

New Race

A Journal of Integral & Future Studies



Special Issue on
Art as a Bridge between the Human and the Divine

August 2025: Volume XI Issue II

13. 12. 66

New Race

blessings


NEW RACE is published by Chhalamayi Reddy on behalf of
Institute of Human Study, 2-2-4/1, O.U.Road, Hyderabad 500 044.

Founder Editor : (Late) Prof. V. Madhusudan Reddy

Editor-in-Chief: V. Ananda Reddy

Assistant Editor: Shruti Bidwaikar

Editor for this Issue: Dr. Indira Malapaka

Email: newracejournal@gmail.com; Phone: 040 27098414

On the web: www.instituteofhumanstudy.org

ISSN No.: 2454—1176

NEW RACE

A Journal of Integral & Future Studies

August 2025
Volume XI Issue II



CONTENTS

From the Editor's Desk

1. ART

Sri Aurobindo v

2. The Multidimensionality of Art in Indic Thought: From Divine Connection to Digital Challenges

Dr. Sachidanand Joshi vii

3. Art and Avatāra: The Divine Manifestation in Indian Aesthetics

Dr. Bharat Gupt xiii

4. The Enduring Link: Indian Civilization and Its Human-Divine Influence in Southeast Asia

Commander Neeraj Vashisth xx

5. Nāda Brahma: Music as a Divine Pathway in Indic Traditions

Dr. Sumit Day xxix

6. The Enduring Nexus of Art and Divinity in Indian Consciousness

Indira Malapaka xliv

The Art of Becoming: A Journey with Sri Aurobindo

In this edition of *New Race*, we delve into the profound vision of Sri Aurobindo, a seer whose life and work were dedicated to the spiritual evolution of humanity. The theme, "Art is a bridge between the human and divine," is not merely an aesthetic statement but addresses art as a tool, a means to transcend the limitations of the physical and psychological self and to connect with the deeper realities of the spirit. He saw the artist not just as a creator of beauty but as a channel for divine consciousness, a vehicle for the descent of truth, beauty, and harmony into the earthly plane. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy posits that humanity is on the cusp of a new evolutionary leap, from the mental to the supramental consciousness. This transformation, he believed, would be a collaborative effort between the human aspiration and the divine grace. Art, in this context, plays a crucial role. It refines our sensibilities, purifies our emotions, and awakens our spiritual perception. The artist who seeks to express the divine must first cultivate an inner silence, a receptive state of mind where the higher truths can be received and translated into form.

The essays in this issue explore this vision from various perspectives. From an analysis of Sri Aurobindo's views on art, which he considered a vehicle for spiritual experience, to discussions on how contemporary art forms can be infused with a spiritual purpose, we seek to understand how this ancient wisdom can guide us in our creative endeavors today. We are reminded that art, at its highest, is not about self-expression but about a larger, more universal expression—the manifestation of the divine in the human. It is a journey from the outer forms to the inner essence, from the fleeting and temporal to the eternal and timeless. The writers for this issue are all, in their own unique ways, engaged in this sacred task. They are participating in the great work of human evolution, helping to build that bridge between the earth and the heavens. They are explorers of the soul, cartographers of the inner world, showing us the way to a more luminous existence.

We hope that this edition inspires you to look at art not just with your eyes, but with your soul. May it encourage you to see the divine in the human, the eternal in the ephemeral, and to find your own path in this grand journey of becoming.

Indira Malapaka

Sri Aurobindo

All Art is interpretation. Creation is a misnomer; nothing in this world is created, all is manifested. All exists previously in the mind of the Knower. Art may interpret that which is already manifest or was manifest at one time, or it may interpret what will be manifest hereafter. It may even be used as one of the agencies in the manifestation. A particular type of face and figure may be manifested in the work of a popular artist and in a single generation the existing type of face and figure in the country may change and mould itself to the new conception. These things are there in the type in the causal world with which our superconscious selves are perpetually in touch; they manifest in the psychical and become part of our thought. That thought we put out into the material world and there it takes shape and body, as movements, as institutions, as poetry, Art and Knowledge, as living men and women. Man creates his world because he is the psychic instrument through whom God manifests that which He had previously arranged in Himself. In this sense Art can create the past, the present and the future. It can remanifest that which was and has passed away, it can fix for us that which is, it can prophesy that which will be.

Its normal sphere, however, is interpretation of a less pregnant and forceful kind. Here too, there are three things which it can interpret in the object it selects, the causal part or thing in itself; the psychical part or its passing imaginations, phases, emotions; or the physical part, the outward appearance, incident or movement as our eyes see them. Indian Art attaches itself to the two higher interpretations, European to the two lower. They meet in the middle term of Art, the imaginative and emotional; but each brings with it the habits of vision, the conventions, the mastering movement and tendency of the soul downward to earth or upward to heaven, born of their main preoccupation, so that even here, though they meet on common ground, they remain diverse and unreconciled.

In dealing with the form the question between them is Shall I reproduce what the eye sees or shall I reproduce what the soul sees? The lower type of European Art is content with reproducing what the eye sees. This it calls realism and fidelity to Nature—narrowing Nature to the limited confines of the materially sensible. The reproduction, of course, is not a real reproduction, but only an approximation within the limitations imposed by the canvas, the brush and the paint-box. It is really as close an imitation as our instruments will allow, absolute fidelity being rarely possible. This style of Art had perhaps its utility, but now that we have photographs and can put colour into the photographs, its separate field is in danger of being taken from it.

A higher European Art takes imitation of the form as its basis, but its nobler objective is not the imitation of form, but the imitation of emotion. The artist tries to see and recover on canvas not only the body, but so much of the feeling as the body can for the moment express. This may often be a great deal. In certain moments of powerful feeling or critical action a great deal of our psychical selves may come out in the eyes, the face, the gesture, the pose. This the artist imitates. He not only shows us an object or an incident, but he fixes on the canvas a moment in the soul-life of the object. The habitual mood also stamps itself to a great extent on

the face and certain traits of character betray themselves in expression and feature. These too the imitative artist transfers to the canvas. When not exaggerated or theatrical, this kind of art can be strong, effective and dramatic. But it has serious limitations. So much of the inner truth as the outward form interprets, this Art interprets. Its interpretation is second-hand, its vision derived and unable to go beyond its authority.

A still higher reach is attained by imaginative European Art. Imagination, according to the European idea, is creative, not interpretative. What is really meant is that the imaginative artist transfers something that belongs to himself into the object of his study, some fancy that has flashed across or some idea that has mastered his mind. Either he reads it into his subject by unconscious transference or he deliberately uses his subject as a mere excuse for putting his fancy or his idea into line and colour. The artist is interpreting himself, not his subject. This egoistic Art has often a very high value and some of the best European work has been done in this kind. More rarely his imaginative sympathy enables him to catch a glimpse of the thing itself hidden in the form. His imagination usually plays with it and prevents the vision from being true in all its parts, but he is able to do work of the highest attractiveness, vigour or artistic beauty.

In all these kinds the European binds himself by the necessity of reproducing the actual outward form imposed by material Nature. He is a bondsman to form and such do not attain to that spiritual freedom which is the first condition of the sight spiritual. When he tries to interpret the thing in itself, he degenerates usually into allegory. Recently the Impressionist school in Europe have tried to break the fetters of the form; they have insisted that what one really sees in an object is not the rounded, solid material form but something rarer and different. In reality, they are groping their way towards an attempt at seeing and interpreting something hidden in the object, something the soul sees before the eye can catch it. Ignorant of the way, they seldom rise beyond a striking and fantastic imagination, but sometimes an inspired eye catches the true vision.

The Indian begins at the other end. He sees the thing itself either by *sukshmadrishti*, the soul-sight, or by *dhyana*, a spiritual union with the object studied in which the truth it expresses dawns on the mind by the process of revelation. This he transfers to canvas by letting his inspired and informed Will guide the pencil and the brush instead of using his intellect or merely technical means to find the best way of expression. He uses technique with power, but does not rely on it chiefly. The body he paints is the one which will in every part of it express the thing itself, not the actual material body which largely conceals it. When he descends into the psychical part and seeks to express imaginations, emotions, or passing phases, he carries his method with him. Not content with expressing as much of the feeling as the actual body reveals, he sees the emotion in its fullness by *dhyana* or soul-sight and forces the body into a mould fit for its absolute expression. He sees the soul and paints it or he sees the heart or mind and paints it. He sees and can, if he will, paint the body merely. But usually he does not will it.

(CWSA 1: 541)

The Multidimensionality of Art in Indic Thought: From Divine Connection to Digital Challenges

Dr. Sachidanand Joshi

In Indic philosophical traditions, art is more than just a creative output; it embodies a fundamental ontological link between humanity and the Divine, seamlessly woven into the fabric of daily life. This perspective diverges from linear Western models, instead embracing a cyclical understanding that mirrors the broader Indic conception of time and cosmic progression. This article explores the multifaceted dimensions of art, moving beyond its exoteric functions to delve into its esoteric purpose as a devotional practice and a pathway to inner realization. We will examine how art serves as a means of *Ātmarañjana*—self-enrichment—rather than mere *Manorañjana*—external entertainment—and how this informs its pervasive integration into everyday cultural practices like *Rangoli* and the aestheticization of the home. Furthermore, we will analyze the profound spiritual connection inherent in authentic artistic creation, where inspiration flows from the Divine, fostering unique and irreplaceable expressions. Finally, this discussion will address the contemporary challenges posed by the digital age, particularly the potential for technology to disconnect individuals from genuine artistic essence, while reaffirming art's enduring power to energize creativity and facilitate a deeper connection to the Divine in an increasingly mediated world. Art, within the framework of Indic philosophy, transcends its Western conceptualization as mere aesthetic production or entertainment. Instead, it is posited as a fundamental ontological link between the human and the Divine, deeply interwoven with the fabric of daily existence. This perspective diverges from linear historical or developmental models of art, embracing a cyclical understanding that mirrors the broader Indic conception of time and cosmic progression. This article explores the purpose of art beyond its exoteric functions, delving into its esoteric dimensions as a devotional practice and a pathway to inner realization.

The Purpose of Art: Beyond Exoteric Entertainment

In numerous cultural traditions, particularly those rooted in Indic thought, the *telos* of art extends far beyond the provision of superficial amusement or distraction. Here, art is frequently understood as a profound form of *sādhana* (spiritual discipline) or *bhakti* (devotion), serving as a deliberate means to connect with a higher power or ultimate reality. This approach reorients the primary beneficiary of artistic engagement: it is not principally for an external audience, but for the internal enrichment and sustenance of the practitioner. This distinction is encapsulated in the Sanskrit terms *Ātmarañjana* and *Manorañjana*. *Manorañjana* denotes entertainment or gratification intended for others, focusing on external reception and pleasure. Conversely, *Ātmarañjana* refers to the act of finding joy, peace, and contentment within oneself through artistic creation or engagement. When artistic endeavor emanates from this internal wellspring, it ceases to be a detached performance and transforms into a direct

conduit to the Divine. In this state, every creative act, every thought associated with the artistic process, becomes aligned with a higher purpose, contributing to the practitioner's spiritual evolution.

Consequently, within specific artistic traditions, each creative expression functions as an *arpanam* (offering) or *pūjā* (act of worship) to the Divine. This establishes an intimate, inextricable bond between the artistic output and the fundamental being of the artist. The art object or performance, therefore, is not merely an artifact or a spectacle, but a materialized form of devotion, embodying a spiritual resonance that is both created by and reflective of the artist's inner state. This profound integration elevates art from a secular pursuit to a sacred practice, where the act of creation itself becomes a form of spiritual communion.

Art in Everyday Expressions: An Integrated Aesthetic in Indic Contexts

The pervasive integration of artistic principles into the quotidian fabric of life is a salient characteristic of numerous cultural practices, particularly evident in Indic contexts. This widespread aesthetic engagement challenges Western dichotomies between "high art" and everyday activities, revealing a holistic approach where creative expression serves functional, spiritual, and personal purposes. A prime illustration of this phenomenon is Rangoli, a vibrant form of visual art meticulously crafted on doorsteps and courtyards daily. These intricate designs, executed with colored powders or natural materials, are inherently ephemeral. Their transient nature—meticulously created each dawn and deliberately effaced by dusk—underscores a purpose extending beyond mere public display or lasting preservation. Instead, the practice of Rangoli primarily serves several interconnected functions: it provides profound personal satisfaction to the creator, acts as an honoring of *Prakriti* (Nature), and functions as a daily offering of respect to the Divine. The act of creation itself, rather than the enduring object, becomes the focal point, embodying a meditative and devotional process that fosters inner harmony and connection.

