fundamental paradigms evolved for comprehending the physical phenomena, the rhythm of the universe and the mind and spirit of man as one ecological system. The first was the simple but most potent paradigm of the human body (Purusha). This body was made up of different systems, the digestive, the circulatory, the nervous, each inter-related and inter-dependent in which matter and the spirit, the physical and meta-physical, were contained. The body of man was the microcosm representing the macrocosm. The second was the paradigm of a chariot wheel with a centre, a hub, spokes and a circumference.

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Here also the insistence was on the relationship of the still centre, the hub with the periphery. Centripetal and centrifugal forces were juxtaposed. There was an inner still centre formless beyond form and an outer movement capable of multiplicity plurality but all contained within the circle. The centre was the symbol of the life of reflection, of individual introspection, stasis, nirvana, moksha, the spokes and the area between different radii was the life of dynamic action comprising desire, pleasure, prosperity, knowledge, power, duty and conduct but all harnessed. Time was cyclic, the beginning was the end and beginning. As in other ancient civilizations of the world, the awareness of outer space and the consciousness of the inner landscape of man was inter-related.

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The Rig Veda stated it as "Truth is one but its expressions many". The Katha Upanishad spoke of the body of the man as the charioteer and the chariot wheel:

"Know thou the soul as riding in a chariot, The body as the chariot. Know thou the intellect as the chariot-driver, and the mind as the reins. The senses, they say, are the horses: The objects of sense, what they range over. The self combined with senses and mind Wise men call 'the enjoyer'."

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Indian architecture, whether the stupas or the temples or the mosques or the city plans or domestic architecture, humble and modest embodies this world view; the mud walls, the brick and stone, ground or elevation plans are an orchestration of multiple forms flowing out of and flowing into a centre. Invariably it begins with a point of unity and manifests it through a spectrum of multiple form which in turn evoke harmony and equanimity. There is a first and foremost a centre. This centre enlarges itself into a vast complex either as a circle or as a square, is filled with crowded abundance of life in all its variety.

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The ornamentation and the decoration, representational or abstract, play their role to an ascending oneness vertically and a closing in and gathering of all energies horizontally from the outer to the inner. Brick by brick, stone by stone, and immense epic poem of the infinite is made. Each detail can be separated but in fact none is autonomous: each unit is the part of the whole, interwoven and interlocked. In its totality, it represents heaven on earth, the central mountain, the Sumeru. Ultimately it is the cosmic order on earth, arousing the dominant mood of wonder (vismaya) and evoking a transcendental experience of bliss.



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Whether the observer, participator or pilgrim moves from the outside to the inside or circumambulates the stupa temple or mosque until he reaches the centre which represents the ultimate void, the sunya, nirvana or moksha. Alternately, he figuratively ascends the pinnacle whether in the austere simplicity of the spherical dome of the stupa or the masjid or through the crowded multiplicity of the temple. Sanchi and Bharhut, the temples of North, South, Western or Eastern India, or the mosques speak the same language of transcendence and of heightened experience despite the cultural specifics of each of these monuments.

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Impersonality and intensity are the twin paradoxical demands of this art which is life bound and beyond it. These monuments bear testimony to the concretization of this vision through a perfect language of art which was as universal, pan-Indian as specific in time, region or locality.

Sculpture likewise manifests this vision of wholeness through a methodology of impersonalisation. Indian figurative art is not portraiture of the specific. Each image is an embodiment of a dominant abstracted impersonalised state or mood in a given stance or pose evoking stillness and dynamic movement together.

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Each is a complete world unto itself, related to life born of life, part of the cultural fabric, but not it. Buddha is Buddha, the historical prince Siddhartha, and Sakyamuni, but he is more: he is compassion, pathos and grace in absolute. The spirit and soul of the cosmic infinite is contained in the body of the particular but impersonal form. The image is not the historical figure-it is and it is not the cultural specific in which it is articulated: a Kushan, Gupta, Pala or for that matter an Indonesian, Cambodian, a Khmer, Japanese and Chinese Buddha can be clearly identifiable. They are distinguishable and dateable, but in the last analysis, they are beyond their cultural boundaries and are each a hypothesis, an aspect of the vast ocean of karuna (compassion) in all its multitudes of shades, tones and subtleties.

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The images of Siva and Vishnu, in their benign or demonic moods, as the yogis or Sadasivas, as the lovers or ascetics containing bi-unity as endrogynes (Ardhanarisvara) or combining the three principles of involution, evolution and devolution, as cojoined images of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesa, or only the principle of creation and destruction as Harihara, or as four-faced or three-faced lingas, all articulate, once again, the same attribute of the internalised intangible experience of the unmanifested unity. The multiple faces and arms of the image are parts of whole and vehicles for the final evocation of the transcendental experience of bliss (rasa).

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The famous image of Siva in Elephanta, called "Trimurti" is Siva as Sadasiva, as Parvati and as Aghora, the fierce one. Through the juxtaposition of three impersonalised states, a fourth that of complete equanimity is evoked.