Furthermore, the aestheticization of the domestic sphere exemplifies an ingrained artistic sensibility. Even activities typically classified as mundane household tasks are imbued with an artistic quality, transforming them into expressions of subtle visual harmony. The deliberate and thoughtful arrangement of objects, ranging from utilitarian utensils to decorative elements, contributes to an overall aesthetic order within the living space. This practice, conceptually akin to *Ātma-Rangoli* (self-oriented aesthetic creation), aims to cultivate an environment of contentment, positive energy, and tranquility within the home. The meticulous attention to detail and harmonious placement are understood

to facilitate the palpable presence of a divine energy, rendering the domestic environment a sacred and aesthetically charged space. This integration highlights how artistic principles are not confined to specialized domains but permeate the very structure of daily living, fostering a perpetual engagement with beauty and spiritual resonance.

Art and Spiritual Connection: An Integrated Paradigm

The relationship between art and spirituality is often understood not as a duality but as a profoundly integrated continuum, particularly within philosophical frameworks that emphasize the immanence of the Divine. From this perspective, authentic artistic creation is posited to originate from a state of spiritual attunement, where the artist functions as a conduit for inspiration and energy derived directly from a transcendent or immanent divine source. This intrinsic connection elucidates why certain artworks possess an ineffable quality of uniqueness and irreplaceability; they are perceived as manifestations of a singular divine impulse, rather than mere human constructs. Consequently, such art is not primarily driven by commercial imperatives but is compelled by an internal necessity, emerging from the heart and spirit to resonate deeply with the soul of both creator and perceiver.

This understanding of art stands in stark contrast to prevailing commercially oriented models, which often prioritize market value, mass production, or aesthetic commodification. Within this integrated framework, art is conceptualized not as an external object or a performative act, but as an internalized experience. It is lived, embodied, and woven into the very fabric of one's being. This perception effectively blurs the ontological distinction between an 'ordinary person' and an 'artist', asserting that every individual, by virtue of their inherent capacity for creativity and expression, possesses the potential to manifest a unique world of art. Such a perspective also provides a compelling explanation for the historical absence of a widespread emphasis on public museums in certain cultural traditions. The primary value of art lies not in its physical preservation or static display, but in its immediate creation, its lived experience, and the profound joy and spiritual liberation it engenders in the moment of its unfolding.

As articulated by Sri Aurobindo, art serves as a "bridge between the individual and the Divine." This metaphor suggests a dynamic flow, where artistic expression permeates the soul and body, akin to the vital act of breathing. This continuous engagement with art initiates a profound transformation of the self. An individual who truly embodies art within their being often radiates a distinctive presence, demonstrating an elevated state of consciousness and refined sensibility. This

underscores art's remarkable capacity not only to effect individual spiritual metamorphosis but also, by extension, to profoundly influence and elevate the collective consciousness of society.

The Pervasive Role of Art in Culture and Education

Historically, art has been organically interwoven into the very fabric of daily life and cultural practices, particularly evident in non-Western contexts where its function extended beyond mere aesthetic appreciation. Ancient artistic traditions demonstrate a seamless integration of creative expression across various societal domains, encompassing grand architectural feats, complex musical compositions, diverse visual arts, rich literary forms, and even seemingly mundane domestic activities such as textile work or culinary presentation. The historical precedent for practices like food garnishing, often perceived as a modern or Western innovation, highlights how artistic presentation has long been a component of diverse aspects of human experience, elevating the everyday to a realm of aesthetic consideration.

The intrinsic relationship between art and the natural environment is also a significant feature of culturally integrated artistic expressions. Artistic forms frequently complement and interact with the natural world. This reciprocal influence is observable in various cultural sartorial choices; for instance, in arid regions characterized by muted natural palettes, traditional attire often features vibrant, saturated colors, compensating for the environment's chromatic scarcity. Conversely, in verdant, lush landscapes, local garments may adopt softer, more subdued hues, harmonizing with nature's inherent chromatic richness. This interplay underscores how human creativity can both respond to and enhance the existing environmental aesthetics, demonstrating a deep connection between artistic output and ecological context.

Consequently, art is conceptualized not merely as a specialized academic discipline but as an integral component of societal experience. A genuinely elevated society is recognized by its profound cultural dimension, a depth that is primarily fostered through the internalization of art within its social structure. This acculturation process ideally commences in early childhood, cultivating an innate appreciation for the pervasive spirit of art that has flourished across generations. The emphasis is on absorbing art's essence as a lived experience, rather than confining it to formal instructional settings or specialized curricula.

Philosophers like Sri Aurobindo further elaborate on art's multifaceted role in aesthetic, intellectual, and social upliftment. Art is posited as a fundamental means for comprehending and connecting with the Divine and nature, serving as an expression of the soul and spirit. The creation of exceptionally impactful art, exemplified by a sculptor imbuing an inert medium with perceived vitality, illustrates how divine impetus can manifest through human agency. Ultimately, art provides an unparalleled means for individuals to articulate their deepest

selves. Whether through the expressive power of a single brushstroke, the resonance of a poetic phrase, or the profound impact of a musical note, art facilitates an instantaneous connection that transcends the purely physical realm, enabling a powerful and immediate communication of intrinsic being.

The Challenge of the Digital Age: Reclaiming Artistic Essence in a Technologically Mediated World

The contemporary landscape, characterized by the pervasive ubiquity of digital media, presents significant challenges to the deeply integrated and spiritually resonant understanding of art that has historically prevailed in many cultures. The prevalent paradigm of digital consumption risks fostering a profound disconnection between individuals and the intrinsic essence of creativity and authentic artistic expression. While technological advancements undoubtedly offer powerful tools for artistic creation and dissemination, an uncritical surrender to the 'intellect' of these devices can inadvertently impede genuine personal growth and the cultivation of refined artistic sensibility. The increasing societal shift from an engaged 'real life' experience to a mediated 'reel life' via digital platforms is viewed by some as fundamentally detrimental. This transition potentially leads to a diminishment of innate human creativity, a reduction in the nuanced capacity for artistic expression, and an overall erosion of cultural refinement. The immediacy and often superficial nature of digital interactions may displace the contemplative and deeply personal engagement that traditional art forms demand.

The recent advent of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly in generative art, further compels a critical re-evaluation of the true nature of art. While AI algorithms can produce technically polished and aesthetically complex artistic outputs with unprecedented speed and scale, a significant philosophical debate emerges regarding the *locus* of artistic essence. For many, the profound value of art lies not merely in its formal characteristics or technical execution, but in its capacity to foster human connection—a connection between the artist and their inner vision, between the artwork and the Divine, and between humanity and nature. This connection transcends the realm of pure information processing or technical skill, tapping into deeper spiritual and existential dimensions that are often deemed inaccessible to artificial intelligences. The very act of creation, when deeply rooted in human experience and intentionality, carries a qualitative difference that AI-generated content may struggle to replicate.

Despite these challenges, the foundational philosophy that art empowers individuals to energize their inherent creativity and establish a profound connection with the Divine remains central. Rooted in Vedantic principles such as *Ahaṁ Brahmāsmi* ("I am the Divine") and *Eko'ham eva* ("I alone am, there is no other"), this perspective posits that each individual is not merely a component of the Divine, but an active manifestation and representation of the Divine force

itself. Consequently, the most authentic and potent form of this representation is realized through genuine artistic expression. It is through the uninhibited communication of the depths of the human heart and soul, translated into artistic form, that this divine essence finds its most profound and accessible articulation, underscoring the enduring, transformative power of art even in an increasingly digitalized epoch.

Conclusion: Reclaiming the Holistic Essence of Art

The preceding exploration has illuminated a profound and comprehensive understanding of art within Indic thought, one that significantly broadens its conventional interpretations. We've established that art functions as a fundamental ontological link between humanity and the Divine, seamlessly integrated into the very rhythm of daily existence. This perspective, distinct from linear Western models, embraces a cyclical understanding of time and cosmic progression, underscoring art's role in fostering *Ātmarañjana*—inner fulfillment—rather than solely *Manorañjana*, or external entertainment. This foundational principle is tangibly expressed in the ubiquitous aestheticization of everyday practices, from the ephemeral beauty of Rangoli to the harmonious arrangement within domestic spaces, demonstrating art's pervasive presence beyond formal artistic institutions.

Furthermore, our analysis highlighted the inherent spiritual connection to authentic artistic creation, where inspiration is perceived to flow directly from the Divine, resulting in expressions that are uniquely profound and irreplaceable, unburdened by commercial motivations. This integrated paradigm views art as an internalized experience, lived and embodied, thus dissolving the conventional distinction between 'artist' and 'ordinary person'. As articulated by a prominent philosopher, art serves as a vital bridge, not only facilitating personal transformation but also elevating collective consciousness. However, this holistic understanding faces significant contemporary challenges, primarily from the pervasive influence of the digital age. The increasing reliance on technology risks fostering a disconnection from genuine artistic essence, potentially diminishing innate creativity and refinement. While artificial intelligence offers powerful tools, the true value of art, within this framework, remains rooted in its capacity to cultivate human connection—to the creator's inner vision, to the Divine, and to the natural world. Ultimately, understanding art through an Indic lens urges a critical re-evaluation of our relationship with creativity in an increasingly mediated world. It calls for a conscious effort to reclaim the multidimensional power of art, recognizing it as a profound means to energize our inherent creative faculties and to foster a deeper, more authentic connection to the sacred. In doing so, we can not only revitalize our individual spirits but also contribute to the elevation of society as a whole, ensuring that art continues to serve its ultimate purpose as a conduit for the divine within us and around us.

Art and Avatāra: The Divine Manifestation in Indian Aesthetics

Dr. Bharat Gupt

Śrī Gurubhyo Namaḥ!

Ayam śaivaḥ sarvopāsate śiva iti, brahma iti vedāntinaḥ, bodhaḥ, buddha iti pramāṇa-karṭṛ-tvena nāyakam, arhat nitya-tā-jayin śāsana-rataḥ, karma iti mīmāṃsakāḥ, sa eva yuvida dhatta vān-citta-phalaṁ trilokyanāthaḥ hariḥ.

Let the *Trilokyanātha*, the Lord of the three universes, grant you all your legitimate desires. He is the Lord of the three worlds—*Hari*, but he is also Buddha, he is also *Śiva*, he is also *Yajña*, he is also *Arhat*, he is also the *kartā* of the *nāyaka*. It is he, and he alone, who takes all these diverse shapes and manifestations.

(11th century verse, written as *maṅgalācaraṇa* to a play called *Mahanāta*, gives a message of our land that - Truth is one, truth is abiding, and truth is triumphant: *satyam eva jayate nānṛtaṁ*.)

At the heart of Indian philosophical and artistic traditions lies the profound concept of *avatāra*, or divine incarnation. This foundational pillar posits that the Divine is not merely a detached creator of the universe but actively descends into it, taking on a myriad of forms and manifestations. This contrasts sharply with many other world views where creation is often perceived as inherently separate from, or even inferior to, the creator. The Indian perspective asserts an intimate and continuous engagement of the divine with the material realm, suggesting a seamless continuum rather than a hierarchical separation. This deep integration means that the sacred is not solely transcendent but also immanent, dwelling within the very fabric of existence.

This core idea is beautifully encapsulated in an 11th century invocation, which describes the Lord of the three universes, *Hari*, manifesting in diverse forms such as Buddha, *Shiva*, *Yajña*, and *Arhat*. This ancient declaration underscores a fundamental tenet of Indian thought: Truth is singular, eternal, and ultimately triumphant, yet it expresses itself through a multiplicity of divine forms and paths. This allows for a rich tapestry of spiritual practices and artistic representations, all converging on the same ultimate reality. The recognition of the divine in various manifestations provides fertile ground for artistic expression, as artists seek to capture and convey the myriad facets of this singular, eternal truth.