Painting schools and styles, ranging from those of Ajanta, Ellora to the caves of Bagh and murals of Alchi, give further evidence of this avowed faith and commitment to the impersonalised dominant moods (archetypals), which have been and are expressed in cultural specifics. At one level, there are as many schools of paintings as there are dynasties, or another level, each is the reflector of an impersonalisation which has been the beginning and is the ultimate goal.

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Again, the range is staggering in its multiplicity ranging from Ajanta to Sittanavasal--the Islamic geometrical designs. However, once again, in each of these, the archetypal dominant states, the reaching out to infinity and the expression through cultural specific idiom is vital and fundamental. Hindu, Buddhist, Jain figurative art is as abstract as Islamic calligraphy.

These are the more permanent arts, frozen at a moment of time for posterity. What about the occurrent arts, those of music and dance, the oral recitations and the dramatic experience. They are shaped and formed in the art of creation, live for the moment the specific duration. Now instead of time being frozen in consecrated space, space is consecrated in time of fixed duration.

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The beginning and end of the performance in sound or movement is a consecration when the cosmos is made anew for that duration: it is complete and whole whether of five minutes or two hours or five days enactment. The beginning is the same, the still centre, the immutable invariable inwardness; the fixed note of the scale or the stances of the dancer. Thereupon is an enlargement in expanding concentric circles of the cosmos whether through one or three octaves, the exploration of space in all its variety of shares of tonality, micro-units of sounds, light, shade, stresses, accents, and discriminating exclusion of particular notes. The edifice is built with sound; it is architectonic in character. Now the listener circumnutates as the pilgrim did the stupa in clockwise but ascending direction.

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Through the structured patterning of sound the multitude of life in its endless variety is presented, a dominant mood is created; together the still centre and its flowerings like a lotus petal evoke the state of heightened aesthetic experience. While the creator performer begins with the state of internalised yoga and express through consummate skill the dominant mood, the listener responds by returning to the state of bliss where the artist had begun. Again, impersonalised emotion, a dominant mood, a multiplicity of sound, symbols and motifs combined with intensity, create an icon in music which the listener can worship as he could, the sculptural image in stone or bronze.



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And finally through a beautiful and complete language of movement, Indian dance provides the most concrete manifestation of the inner state and vision. The dance, like poetry, music and sculpture, seeks to communicate universal, impersonal emotion and through the very medium of the human form, it transcends the physical plane: in its technique, it employs the technique of all the arts and it is impossible to comprehend the architectonic structure of this form without being aware of the complex techniques of the other arts which it constantly and faithfully employs and synthesises.

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The themes which the Indian dancer portrays are not only the raw material of literature, but are also the finished products of literary creation; the music which seems to accompany the dance is actually the life breath of its structure and, indeed, dance interprets in movement what music interprets in sound: the postures and the stances it attains are the poses which the sculptor models; all these the dancer imbues with a living spirit of movement in a composition of form which is both sensuous and spiritual.

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**Q. 1 Answer the following questions in one sentence each:**

1. In what does the cultural heritage of India lie?

Ans. The cultural heritage of India lies in the recognition of the inner landscape of man as its centre along with his outer landscape.

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Q. 1 Answer the following questions in one sentence each:

2. “Time is one but its expression many.” Tell the source from where this quotation has been extracted?

Ans. “Time is one but its expression many.” This quotation has been extracted from the Rig Veda.

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**Q. 1 Answer the following questions in one sentence each:**

3. What did the Katha Upanishad speak about the body of man?

Ans. The Katha Upanishad spoke about the body as a charioteer and the chariot wheel.

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Q. 1 Answer the following questions in one sentence each:

4. Is Indian figurative art portraiture of the specific?

Ans. No, Indian figurative art is not the portraiture of the specific.

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Q. 1 Answer the following questions in one sentence each:

5. What is the significance of 'Trimurti' in Elephanta?

Ans. The 'Trimurti' in Elephanta represents Shiva as Sadashiv, as Parvati and as Aghora all together as the fourth state of equanimity.

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**Q. 1 Answer the following questions in one sentence each:**

6. How does Indian dance provide manifestation of the inner state and vision?

**Ans.** Through the beautiful and complete language of movement, Indian dance provides of manifestation of the inner state and vision.



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**Q. 2 According to the context of the essay say whether the following statements are True or False:**

1. Whosoever came to India fell into its pattern.

**Ans. True.**

2. The body of man was the microcosm representing the macrocosm.

**Ans. True.**

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**Q. 2 According to the context of the essay say whether the following statements are True or False:**

3. Impersonality and intensity are the twin paradoxical demands of Indian art which is life bound and beyond it.

**Ans. True.**

4. Sculpture manifests India's vision of wholeness through a method of impersonation.

**Ans. True.**

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**Q. 2 According to the context of the essay say whether the following statements are True or False:**

5. Indian painting is impersonal in essence.

**Ans. True.**

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Q. 1. Give the meanings of the following words and use them in sentences of your own:

1. Heritage
2. Evoke
3. Microcosm
4. Macrocosm
5. Juxtapose
6. Harness
7. Cyclic
8. Benign
9. Concentric
10. Cosmos