Art as a Pathway to the Divine (*Vidyā-Tīrtha*)

In the Indian intellectual and spiritual landscape, the concept of a "*vidyā-tīrtha*" holds profound significance, designating institutions or places where the pursuit of knowledge (*vidyā*) transcends mere academic instruction to become a sacred endeavor. Unlike secular educational models that prioritize utilitarian outcomes or professional accreditation, a *vidyā-tīrtha* is conceived as a hallowed

ground where the acquisition of knowledge is intrinsically linked to spiritual growth and self-realization. This reverence for knowledge is encapsulated in the aphorism "*vidyā gurūṇām guruḥ*"—knowledge is the teacher of all teachers, suggesting its pre-eminent position as the ultimate guide and illuminator. Within such a framework, art is not relegated to a secondary status as a recreational activity or a decorative embellishment; rather, it is elevated to a profound spiritual practice, or *sādhanā*. This designation as *sādhanā* implies a disciplined and dedicated pursuit, a rigorous engagement with the artistic form that aims at inner transformation and a deeper connection with the divine.

The teleological aspiration of Indian art is succinctly articulated in the celebrated Upaniṣadic declaration, "*rasaḥ vai saḥ*." This aphorism, drawn from the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, posits that *rasa*, the quintessential aesthetic experience, is not merely a subjective feeling but is, in essence, Brahman—the ultimate, ineffable reality. This profound identification between aesthetic delight and ultimate truth distinguishes Indian aesthetics from many other traditions. Consequently, art functions as a powerful *conduit*—a divinely ordained means—to propel individuals towards *ānanda*, a state of supreme bliss that is not transient pleasure but an intrinsic aspect of Brahman itself. Viewed from this perspective, artistic engagement becomes a "divine doorway" (*divya-dvāra*), serving as a liminal space that simultaneously illuminates the external world of phenomena and the intricate inner landscape of the self. Much like a lamp that reveals both the sanctity of an inner sanctum (*garbha-gr̥ha*) and the path leading to it, art, in its Indian conception, unveils the sacred within the mundane and guides the practitioner and the connoisseur towards deeper spiritual insights.

Further corroborating this spiritual orientation of art, the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*, an ancient legal and ethical treatise, explicitly outlines the transformative potential of artistic mastery. It asserts that an individual adept in playing the *vīṇā*—possessing profound knowledge of its intricate elements such as *jāti* (melodic types) and *śruti* (microtonal intervals), and expert in *tāla* (rhythm)—can attain the path to liberation (*mokṣa-mārgam niyacchatī*) with remarkable ease. This assertion is not an isolated claim but reflects a pervasive cultural belief that has permeated Indian society for millennia. It underscores the conviction that even artistic practices, which might appear outwardly focused on skill acquisition or performance, are imbued with the capacity to facilitate spiritual ascent. The emphasis is not solely on the grand or complex art forms; even seemingly "humble" artistic endeavors, when undertaken with sincerity, dedication, and an understanding of their deeper spiritual resonance, are believed to contribute to an individual's journey towards higher states of being and ultimate liberation. This integration of art and spirituality thus forms an unbroken thread through the fabric of Indian cultural and philosophical thought.

The Misdirection of Art in the Modern Era

In contemporary discourse, a notable and concerning trend is the re-purposing of art for objectives that diverge significantly from its inherent, traditional nature. Historically, many cultures have viewed art as a conduit for spiritual expression, aesthetic contemplation, or the transmission of profound truths. However, in the modern era, particularly under the influence of globalized economies and shifting ideological paradigms, art has increasingly been co-opted for more pragmatic, often instrumental, ends. This includes its deployment for commercial gain, transforming creative expression into a commodity subject to market forces. Similarly, art is frequently employed as a tool for propaganda, serving to disseminate particular political ideologies or governmental narratives. The pursuit of political power also leverages artistic forms, as seen in campaigns that utilize visual or performing arts to sway public opinion or legitimize authority. Moreover, there is a growing concern regarding the use of art in the creation of deceptive narratives, where aesthetic appeal is harnessed to mask ulterior motives or construct fabricated realities.

The commercialization of media offers a stark illustration of this paradigm shift. Indian cinema, for example, once celebrated for its artistic depth, narrative richness, and cultural resonance, has witnessed a significant transformation. The emphasis has largely moved from artistic excellence and thematic integrity towards revenue generation and the pursuit of higher television rating points (TRPs). This shift often necessitates a simplification of narratives, a reduction of artistic complexity, and a prioritization of mass appeal over nuanced storytelling. When the primary purpose of an art form becomes externalized—driven by commercial viability rather than intrinsic creative or spiritual value—its potential for genuine cultural contribution can be profoundly compromised, leading to a dilution of its artistic and ethical substance.

Beyond these utilitarian appropriations, a more profound philosophical assault on the traditional understanding of Indian art has emerged, primarily from two distinct yet interconnected perspectives. The first is a rejection of the concept of *rasa* as a valid or beneficial aesthetic experience. Critics adopting this stance often dismiss *rasa*—the quintessential aesthetic emotion or delight—as a “false drug” or an opiate. Their argument posits that the pursuit of *rasa*, which encourages absorption in aesthetic bliss, distracts individuals from engaging with pressing social issues such as inequality, injustice, or structural disempowerment. From this critical vantage point, art’s primary function ought to be socio-political critique and mobilization, rather than providing an experience that might be perceived as an escape or a pacifier in the face of societal ills. This perspective, often rooted in specific socio-political theories, views traditional Indian aesthetics as potentially complicit in maintaining existing power structures by offering spiritual or aesthetic solace instead of prompting revolutionary action.

The second critical perspective manifests as a disdain for beauty and materiality, particularly in the context of artistic representation. This view often originates from a puritanical or iconoclastic impulse, which regards beauty—especially in its earthly, sensuous forms, and particularly the representation of the human body—as dangerous, distracting, or inherently inferior. This perspective frequently stems from a theological or ideological belief that creation, or the material world itself, is inherently flawed or subordinate to a higher, abstract ideal. Whether this ideal is a political utopia, a social construct, or a transcendent religious truth, it posits that the material realm lacks intrinsic divinity. Consequently, the world becomes something to be manipulated or controlled rather than revered or celebrated. In such frameworks, art, if it focuses on embodying material beauty or the human form, is seen as either idolatrous or as diverting attention from the supposedly more significant, non-material ideals. This often leads to calls for censorship, suppression, or a reorientation of artistic practice away from representational beauty towards more abstract or didactic forms, effectively stripping art of its traditional role in celebrating and divinising the phenomenal world.

The Divine in the Material: The Incarnational Basis of Indian Art

A pivotal tenet across most Indian philosophical schools is the emphatic rejection of the notion that the material world is separate from or inferior to the divine. Instead, Indian thought posits a profound unity: the creator is not distinct from creation; rather, the Divine permeates and *becomes* the world. This immanent divinity is powerfully encapsulated in the *mahāvākya* “*sarvaṁ khalu idaṁ brahma*” (“All this, indeed, is Brahman”), signifying an intrinsic divinity within all existence. This vision fundamentally reshapes the perception of reality, asserting that the phenomenal world is not an illusion or a lesser creation, but a direct manifestation of the ultimate reality.

This expansive vision underpins the Indian concept of *samatā* (equality)—a profound recognition of the intrinsic divinity in all beings and phenomena. It is not merely a socio-political construct of parity but a deep spiritual insight into the shared essence of existence. This perspective directly leads to the concept of *avatāra* (incarnation), where the Divine, having manifested the universe, also descends and is born within it. This core belief, that “God becomes flesh,” is a rare philosophical conviction shared by only a few major civilizations historically, most notably ancient Greece and India. Significantly, both these cultures have produced an unparalleled volume and diversity of art, suggesting a strong correlation between the belief in divine immanence and prolific artistic output. The Greek concept of *ensarkōsis* (to become flesh), where gods interacted directly with humanity, closely parallels the Indian idea of *avatāra*, underscoring a shared metaphysical foundation for artistic flourishing.

In practical artistic disciplines like *Bharatanāṭyam*, the performer’s embodiment

of the character (*pātra*) exemplifies this incarnational principle. Through rigorous training and profound dedication, the dancer experiences a complete fusion where the *bhāva* (emotion or inner reality) of the character saturates their entire being. This transformative “becoming” is the very essence of *nāṭya* (theatre or dramatic art). As famously articulated by a renowned Irish philosopher in the context of dance, “There is no difference between the dancer and the dance; the dancer has become the dance.” This total fusion of creator and creation—the artist embodying the artistic subject—is profoundly facilitated by, and perhaps only truly achievable through, a belief in the descent of the Divine into form. Indian art, therefore, compulsively depicts these divine incarnations in various mediums—be it painting, sculpture, dance, or narrative—as a celebration of the divine presence within the material world.

This philosophy extends even to more recent developments in Indian thought, such as the idea of the “descent of the supramental being,” as expounded by figures like Sri Aurobindo. This concept suggests a divine transformation of the material and the ordinary, aiming to elevate humanity through a conscious infusion of higher consciousness into physical existence. This perspective profoundly enhances human relationships and everyday life by encouraging the perception of the divine within them. The example of seeing a child not merely as a child, but as the “sustainer of the worlds” (*jagato dhāraṇa*) in the lap of *Yasodā*, powerfully illustrates how the Divine becomes knowable, intimate, and tangible. This ability to perceive the sacred in the mundane, enabled by the incarnational vision, infuses everyday reality with profound spiritual meaning, thereby enriching both life and art.

Art, Culture, and Societal Well-being

The historical trajectory of Indian civilization unequivocally demonstrates that the deep integration of art within its cultural fabric has transcended mere spiritual and aesthetic pursuits. Art has consistently played a pivotal role in sustaining the very practical and economic dimensions of societal well-being. A prime example of this holistic function is evident in the temple complexes, which, for over two millennia, operated not merely as places of worship but as dynamic, multi-faceted centers. These temples actively fostered artistic creation and patronage, served as repositories and disseminators of knowledge (*vidyā*), and significantly contributed to the local and regional economy through their landholdings, trade networks, and employment of artisans, scholars, and performers. The eventual decline or disruption of these integrated systems, often due to external invasions or internal socio-political shifts, demonstrably contributed to periods of economic stagnation and cultural impoverishment. This historical correlation powerfully illustrates how neglecting such an organically integrated cultural framework can indeed have far-reaching and detrimental consequences on a society’s overall prosperity and vitality.

Furthermore, the comprehensive philosophy of Indian life, encapsulated in the concept of the four *puruṣārthas*—the legitimate aims of human existence—underscores art’s integral role. These *puruṣārthas* are *dharma* (righteous conduct and moral duty), *artha* (material prosperity and economic well-being), *kāma* (desire, pleasure, and artistic gratification), and *mokṣa* (spiritual liberation). Art, in its diverse forms, actively supports all four. For instance, the *Kāmasūtra*, often superficially understood as merely a manual on sexual postures, is in fact a profound treatise on *kāma* as a sophisticated pursuit. It functions as a comprehensive guide for transforming primal desires into purposeful and aesthetically refined expressions across individual, social, and artistic levels, ultimately contributing to a more elevated form of love, potentially leading towards divine love. It is within the *Kāmasūtra* that the *Catuḥṣaṣṭi Kalā*, or 64 arts, are meticulously enumerated. This enumeration highlights the extensive and sophisticated artistic education traditionally imparted to women, enabling them to uphold the beauty, harmony, and cultural richness of *gṛhastha* (householder) life. These arts extended far beyond decorative skills, encompassing highly intellectual and demanding disciplines such as *vyākaraṇa* (grammar), *nāṭya* (drama), *nṛtta* (dance – a discipline requiring immense physical and mental rigor), foreign languages, and even rudimentary military techniques, thereby showcasing a remarkably holistic approach to education and societal contribution.

In stark contrast to this integrated traditional model, modern society often exhibits a significant disjunction between economic pursuits and holistic well-being. Driven by an ethos of rapid consumption and fiercely competitive ideals, contemporary society frequently overlooks the profound role of art in fostering genuine and sustainable happiness. The prevailing focus on material gain and superficial achievements, often promoted by certain business philosophies and media narratives, can paradoxically lead to widespread societal unhappiness, anxiety, and a sense of existential void. The relentless pursuit of external markers of success, devoid of deeper artistic or spiritual engagement, tends to create a transient and ultimately unsatisfying existence. In this context, the ancient Indian principle of *Yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam*—“Yoga is skill in action”—offers a powerful counter-narrative. This aphorism suggests that true fulfillment and abiding happiness (*ānanda*) are found not in the outcome of an action or external rewards, but in the inherent quality, efficiency, and mindfulness with which an action is performed. This principle resonates profoundly with the transformative power of art, where the meticulous dedication to craft, the absorption in creative process, and the alignment of inner intention with outward expression, irrespective of commercial outcome, cultivate a deeper sense of contentment and self-realization. Thus, art, when understood and practiced in its traditional Indian spirit, becomes a crucial antidote to the discontents of modernity, offering a pathway to a more balanced, harmonious, and truly prosperous life.

In conclusion, the Indian vision of art, deeply rooted in the concept of *avatāra* and the immanence of the Divine, offers a holistic and transformative

framework that extends far beyond mere aesthetic appreciation. Unlike modern perspectives that often instrumentalise art for commercial gain or socio-political agendas, traditional Indian aesthetics views art as a *sādhana*—a spiritual practice leading to ultimate bliss, or *rasa*. This understanding of art as a “divine doorway” underpins a culture where creativity isn’t just a skill but a pathway to liberation, as evidenced by ancient texts and the historical role of institutions like temple complexes in fostering societal well-being.

However, contemporary trends pose significant challenges to this profound integration, misdirecting art towards superficial achievements and external validation. This often leads to a disconnect from the intrinsic happiness that traditional artistic engagement can provide. By reclaiming the incarnational perspective—recognizing the divine in the material and embracing art as a means of self-realization and the celebration of intrinsic beauty—society can rediscover a more harmonious and prosperous existence. The timeless principle of *Yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam* reminds us that true fulfillment lies in the skillful and dedicated pursuit of any endeavor, including art, fostering not just external success but deep, abiding contentment. Re-embracing this holistic understanding of art is vital for navigating the complexities of the modern world and fostering genuine societal flourishing.

Literature like everything else can be made an instrumentation for the Divine Life. It can be made of some spiritual importance if it is taken up with that aim and, even so, it cannot have that importance for everybody. In ordinary life no particular pursuit or study can be imposed as necessary for everybody; it cannot be positively necessary for everybody to have a mastery of English literature or to be a reader of poetry or a scientist or acquainted with all the sciences (or encyclopaedia of knowledge). What is important is to have an instrument of knowledge that will apply itself accurately, calmly, perfectly to all that it has to handle.

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 27: 723)

The Enduring Link: Indian Civilization and Its Human-Divine Influence in Southeast Asia

Commander Neeraj Vashisth

Introduction

The study of civilizations offers a unique lens through which it is easy to understand the complex tapestry of human history. While many of the world's great civilizations—including the Incan, Mayan, Greek, Roman, and Mesopotamian—have long ceased to exist in their original forms, one civilization stands as a remarkable exception: Indian civilization. Its continuous survival, despite centuries of invasion, plunder, and cultural adversity, prompts a critical inquiry into the unique factors that have allowed it to endure. This article argues that the resilience of Indian civilization is deeply rooted in its preservation of a holistic worldview, which is centred on the human-divine connection. This enduring philosophical and cultural framework is not only evident in India's internal rituals and traditions but also serves as the foundational link in its centuries-long relationship with Southeast Asia. This examination will first elaborate on the pillars of this civilizational continuity, then transition to a detailed analysis of the shared cultural and historical bonds that connect India with its Southeast Asian neighbours, demonstrating how a universal and inclusive ethos has shaped a unique and non-coercive civilizational nexus.

I. Resilience and Continuity of Indian Civilization

A defining characteristic of Indian civilization is its remarkable continuity. The fundamental patterns of daily life, social organization, and spiritual rituals have largely remained consistent for millennia. Unlike civilizations that have undergone complete transformations or collapsed entirely, Indian society maintains a discernible link to its ancient past. The profound resilience of this civilization can be attributed to its ability to weave the sacred into the fabric of daily life, creating a continuous and unbroken tradition from birth to death.

1. Human-Divine Connection in Rites of Passage

The earliest moments of a life in a Hindu family are marked by ceremonies that establish a direct and personal connection with the divine. These rituals are not merely symbolic gestures but are considered essential acts that guide a person's journey through *samsāra*, the cycle of life and rebirth. A prime example is the *Jātakarma* ceremony, performed shortly after a child is born. In this ancient rite, the father offers the infant a taste of honey and *ghee* or milk, a gentle act of welcoming the child into the world. This simple yet profound gesture signifies the beginning of a new journey, a re-entry into the cycle of life, and an initial acknowledgment of the spiritual path. This ceremony is followed by a period of

confinement for the mother and child, known as *sūtak*, a time for spiritual and physical purification.

The integration of the divine continues with the *nāmakaraṇa* (naming ceremony), where the child is given a name, often that of a deity. The choice of names like *Sītā*, *Lakṣmī*, or *Durgā* ensures that gods and goddesses are not distant figures but become household names, a constant and personal presence within the family. This practice directly affirms the human-divine connection as a central theme of a person's identity. Later in childhood, the *annaprāśana* ceremony, the first feeding of solid food, symbolises a milestone in the journey of life, marking a new stage of nourishment and physical maturation within the spiritual context of a purifying ritual. These ceremonies, while exhibiting subtle regional variations, all share a common purpose: to affirm the sacredness of human life and its journey toward the ultimate goal of transcending the cycle of rebirth.

2. Philosophical Significance of Death Rituals

Just as birth is celebrated, death is also treated as a sacred transition, a crucial stage in the journey of the *ātman* (soul). The rituals surrounding death underscore the philosophical tenets of Indian civilization, particularly the concepts of karma and the irrelevance of material possessions in the face of spiritual progress. The first act, traditionally, is the bathing and cleansing of the body, a physical and symbolic purification. All material attachments—jewellery, rings, and fine clothing—are removed. The person is then dressed in a simple white cloth, symbolising the stripping away of all worldly gains. This act powerfully communicates that material acquisitions hold no real consequence on the spiritual journey; what truly matters is one's karma, one's actions, and one's proximity to *mokṣa*, or spiritual liberation.

The funeral procession itself is steeped in symbolism. A family member, usually a younger male, leads the procession and performs *mukhāgni*, the ritual of lighting the funeral pyre. This act is a profound acknowledgment of the five elements - *prthvī* (earth), *jala* (water), *agni* (fire), *vāyu* (air), and *ākāśa* (space) - from which the physical body is believed to be formed. The return of the body to these elements symbolises the continuity of life in a cosmic sense. Following this, the mourning period culminates in an annual *śrāddha*, a ceremony performed on the death anniversary to honour the deceased and offer prayers for their soul's continued journey. The observance of *piṇḍa-dāna* during *pitṛ-pakṣa*, a fortnight dedicated to ancestors, further demonstrates the profound value placed on continuity and the spiritual bonds that connect generations.

3. A Holistic Worldview: Connection with Nature and Knowledge

The human-divine connection in Indian civilisation is not anthropocentric; it extends to a deep reverence for nature. This is powerfully demonstrated by the association of Hindu deities with various animal *vāhanas* (vehicles

or companions). For example, Shiva is associated with the bull (*vr̥ṣabha*), representing strength and righteousness; Vishnu rides the mythical bird *Garuḍa*; Ganesha is accompanied by the mouse (*mūṣika*), symbolising wisdom and prosperity; Saraswati has a white swan, and Kartikeya rides a peacock, representing beauty and fearlessness. These associations reflect a belief in the inherent unity between humans and animals.

Similarly, certain trees are revered as sacred, including the *pippala* (peepal), *nīma* (neem), *tulasī*, and *vaṭa* (banyan). They are an integral part of spiritual practices and family customs, rooted in a sacred geography and ecology. This worldview, which considers humans, animals, plants, and the elemental forces as part of a single, interconnected whole, is the essence of what makes Indian civilisation a living pact between all of creation. This is why it is not merely a religion but a holistic civilisation. Its core ideals, such as *vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam* ("the world is one family") and *ahimsā* (non-injury), are universal and inclusive, fostering an ethos of acceptance rather than mere tolerance.

Beyond rituals and philosophy, this civilizational continuity is also rooted in a rich legacy of knowledge. While the world witnessed its "Dark Ages," India was lit by the brilliance of its own golden age. The invention of zero, a foundational concept for all meaningful mathematical and scientific calculation, stands as one of India's greatest contributions. The ancient sages had a profound understanding of astronomy, planetary movements, and cosmology, as evidenced in texts composed long before the European Renaissance. This vibrant intellectual and scientific tradition, alongside a rich repository of folk tales (*lok-kathās*) like the *Pañcatantra* and a sophisticated system of traditional medicine, demonstrates a civilization that has always been self-aware, innovative, and deeply connected to its own wisdom.

II. The India–Southeast Asia Civilizational Nexus

The enduring nature of Indian civilisation finds its most profound external expression in its centuries-old relationship with Southeast Asia. This connection, which spans over two millennia, is unique in that it was not forged through military conquest or forced conversion. With the singular exception of a military encounter involving the Cholas, there is no historical record of India imposing its will on the region through force. Instead, the relationship was built on peaceful maritime trade, cultural exchange, and the voluntary adoption of Indian philosophical, religious, and political ideas. The shared civilisational legacy is evident in language, religion, art, and political traditions, forming a unique and enduring nexus.

1. A Tapestry of Shared Heritage: Linguistic and Cultural Fabric of Southeast Asia

The profound and enduring relationship between India and Southeast Asia,

forged over centuries without military conquest, is most tangibly preserved in the linguistic and cultural fabric of the region. The influence of Sanskrit and its close relative, Pali, provides a living testament to a sophisticated exchange that went far beyond mere trade, shaping the intellectual, religious, and administrative foundations of these societies.

2. The Role of Sanskrit as a Civilizational Language

- a]. Sanskrit was not merely a source of loanwords; it was the prestigious language of statecraft, religion, and scholarly discourse. Its adoption was a conscious choice by local elites who sought to align their kingdoms with the advanced philosophical and legal frameworks of Indian civilization. This choice to adopt a language of immense subtlety and depth demonstrates a voluntary acceptance of a shared worldview.
- b]. **Rich Lexicon of Thai**— An examination of the Thai language reveals an extensive Sanskrit vocabulary, particularly in formal domains. Beyond the words for goddess (*Thevi*), teacher (*Guru*), and king (*Raja*), this influence is deeply embedded in the terminology of governance. The full, ceremonial name of Thailand's capital, Bangkok, is *Krung Thep Maha Nakhon Amon Rattanakosin Mahinthara Yutthaya Maha Dilok Phop Noppharat Ratchathani Burirom Udom Ratchaniwet Maha Sathan Amon Phiman Awatan Sathit Sakkathattiya Witsanukam Prasit*. Within this name, nearly every word is a Sanskrit or Pali compound, translating to "City of Angels, Great City of Immortals..." This elaborate naming convention showcases a deep-seated adoption of Indian cosmological and royal traditions.
- c]. **Khmer- A Historical Repository** In Cambodia, the Khmer language and its ancient inscriptions serve as a historical archive of this influence. The builders of the Angkor temples used Sanskrit as the official language for royal edicts and religious hymns, while employing Khmer for everyday administrative details. This practice reveals Sanskrit's role as a language of high culture and state legitimization. Modern Khmer still carries this legacy, with foundational words for abstract concepts, such as *sukh* (*sukha*, "happiness"), and *sīla* (*sīla*, "moral conduct"), stemming from this exchange.
- d]. **Malay and Indonesian**— a Widespread Influence: The impact is equally profound in the Malay Archipelago. The Malay and Indonesian languages are rich with Sanskrit loanwords that have become indispensable to their daily use. Words for universal concepts like "voice" (*suara* from *svara*), and "victory" (*jaya* from *jaya*) all point to a shared intellectual heritage. The word for "language" itself, *bahasa*, is a direct borrowing from *bhaṣa*. The historical adoption of Hindu-Buddhist traditions by powerful empires like Srivijaya and Majapahit cemented this linguistic connection, making Sanskrit a fundamental component of the Malay identity.

3. Beyond Literature—Shared Cultural and Artistic Expressions

The diffusion of Indian civilization was not confined to vocabulary alone. It manifested in the very systems of thought, art, and social organization.

- a]. **Transfer of Writing Systems** One of the most significant transfers of knowledge was the adoption of Indian writing systems. Early inscriptions in Khmer, Thai, Javanese, and other regional languages were written in scripts such as the *Pallava*, *Kawi*, and *Grantha*, all of which are descendants of the ancient Brahmi script from southern India. This shows a direct, physical transfer of a complete system of writing, which was essential for the rise of a literate culture and the documentation of local histories and laws.
- b]. **The Epics as a Shared Narrative** The universal themes of the Indian epics, particularly the *Ramayana*, were not simply borrowed but deeply integrated and transformed into localized narratives. In Thailand, the story is known as the *Ramakien*, in Cambodia as the *Reamker*, and in Malaysia as the *Hikayat Seri Rama*. These versions are not mere translations; they are cultural adaptations featuring local characters, settings, and traditions. This localisation demonstrates a profound absorption and personalization of the Indian narrative, making it an organic part of their own cultural identity.
- c]. **Artistic and Architectural Parallels** The artistic and architectural traditions of Southeast Asia also bear the unmistakable stamp of Indian influence. The temple complexes of Angkor Wat and Borobudur, for instance, are not simply copies of Indian temples but are original masterpieces that incorporate Indian cosmological ideas, such as the *mandala* plan and the representation of Mount Meru. Their carvings and friezes depict stories from Hindu and Buddhist texts, showcasing a shared visual language and a common understanding of divine and mythical figures like the *naga* (serpent) and *Garuda* (the mythical eagle).

The linguistic evidence, from formal vocabulary to place names, coupled with the widespread adoption of scripts, religious narratives, and architectural motifs, stands as a powerful testament to a shared civilizational space. This exchange was a non-coercive process where the universal concepts and rich artistic traditions of India were embraced and adapted, becoming an intrinsic part of the cultural tapestry of Southeast Asia.

4. Religious and Architectural Parallels: A Shared Cosmological Vision

The religious and architectural landscape of Southeast Asia stands as a powerful, tangible testament to a centuries-old civilizational exchange. This connection was not founded on coercion but on the voluntary and creative adoption of Indian philosophical, political, and spiritual concepts. The region's sacred sites and enduring monarchical traditions provide a vivid illustration of this deep-seated shared heritage.

5. Angkor Wat—The Embodiment of a Universal Cosmology

The world's largest Vishnu temple, Angkor Wat, located in Cambodia, is a masterpiece of cultural synthesis. Its architecture is a physical manifestation of Hindu cosmology, meticulously designed to replicate the universe. The central towering spire represents *Meru Parvata*, the sacred mountain at the centre of the universe in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The four concentric galleries and towers surrounding it symbolise the mountain ranges, while the vast moat surrounding the entire complex represents the cosmic ocean. This meticulous design reveals that the Khmer architects and patrons possessed a sophisticated understanding of Indian religious concepts, transforming them into a unique and majestic architectural form.

The temple's extensive bas-reliefs are a visual narrative of this shared heritage. The walls are adorned with incredibly detailed carvings depicting epic battles from the *Mahabharata* and the stories of the *Ramayana*. One of the most famous panels illustrates the "Churning of the Ocean of Milk" (*Samudra Manthan*), a foundational Hindu myth about the cosmic struggle between gods and demons. The presence of these narratives and divine figures—from *Vishnu's* avatars to celestial beings—proves that the epic lore of India was not just known but was a central part of the Khmer cultural and religious consciousness.

6. "God-King" and the Sanctification of Rule

The influence of Indian political and religious thought is profoundly visible in the concept of the "God-King" (*Deva raja*), which was central to the Khmer Empire. This idea, where the monarch was considered a living embodiment of a deity (often *Shiva* or *Vishnu*), provided a divine mandate for their rule, legitimising their authority and sanctifying the state. This tradition of the divine ruler has been passed down through centuries.

In Thailand, this tradition continues with the modern monarchy. The current king is referred to as Rāma X, the tenth in his lineage to bear the name of the protagonist from the *Ramayana*, a clear and conscious link to the revered Hindu epic. His father was Rāma IX. This practice directly connects the Chakri dynasty to a mythical and divine lineage, solidifying their legitimacy in the eyes of their people. The royal ceremonies, such as the coronation rites, still bear a striking resemblance to those of ancient Indian kings. The *jalābhiṣeka* (ritual anointment with water), for instance, is performed with sacred waters collected from different sources, and is overseen by royal priestly lineages. The historical origins of these Brahmanical priestly families, tracing back to places like Gorakhpur and southern India, provide a direct, living link to the civilizational roots of these traditions.

7. Essence of Shared Festivals

Even in their festivals, a deep spiritual resonance with Indian traditions is apparent. While many countries in Southeast Asia are now predominantly

Buddhist, their traditional celebrations often preserve a distinctly Indian essence of renewal, light, and cleansing.

- a]. **Loy Krathong and Deepawali** The Thai festival of *Loy Krathong*, where people float decorated baskets on water, shares a spiritual parallel with the Indian festival of *Deepawali*. In *Loy Krathong*, the act of floating the baskets is a symbolic gesture of letting go of past grudges and bad luck, while also paying respect to the water goddess. In *Deepawali*, the lighting of lamps and candles symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil. Both festivals use light and ritual to celebrate renewal and purification.
- b]. **Songkran and Holi**: The Thai festival of *Songkran* marks the traditional New Year. The ritualistic throwing of water during this festival is not just a playful act but a deeply symbolic one of washing away the past year's misfortunes and sins. This act of spiritual cleansing and collective renewal shares a profound resonance with the Indian festival of *Holi*, where the use of water and colours serves as a ritual to celebrate the triumph of good, the arrival of spring, and a temporary reversal of social norms.

These architectural, political, and festive parallels demonstrate that the exchange between India and Southeast Asia was a sophisticated process of cultural adoption and creative synthesis. It was through this shared cosmological and ritualistic worldview that a lasting civilizational bond was forged, one that continues to define the cultural landscape of the region today.

8. The Historical and Contemporary Revival of the Nexus

The historical narrative charting India's interface with Southeast Asia often commences with a legendary account from the 1st century BCE. This foundational story speaks of a prince from ancient *Uḍra Deśa* (present day Odisha) embarking on a maritime journey to what is now Cambodia, where he is said to have entered into a marital alliance with a local princess, *Soma*. While rooted in legend, this narrative profoundly symbolises the genesis of a lasting cultural and civilizational relationship, marking a peaceful union that ushered in an era where kingdoms across Southeast Asia began to align culturally with India. This process was far from a singular occurrence; it represented a continuous, organic exchange facilitated by diverse agents: resourceful maritime merchants, revered seers, learned priests, and skilled craftsmen, all traversing established sea routes and fostering a vibrant intellectual and artistic dialogue. This enduring historical link finds a tangible annual commemoration in the *Bali Jātrā* festival in *Odisha*, a vibrant celebration honouring those ancient voyages and the intrepid spirit of cross-cultural interaction.

In the contemporary era, a concerted and conscious endeavour is underway to revitalise and re-affirm this shared heritage. Under the guidance of luminaries such as Shri Sanjeev Sanyal, the Government of India has spearheaded a pioneering initiative in cultural diplomacy. This project specifically focuses on

re-tracing the historic sea routes once navigated by ancient Indian mariners. The symbolic journey, commencing in Oman and continuing onward to Bali, is not merely an exercise in historical reenactment. Rather, it is a deliberate act designed to reawaken a collective consciousness regarding this shared legacy. It serves as a powerful reminder that the bonds connecting India and Southeast Asia transcend recent political constructs; they are deep-seated civilizational ties, inherently far more enduring and profound than any modern interstate agreement. This renewed emphasis on cultural diplomacy aims to underscore that this shared heritage is a vibrant, living tradition, rather than a mere relic confined to the annals of the past.

The significance of these ancient maritime pathways extends beyond historical curiosity. They underscore India's advanced shipbuilding traditions and navigational prowess in antiquity, illustrating a period when Indian seafaring was arguably far ahead of its contemporaries. This historical fact informs the contemporary revival, providing a source of national pride and a foundation for modern engagements. Beyond the specific maritime expedition, the broader effort involves various cultural exchange programs, academic collaborations, archaeological initiatives, and robust people-to-people exchanges. These multifaceted approaches collectively work to deepen mutual understanding and appreciate the intricate threads that weave together the cultural fabric of both regions. By acknowledging and celebrating these civilizational bonds, the aim is to foster stronger, more resilient relationships that are rooted in a shared past and aspire towards a harmonized future. This ongoing revitalization is a testament to the belief that understanding and honouring one's civilizational roots are crucial for navigating the complexities of the modern world and forging meaningful international partnerships.

III Conclusion

The remarkable endurance of Indian civilization is not an accident of history but a testament to its foundational principles. The continuous survival of its traditions, rituals, and a holistic worldview is rooted in a profound and unbroken connection between the human and the divine. This deep-seated ethos, which permeates every aspect of life from birth to death and extends to a reverence for nature, has served as a powerful source of resilience against centuries of adversity.

This same universal and inclusive culture became the basis for India's unique and enduring relationship with Southeast Asia. This was not a story of conquest but of a peaceful, centuries-long exchange of ideas, where the philosophical and artistic traditions of India were embraced and creatively synthesised. The evidence for this civilizational bond is robust and multi-faceted, visible in the Sanskrit origins of languages like Thai and Khmer, in the cosmological

architecture of temples like Angkor Wat, and in the shared spiritual essence of festivals.

Today, these ties are more than just historical footnotes; they are a living tradition. Through conscious efforts in cultural diplomacy, such as retracing ancient maritime routes and fostering people-to-people exchanges, there is a renewed focus on celebrating this shared heritage. The enduring nexus between India and Southeast Asia proves that cultural bonds, built on mutual respect and a shared worldview, are far more resilient than any political or economic arrangement. Understanding this legacy is crucial for forging meaningful, resilient partnerships that are rooted in the past and inspire a more harmonious future.

It is obvious that poetry cannot be a substitute for sadhana; it can be an accompaniment only. If there is a feeling (of devotion, surrender etc.), it can express and confirm it; if there is an experience, it can express and strengthen the force of experience. As reading of books like the Upanishads or Gita or singing of devotional songs can help, especially at one stage or another, so this can help also. Also it opens a passage between the exterior consciousness and the inner mind or vital. But if one stops at that, then nothing much is gained. Sadhana must be the main thing and sadhana means the purification of the nature, the consecration of the being, the opening of the psychic and the inner mind and vital, the contact and presence of the Divine, the realisation of the Divine in all things, surrender, devotion, the widening of the consciousness into the cosmic Consciousness, the Self one in all, the psychic and the spiritual transformation of the nature. If these things are neglected and only poetry and mental development and social contacts occupy all the time, then that is not sadhana.

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 31: 78)

Nāda Brahma: Music as a Divine Pathway in Indic Traditions

Dr. Sumit Day

The study of Indic spiritual traditions invariably reveals a deeply embedded reverence for sound and its transformative potential. Unlike purely secular or aesthetic interpretations, music within these frameworks is often understood as a vibrational essence, a primordial force that underlies creation and offers a direct pathway to the ultimate reality. This article delves into the multi-dimensional role of music as a potent medium for spiritual transcendence, moving beyond its conventional artistic perception to explore its function as a profound tool for divine communion. The ancient Sāmaveda, one of the four principal Vedas, stands as a foundational testament to the sacralization of sound. Predominantly comprised of hymns set to melodies for ritualistic chanting, the Sāmaveda underscores the belief that *nāda* (sound) or *dhvani* (resonance) possesses an inherent spiritual potency. This isn't merely about verbal articulation but about the precise vibrational quality of sound, which is believed to resonate with cosmic principles and invoke divine presence. This early Vedic emphasis laid the groundwork for a sophisticated understanding of sound's capacity to express profound devotion, evoke intense emotion, and, crucially, act as a vehicle for direct spiritual experience. The philosophical implication of music as a direct conduit to the Divine finds eloquent expression in the words of Rabindranath Tagore, who observed in one of his songs, "You are standing on the other side of my song; while my music, my notes reach you, I cannot reach you." This statement, while seemingly expressing a limitation, simultaneously highlights music's unique ability to bridge an otherwise unbridgeable chasm. It suggests that while the individual human being, constrained by physical form and worldly attachments, may struggle to directly perceive or access the Divine, the very essence of their musical expression—the pure notes, the heartfelt melody—can indeed penetrate the realm of transcendence. This perspective positions music as a direct spiritual medium, offering a means for seers (*ṛṣis*), mystics, and ordinary devotees to seek connection and achieve proximity to the Divine despite the inherent limitations of their physical existence. The human condition, often characterized by sensory limitations and the distractions of the material world, is frequently perceived in Indic thought as an inherent impediment to direct perception of or unhindered access to the Divine. However, practices centered on prayer, chanting, and song are consistently presented as efficacious methods for transcending these ordinary existential constraints. Music, in this profound context, is understood as an embodiment of the human psyche's deepest aspirations, an expression that operates beyond the linear confines of time and space. This pervasive and enduring understanding of music as a spiritual force forms the central inquiry of this article.

Music as Art and Spiritual Practice: An Integrated Perspective

The distinct conceptualization of music within Indic traditions departs significantly from purely aesthetic or performative understandings, instead integrating it deeply within a broader artistic and spiritual framework. This holistic view is explicitly articulated in foundational classical Indian works such as the *Saṅgīta Ratnākara* by Śārṅgadeva (13th century CE) and the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* (likely 5th-6th century CE), both of which are seminal texts for understanding the Indic arts. In these texts, the term *saṅgīta* is far more expansive than the contemporary English word “music.” It denotes a comprehensive art form that embraces not only vocal music (*gīta*) but also instrumental music (*vādyā*) and dance (*nṛtya*). This tripartite definition underscores a fundamental principle in Indic aesthetics: these art forms are not disparate disciplines but intrinsically interconnected components of a unified expressive whole. This integration stands in stark contrast to the Western conceptualization of “music” as primarily an auditory phenomenon, often divorced from visual or performative elements in its classical iterations.

The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, in particular, offers a remarkable exposition on this integrated approach. It meticulously illustrates how painting, music, dance, and sculpture are not merely individual artistic pursuits but are integral components of a unified “lived experience” aimed at spiritual alignment. The text asserts that through dedicated engagement with these art forms, individuals can effectively align their lives with the four *puruṣārthas*—the fundamental aims of human existence: Dharma (righteous conduct), Artha (material prosperity), Kāma (legitimate desires), and Mokṣa (spiritual liberation). This holistic perspective establishes a profound link between artistic practice and spiritual realization. The *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* effectively delineates a form of *prapatti-yoga*, a path of surrender and devotion, suggesting that through diligent and consecrated engagement with these artistic disciplines, particularly music and dance, one can facilitate the attainment of mokṣa. The arts are thus elevated from mere entertainment or aesthetic indulgence to powerful vehicles for spiritual evolution and ultimate liberation. This perspective posits that the very act of creating or experiencing art, when infused with spiritual intent, can become a form of worship and a direct means of realizing the ultimate truth.

A particularly compelling and widely referenced illustration of music’s transformative power is found in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, specifically within the celebrated *Rāsa Pañcādhyāyī* (Chapters of the Rāsa Dance). This narrative describes a pivotal moment when Śrī Kṛṣṇa plays his divine flute. The sound produced by Kṛṣṇa’s flute (*nāda*) is depicted as possessing an unparalleled and irresistible captivating quality, unlike any other sound. Upon hearing it, the *gopīs* (cowherd maidens) of Vṛndāvana are depicted as being irresistibly drawn to him, abandoning all worldly engagements, domestic duties, and even disregarding societal norms and the authority of elders. The sheer potency of this divine music transcends ordinary sensory experience and societal constraints. The narrative

extends this phenomenon beyond physical presence; it states that even those *gopīs* who, due to external circumstances, could not physically join Kṛṣṇa, achieved an inner union with him. They entered a state of deep meditative absorption, and through this profound inner stillness, they connected with Śrī Kṛṣṇa on a spiritual plane. This powerful account serves as more than a mythological story; it functions as a foundational teaching. It emphatically demonstrates that sincere engagement with music, undertaken as a dedicated *sādhana* (spiritual discipline) with focused intent, possesses the inherent capacity to lead to profound divine communion and spiritual realization. The music itself becomes the medium through which the veil between the material and the spiritual is thinned, allowing for a direct, immersive experience of the Divine.

Diverse Traditions of Devotional Music Across India

The influence and integration of music into various devotional and spiritual traditions across the Indian subcontinent are profound and pervasive. From ancient Vedic chants to the ecstatic *kīrtans* of the Bhakti movement and the structured compositions of classical forms, music has consistently served as a primary vehicle for expressing and experiencing the Divine.

Bhakti Saints of Vṛndāvana and the Power of Personal Devotion

In the heartland of the Kṛṣṇa devotion, Vṛndāvana, figures like Sant Haridās exemplify the profound efficacy of music as a direct medium for divine connection. Haridās, an unwavering devotee of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is said to have utilized song as his sole means of communion. His musical expressions were not merely performances but intensely focused acts of devotion, infused with such spiritual fervor that they transcended the ordinary. Legends surrounding Sant Haridās speak of the extraordinary power of his voice. It is said that when he sang, birds would fall silent, nature would respond (with phenomena like rainfall or sunrise), and even inanimate objects, such as stones, would melt. While these accounts may contain elements of hyperbole characteristic of hagiographic literature, their consistent recurrence underscores a deep-seated belief in the transformative power of devotional music. This purported ability of Haridās's voice to impact the physical world parallels the effects attributed to Śrī Kṛṣṇa's divine flute in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, where its sound captivated all creation. In Haridās's case, however, the agency shifts: it was the devotee's music, born of pure bhakti (devotion) and enacted as *pūjā* (worship), that compelled the Divine to manifest or respond. This highlights a core Bhakti tenet: the power of the devotee's love and surrender, often channeled through musical expression, can move the Divine itself. This profound influence of Sant Haridās is further acknowledged by the fact that he was the guru of Miyaṇ Tansen, one of the most celebrated musical maestros in Indian history, often regarded as a progenitor of Hindustānī classical music. This lineage demonstrates how the spiritual depth of devotional music formed the very foundation for the development of classical musical forms.

Southern Indian Traditions: The Tēvāram and Nāda Yoga

Moving geographically southward, the Tēvāram hymns represent a pivotal collection of devotional songs dedicated to Lord Śiva, composed by the Nayanars (Śaivite saints) between the 6th and 9th centuries CE. These hymns are not merely poetic verses but are intrinsically linked to specific melodies and rhythmic structures, forming an integral part of Carnatic saṅgīta tradition. They are direct, heartfelt expressions of the devotee's longing and reverence for the Divine. The very act of singing the Tēvāram is understood as a spiritual discipline aimed at achieving union with Lord Śiva. Elements such as Śuddhānta! (a melodic concept, though interpretations vary), and specific melodic contours within the Karnāṭaka saṅgīta framework, are illuminated through the performance of these hymns. Through their lyrical and melodic offerings, Śiva devotees engage in a profound form of spiritual practice. This practice is consistent with the principles of Nāda Yoga, a yogic path that focuses on the internal and external dimensions of sound. Nāda Yoga posits that by systematically exploring and mastering sound, one can achieve higher states of consciousness and ultimately liberation. The Tēvāram, with its emphasis on structured melodic chanting and the profound spiritual impact of its sound, aligns directly with these yogic principles, making the act of singing a direct meditative and devotional pathway.

Eastern Indian Traditions: Nāma-saṅkīrtana and the Bhakti Movement

Eastern India has been a fertile ground for devotional music, particularly through the Nāma-saṅkīrtana tradition popularized by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu (1486–1534 CE), a central figure of the Bhakti movement in Bengal and Odisha. Caitanya Mahāprabhu recognized music not only as a powerful means of direct connection with God but also as an exceptionally effective tool for reaching the masses, transcending linguistic, social, and caste barriers. He initiated the communal practice of saṅkīrtana, where groups of devotees would gather to chant and sing the names of God, often accompanied by instruments like karatāls (cymbals) and mṛdaṅgas (drums). This practice, which continues vibrantly to this day, especially in the evenings, is imbued with profound spiritual potency. It serves as a daily ritual that fosters collective devotion and spiritual unity. Biographical accounts of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's life, such as the *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, vividly describe how these ecstatic collective singing sessions would lead participants into states of spiritual rapture and communion. Contemporaries and successors to Caitanya Mahāprabhu also significantly contributed to this musical-spiritual landscape. Śrīmaṇṭa Śaṅkaradeva (1449–1568 CE) in Assam, another key figure in the Bhakti movement, profoundly institutionalized music within sacred settings. He established satras—monastic and congregational worship spaces—where music served as the central unifying element. In these satras, the music, primarily in the form of *bargeets* (noble songs) and various forms of kīrtan, centered on the glories of Śrī Hari, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and Śrī Rāma. Devotees would gather to sing

collectively, utilizing instruments such as *jhāñj*, *mañjirā* (cymbals), and *mṛdaṅgam* (drums), transforming rhythm and melody into direct acts of devotion. This institutionalization ensured the continuity and widespread practice of music as a spiritual discipline. The enduring influence of devotional music is further attested to by Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahansa (1836–1886 CE), a revered spiritual master of 19th-century Bengal. He consistently affirmed music as a divine gift, believing that those possessing musical talent were naturally drawn toward the Divine. Sri Rāmakṛṣṇa frequently experienced profound states of spiritual absorption (*bhāva-samādhi*) when exposed to devotional music. His biography, *Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa līlāprasanga*, recounts numerous instances, such as his deep emotional response to the sound of the *vīṇā* during a pilgrimage to Kāśī (Vārāṇasī). He found a *vīṇā-vādaka* (*vīṇā* player) whose daily performances transported him to a divine plane, manifesting as visible ecstasy. Even the very title of the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā — literally “The Song of the Lord” — underscores the intrinsic connection between *gīta* (song) and *bhakti* (devotion), suggesting that divine wisdom is inherently expressed in a musical form, serving as a guiding melody for spiritual life.

Western Indian Traditions: The Abhaṅga and Vārkarī Movement

In Western India, particularly Maharashtra, the Abhaṅga tradition represents a powerful and sustained expression of devotion. These songs, irregular in meter (hence “abhaṅga” meaning unbroken), are offered in profound love and reverence to Viṭṭhala (also known as Vithoba), a manifestation of Śrī Viṣṇu or Śrī Kṛṣṇa, whose primary seat of worship is Paṇḍharpur. The Vārkarī movement, a pilgrimage tradition associated with Viṭṭhala, is characterized by its fervent collective chanting of abhaṅgas. Figures like Sant Tukārām (17th century CE) epitomize the personal and intimate connection with Viṭṭhala expressed through these songs. His abhaṅgas are deeply autobiographical, reflecting his personal struggles, joys, and spiritual yearning. Tukārām would often enter trance-like states, repeatedly chanting the divine name: “Viṭṭhala, Viṭṭhala, Viṭṭhala.” This repetitive invocation, often rhythmic and melodic, served as a powerful meditative practice. Sant Nāmadeva (1270–1350 CE), another prominent Vārkarī saint, also extensively composed *abhaṅgas*, articulating his unwavering devotion. The Bhakti movement in Maharashtra was notably inclusive, transcending gender barriers. Female saints such as *Svarṇābāī*, *Sākubāī*, and *Janābāī* composed profound philosophical insights within their *abhaṅgas*. Critically, these women often sang their devotional compositions while engaged in their daily chores, such as grinding grain or fetching water. This integration of bhakti into the fabric of everyday life is a crucial aspect of the *Vārkarī* tradition. It demonstrates how seemingly mundane activities (*karma*) can be transformed into acts of worship, seamlessly intertwining *karma yoga* (the path of action) and *bhakti yoga* (the path of devotion). The emotional depth, spiritual rhythms, and accessible language embedded in these abhaṅgas allowed them to transcend

regional boundaries and foster unity through shared devotional experience. The saints may be physically absent, but their music continues to be a tangible yet intangible heritage, serving as a constant source of inspiration and spiritual sustenance. The yearning to reach Paṇḍharpur and experience *darśana* (sight of the deity) of Viṭṭhala, as expressed in abhaṅgas, underscores music's role in articulating and fulfilling spiritual aspirations.

Rajasthani Traditions: Mīrābāī and Unconditional Devotion

Moving to Rājasthān, Mīrābāī (c. 1498–c. 1546 CE) stands as one of India's most beloved mystic saints, whose life was entirely consecrated to her devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Her spiritual journey and profound experiences are primarily documented through her numerous songs, known as gītās or bhajans. Mīrā's life is a testament to the transformative power of *saṅgīta* in transcending conventional societal and personal restrictions. She is celebrated for breaking free from what are traditionally known as the eight bandhanas (bondages) that are said to impede the soul's spiritual progress: *kula* (family lineage), *śīla* (conduct), *māna* (pride), *lajja* (shame), *śarama* (modesty), etc. Mīrā's unwavering devotion, expressed through her ceaseless singing, allowed her to defy patriarchal norms and royal expectations. Her famous line, "*paga ghunguruoo bāndh Mīrā Nāchī re*" (Mīrā danced with the anklets, leaving shame behind), encapsulates her radical abandonment of social conventions for the sake of her divine beloved. Even when faced with extreme adversity, including attempts on her life by her in-laws (such as being given poison), Mīrā is depicted as having consumed the poison in ecstasy, completely absorbed in the Lord's name and song. This narrative, whether literal or symbolic, powerfully illustrates music's transformative capacity: as an act of bhakti and prayer, it can transmute suffering into spiritual rapture and affirm the devotee's indissoluble bond with the Divine. Mīrābāī's songs continue to inspire countless devotees, embodying the ideal of unconditional love and surrender to the Divine through musical expression.

Music in Temple and Community Rituals: A Pervasive Presence

Beyond individual devotional practices, music has been, and continues to be, an indispensable element in temple worship and broader community rituals across India. Its integration into daily religious life underscores its profound sacred role.

Awakening the Divine: Suprabhātam and Temple Music

In South India, the suprabhātam tradition exemplifies the pervasive presence of music in temple ritual. This practice involves musically invoking and awakening the deity at dawn. The melodious strains of the suprabhātam signify the beginning of the divine day, setting a sacred tone for the entire temple routine. Similarly, many rituals formally commence with musical invocations, such as the Nārāyaṇa Āśīrvādam, a blessing through chanted melody. Throughout the

day, the deity's awakening for various services is often accompanied by specific songs, establishing a continuous musical dialogue between the human and the divine realms. This practice isn't exclusive to the South; in Vārāṇasī, the holy city, the *śeṇāī* (a double-reed wind instrument) has long held a crucial ritualistic role. The legendary Ustad Bismillah Khān, a Bharat Ratna recipient, embodied this tradition. His performances on the *śeṇāī* at the Viśvanātha or Bālajī temples were imbued with such spiritual force that it was believed the city itself would not fully awaken until he had played. This highlights music's vital function in initiating and sanctifying daily life, asserting its power to consecrate time and space. Historically, temple music has an ancient lineage. We previously touched upon the Tēvāram hymns. During the glorious Chola period (c. 850–1250 CE) in South India, the singing of Tēvāram hymns in grand temples like the Bṛhadiśvara Temple in Thanjavur was a regular and highly institutionalized practice. Dedicated musicians (ōdhuvārs) were employed to ensure the continuous rendition of these sacred compositions, solidifying music's role as an integral part of public worship and temple administration.

The Gīta Govinda and Devotional Dance

Continuing our journey through temple traditions, eastern India, particularly Odisha, holds a special place for Jayadeva's 12th-century poetic masterpiece, the Gīta Govinda. This lyrical poem, depicting the līlās (divine plays) of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā in Vṛndāvana, became central to temple worship, especially at the Jagannātha Temple in Puri. The Gīta Govinda was not merely recited; it was extensively sung and, crucially, danced by devadāsīs (temple dancers) before Lord Jagannātha. This fusion of poetry, music, and dance created a multi-sensory spiritual experience. The influence of the Gīta Govinda transcended its regional origin, spreading northward and influencing the traditions of kathakas (narrative dancers) who incorporated its themes into their performances. It was adopted into various temple practices across India, demonstrating its pan-Indic appeal. The very title, Gīta Govinda—"The Song of Govinda"—underscores its inherent musicality. Jayadeva's original manuscript even precisely prescribes specific rāgas (melodic frameworks) for certain sections, reinforcing its foundational musical structure. Today, the Gīta Govinda continues to be sung in prominent temples like Guruvāyūr in Kerala and has profoundly inspired the choreographic and interpretative traditions of classical Indian dance forms such as Bharatanāṭyam and Kuchipudī. Its journey extended even to Īśāna Bhārata (Northeast India), where Vaiṣṇava singers in Manipur adopted the Gīta Govinda into their unique devotional repertoire, demonstrating its adaptability and enduring spiritual resonance across diverse cultural landscapes.

Music as Higher Entertainment: The Intertwining of Devotion and Joy

During the medieval period in India, the distinction between entertainment and devotion was far less rigid than it is often perceived in modern contexts.

Sacred music frequently served as a form of “higher entertainment,” providing spiritual joy and celebrating the Divine in a communal setting. Temples and various sacred spaces, often designated by specific communities of devotees, would come alive with such music as evening fell and night approached. On auspicious occasions and major festivals like Janmāṣṭamī (Kṛṣṇa’s birthday) or Śivarātri (Śiva’s night), special musical performances would take place within these consecrated spaces. These performances were not merely ceremonial; they were deeply imbued with spiritual fervor, intended to elevate the consciousness of the participants and foster a collective experience of the Divine. The joy derived from such musical gatherings was thus intertwined with spiritual upliftment, blurring the lines between the sacred and the celebratory.

Bengali Traditions: Śyāmā-saṅgīta and the Familial Divine

In Bengal, the devotional landscape saw the flourishing of specific musical genres that exemplified this intertwining of spiritual pursuit and artistic expression. Spiritual seekers and sādhas like Rāmaprasāda Sena (c. 1718–1775 CE) and Kāmālākānta Bhaṭṭācārya (c. 1769–1821 CE) composed profound devotional songs dedicated to the Goddess Kālī. These composers, deeply immersed in the Śākta tradition, often envisioned Śyāmā (a fierce yet compassionate form of Mahākālī, widely worshipped in Bengal and eastern India) not as a distant, awe-inspiring deity, but as their own beloved daughter or revered mother. This intimate, familial approach infused their songs with a unique blend of love, yearning, and playful surrender, transforming them into acts of heartfelt devotion. Rāmaprasāda Sena’s musical expression was so profoundly imbued with spiritual insight that it is said to have enabled his direct communion with the Goddess. Later spiritual luminaries, notably Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahansa, acknowledged Rāmaprasāda’s unique achievement, stating that he attained the Divine solely through his music. Legend further recounts that Rāmaprasāda’s singing was so powerful that the Goddess Herself would appear in disguise to listen, or even invite him to perform, as in the story where Goddess Annapūrṇā of Kāśī invited him to Vārāṇasī. Beyond their devotional fervor, Rāmaprasāda and Kāmālākānta also played a crucial role in simplifying complex tāntrika concepts through their songs. They employed metaphors drawn from everyday life, making deep spiritual messages accessible to the common person. For instance, Rāmaprasāda’s song addressing his own mind, “O my mind, you have not learnt agriculture. Had you learnt it, many crops could have been harvested,” appears on the surface to be a simple agrarian analogy. However, when he uses the phrase *mānava jāmin* (“the human self as a field”), he conveys a profound spiritual truth—the potential for spiritual growth within each individual—through relatable, lived imagery. This genre of music, known as Śyāmā-saṅgīta, dedicated to the Divine Mother, continues to flourish, reflecting the sacred and intimate bond between the Mother and Her devotee. Even today, during Kālī

Pūjā or other celebrations of the Divine Mother, the ritual often feels incomplete without the soulful renditions of compositions by Rāmaprasāda or Kāmālākānta, highlighting their enduring spiritual and cultural significance.

The Bāul Tradition: Music as a Way of Life

In Bengal, apart from the dominant Vaiṣṇava and Śākta traditions, a unique and deeply spiritual tradition emerged: the Bāul or Sahajiyā tradition. The Bāuls are wandering minstrels, often characterized by their distinctive attire and musical instruments (like the *ektara*). For them, music is not merely a performance or a set of songs; it is a complete way of life—a spiritual path in itself. Their songs are expressions of their inner spiritual quest, often addressing the Divine Name, their guru, or the universal Divine Master (Sāi). The Bāul mārg (path) is syncretic, drawing elements from various devotional streams, including early Sahajiyā Buddhism and diverse Vaiṣṇava traditions. The *mahājanas* or *padakartās* (poet-saints) among the Bāuls express their profound spiritual insights through their musical compositions, known as mahājani pad. These poet-performers are primarily spiritual sādhakas, and their music, known as Bāul gān or Bāul saṅgīta, transcends a mere musical genre. Only through dedicated spiritual practice (sādhana) can one truly grasp the profound meanings embedded within their deceptively simple lyrics. A central theme in Bāul philosophy, often expressed musically, is the comparison of the human body to a musical instrument. This metaphor carries deep philosophical significance. Recalling the image of Kṛṣṇa's flute (*bānsurī*) made of hollow bamboo, it is through this emptiness that the divine *nāda* (sound) flows, amplifying the music of the mind and heart. Similarly, the Bāul tradition suggests that unless the human being becomes an empty, receptive medium for the Divine, they remain inert. A musical instrument must be played by a musician to resonate and produce divine sound. Thus, Bāuls speak of the body as an instrument of resonance, implying that it needs to be infused by the Divine spirit to create truly spiritual sound and experience. Furthermore, Bāul songs delve into profound philosophical themes such as *dehātattva* (the philosophy of the body as a microcosm of the universe and a site for spiritual realization) and *advaita* (non-duality, the oneness of the individual soul with the Absolute). These complex principles are communicated through accessible, everyday metaphors and riddles, highlighting the unique beauty of Bāul music's ability to transmit tattvas (spiritual principles) through ordinary experience. The Bāuls have profoundly inspired later musicians, poets, and various spiritual traditions, underscoring the enduring power of their musical-spiritual path.

Universal Manifestations of Sacred Music Across Diverse Faiths

The inherent power of music as a spiritual medium is not confined to the various Indic traditions discussed thus far; it manifests profoundly across other global faiths, highlighting a universal human impulse to connect with the Divine through organized sound.

Sufism: *Samā* and the *Pukār* of the Heart

In Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, music plays a paramount role in spiritual practice, particularly through the concept of *Samā* (literally “listening”). *Samā* refers to a devotional ceremony involving music, chanting, and often dance (like the whirling dervishes), aimed at achieving a state of spiritual ecstasy and communion with God. During *Samā*, Sufi singers chant the Divine Name, often accompanied by instruments, with the intention of transcending temporal and spatial limitations to enter a state of trance and direct connection with the Divine. In this tradition, *svara* (melodic tone) holds a central position, believed to carry the vibrations that resonate with the subtle spiritual centers. The *pukār*—the heartfelt “call” or yearning cry to God—is imbued with immense power, believed to draw the Divine into the devotee’s heart. This vocal expression of intense longing is a core element of Sufi musical practice. One of the towering figures in this tradition is Amīr Khusrau (1253–1325 CE), a polymath, poet, and musician, widely considered the “father of Qawwali.” He composed numerous songs for various seasons and occasions, praising both his Lord and his spiritual guide (*murshid*), Hazrat Nizāmuddīn Auliya. Khusrau’s compositions laid much of the groundwork for the rich musical heritage of Sufism in India. The living tradition of Sufism is perhaps best experienced through its music. Even today, at *dargāhs* (Sufi shrines), one regularly hears traditional Sufi qawwālīs sung in groups. These performances are replete with the powerful *pukār*, intricate melodies, and collective devotion, serving as living embodiments of the Sufi path and its emphasis on spiritual love and ecstatic remembrance of God.

Sikhism: Śabad Kīrtan and the Holy Name

In Sikhism, music forms the very core of their *dhārmika* (religious) practices and daily observances. The Guru Granth Sāhib, the holy scripture of Sikhism, is unique among world scriptures in that it is primarily a musical text. It contains hymns (*śabads*) composed in specific classical Indian rāgas, making the recitation of its verses inherently a musical act. Śabad kīrtan—the singing of the sacred hymns from the Sri Guru Granth Sāhib—is central to Sikh worship. Many great spiritual masters, including Sri Guru Nānak Dev (the founder of Sikhism) and the subsequent Gurus, prescribed specific rāgas for each *śabad* (hymn). This intricate structure has led to the development of a rich and highly formalized musical tradition within Sikhism. At its essence, *śabad kīrtan* is the singing of the holy Name of the Divine, forming a vital part of *simran* (meditative remembrance of the Divine through musical chant). Over centuries, this has evolved into a distinct tradition and method of sacred singing. Śabad Kīrtan holds deep significance in the devotional practices of the Indian subcontinent. Across gurdwārās (Sikh temples) throughout the country, and indeed globally, śabads are performed daily. Moreover, specific rāga-based śabads are often performed during particular times of day or changes in season, such as the *varṣā ṛtu* (monsoon). This practice

serves as a constant spiritual reminder to the devotee: “No matter what comes, maintain your bond with the Divine—through this daily music.” This music is far from mere entertainment; it carries profound philosophical and spiritual substance. For example, a śabad kīrtan composed in Rāga Śrī (an afternoon-to-evening rāga) expresses the thought: “O Lord, You are the One who creates these colors into which we are all dyed, through which our entire existence is stretched,” highlighting the pervasive presence of the Divine in all aspects of life. The transformative power of śabad kīrtan is famously illustrated in a story from the life of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. During a journey through Punjab with his father into the hills, a young Tagore encountered śabad kīrtan and was deeply moved by its spiritual intensity and profound beauty. This experience left an indelible mark on him, and later in life, as a prolific poet and composer, he drew significant inspiration from that very encounter, channeling his own devotion and creative expression through musical traditions that resonated with the spiritual depth he witnessed.

Buddhist Chanting and Universal Principles of Nāda

Even within Buddhist monasteries, particularly in traditions like Tibetan Buddhism or certain schools of Theravada, chanting is performed in distinct melodic and rhythmic modes. While there may not be a fixed, formalized classical musical system for rendering all hymns in the same way that Hindustānī or Carnatic classical music functions, the recitation of mantras and sūtras is nonetheless executed with clear musicality and rhythm. This practice reflects a profound understanding of *nāda* (sound) and *tāla* (rhythm) as fundamental components of meditative practice and spiritual invocation. *Nāda* in this context functions as a focused “call” or invocation to the Divine (or to principles like enlightenment and compassion), while *tāla* (rhythm) serves as a marker of cyclical time, grounding the spiritual practice within a structured temporal framework. This confluence—of temporal awareness and spiritual invocation through sound—is a shared feature across many devotional traditions, extending beyond the various Hindu sects to encompass Buddhist chanting and indeed, other global spiritual practices that utilize sound and rhythm for contemplative and devotional purposes.

Modern Proponents of Sacred Music: Bridging Tradition and Contemporary Spirituality

The enduring legacy of music as a pathway to the Divine finds powerful resonance in the lives and works of pivotal figures in modern Indian spiritual and cultural history. These individuals not only deeply imbibed the spirit of India’s vast musical heritage but also innovated, creating compositions that continue to inspire and elevate generations. They exemplify how spiritual artistry can seamlessly weave the essence of devotional music into creative expression, rendering themselves timeless and universally cherished.

Rabindranath Tagore: Brahma Sangeet and the Synthesis of Devotion

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941 CE), a Nobel laureate, was a towering polymath whose life and work were deeply intertwined with music as a spiritual medium, even from his childhood. Growing up in the intellectually vibrant Tagore household, he was exposed to a rich blend of classical and folk musical influences. He formally studied music under various gurus and was profoundly inspired by a wide range of traditions: from classical Hindustānī compositions to local folk songs (chāra songs) and, significantly, the devotional music of the Brahmo Samāj. Tagore, along with his brothers (notably Jyotirindranath, Satyendranath, and Dwijendranath), contributed immensely to the development of what later came to be known as Brahma Sangeet. This genre of devotional music emerged from the Brahmo monotheistic tradition, which delved into profound spiritual ideas of the formless, supreme Divine (Nirguṇa Parabrahma). The foremost poets and composers of the Brahmo Samāj, including Trailokyanath Sanyal and the Tagores, crafted numerous devotional songs within this distinct tradition. A superficial glance at Rabindranath's vast musical oeuvre might reveal categories like Pūjā (worship), Prema (love), Prakṛti (nature), and Vichitra (miscellaneous), alongside Brahma Sangeet. However, these categories are not rigid or mutually exclusive. His Pūjā and Prema songs frequently blend into each other, reflecting his deep musical philosophy where love and devotion are intrinsically interwoven. Tagore's contribution to devotional music is profound, particularly in his ability to help modern audiences recognize music as both an exalted art form and a direct bridge between the human and the Divine. Tagore's musical genius lay in his ability to draw inspiration eclectically from a diverse range of musical expressions. He incorporated elements from the improvisational and soulful Bāul songs, the intricate melodies of South Indian Carnatic composers like Muthuswami Dīkṣitar, the classical fervor of śabda kīrtana, and the structured complexity of classical rāgas. He even composed original melodies for various Upaniṣadic and Vedic mantras, which were then sung within the Brahmo Samāj. This innovative approach allowed the Brahmo tradition to further a modern understanding of music as a sacred vehicle, capable of accessing the innermost recesses of the human psyche and elevating it towards spiritual realization. The exalted invocations of the Nirguṇa Parabrahma in Brahma Sangeet were so potent that they moved even great spiritual masters like Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahansa. Accounts in texts such as the *Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Vācanāmṛta* and the *Līlāprasanga* meticulously record instances where Brahmo music transported him from the ordinary plane to a divine state, often leading him to tears or causing him to enter bhāva-samādhi (a state of intense spiritual absorption).

Swami Vivekananda: Musical Synthesis and Spiritual Elevation

Another sublime figure who emerged from the dynamic Brahmo milieu and profoundly impacted the spiritual and cultural landscape was Swami Vivekananda

(1863–1902 CE), the chief disciple of Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Paramahansa. Prior to his formal discipleship, Vivekananda (then Narendranath Datta) was actively engaged with the Brahmo Samāj, where he absorbed much of its musical heritage and developed his prodigious musical talents. Swami Vivekananda was indeed a musically gifted genius, possessing a deep and intuitive understanding of both Western and Indian classical music. His early exposure to Brahmo compositions undoubtedly shaped his musical sensibilities. His own compositions, such as the *Ambā Stotra* and other devotional pieces dedicated to Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, serve as powerful testaments to his profound musical knowledge. These works reveal his comprehensive grasp of complex rāgas, octaves, intricate choral structures, and the nuanced rhythmic cycles inherent in both Eastern and Western musical traditions. Vivekananda's music is characterized by a remarkable synthesis of Western and Indian forms, not only in terms of melody and structural composition but, crucially, in its spiritual capacity. His compositions were designed to elevate the listener to a meditative and divine state, transcending mere auditory pleasure to become a vehicle for spiritual upliftment. Some of Tagore's devotional songs, such as the evocative Bengali song *Tomarci koriyacchi Jiboner dhrubotara* (meaning "You, the pole star of my life"), were also sung by Swami Vivekananda, and were known to deeply move Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, further underscoring the spiritual potency shared by these compositions.

Sri Aurobindo and The Mother: Integral Yoga and the Music of Silence

The spiritual lineage stemming from Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa and Swami Vivekananda culminates in the teachings of Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950 CE) and The Mother (Mirra Alfassa, 1878–1973). In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of Integral Yoga, which advocates for the synthesis of all aspects of life—physical, vital, mental, and spiritual—art and music are accorded a central and indispensable role. Music, in this framework, becomes a vital medium for the integration and elevation of consciousness. The Mother, in particular, frequently emphasized that music is one of the most effective forms of devotion and a singularly powerful means of connecting with the Divine. She described music as the "highest expression of the human spirit," possessing the unique capacity to access the Divine directly. Her understanding of music transcended conventional aesthetics; she saw it as a vibrational pathway to higher states of being. The Mother herself composed various types of music, and her compositions are still played today at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the Sri Aurobindo Society, and other affiliated centers globally. Her music is utilized primarily as a tool for meditation, guiding practitioners towards inner stillness. As she articulated in her talks around 1963, true music is not merely "noise" but "a movement towards silence." When music attains this profound quality of silence—a state where its vibrations lead to deep inner calm and receptivity—it transforms into a potent medium for spiritual transformation. At this point, music becomes a force that directly elevates the

soul towards Supramental consciousness, Sri Aurobindo's concept of a higher evolutionary stage of consciousness, and ultimately, towards union with the Divine. This perspective highlights music's capacity not just to express devotion, but to actively facilitate a profound internal shift in consciousness.

Modern Sādhakas and the Legacy of Transformative Music

The legacy of music as a profound spiritual practice continues through contemporary masters. Bharat Ratna awardees like M.S. Subbulakshmi (1916–2004), the iconic Carnatic vocalist, perfectly embodied this principle. She famously stated, "When I sing a prayer, I cease to exist—I become the prayer." Her music was not merely a performance; it was a complete immersion in the divine, capable of transporting not only herself but also her entire audience into a different realm of consciousness. Through her renditions of compositions by revered saints like Tyāgarāja, Muthuswami Dīkṣitar, and Purandara Dāsa, she served as a living bridge between the divine and the human through the sheer emotive and spiritual power of her voice. The transformative effect of music is further exemplified in the often-recounted legend of Pandit Bhimsen Joshi (1922–2011), the Hindustānī classical vocalist. It is said that once, while traveling through a forest, he was accosted by robbers. Upon hearing his singing, particularly the devotional bhajan *Jo Bhaje Hari Ko Sadā* (One who constantly remembers Hari), the robbers were spiritually moved and underwent a profound transformation, abandoning their violent ways. This story, whether literally true or apocryphal, underscores the deep-seated belief in music's capacity to penetrate and alter even the most hardened of hearts. The inherent divinity associated with the Indian classical rāgas and rāgiṇīs, described extensively in the Purāṇas and classical Indian musical texts, further reinforces music's sacred connection. Many rāgas are explicitly linked with specific deities: Bhairava and Bhairavī (associated with Shiva), Ahir Bhairav (connected to Kṛṣṇa's worship by the gopīs), and names like Sarasvatī (the goddess of knowledge and arts) themselves carry sacred connotations. This direct association imbues each rāga with a particular spiritual quality and resonance, making their performance an act of invoking specific divine energies.

Conclusion: Music as the Synthesis of Yogas

In its multifaceted and pervasive expressions across various Indic traditions, music emerges as a singular, profound discipline that remarkably synthesizes and integrates the essence of all other major spiritual paths, thereby functioning as a meta-yoga. It is a medium that seamlessly encompasses elements of karma yoga, jñāna yoga, bhakti yoga, and rāja yoga. As observed with the Vārkarī devotees of Viṭṭhala, who sing their abhaṅgas while engaged in their daily chores and arduous pilgrimages, music transforms mundane action into sacred offering. The very act of performing one's duties becomes an act of worship, demonstrating how music can imbue daily life with spiritual significance, effectively making action a form of devotion. When the nirguṇa bhajans (devotional songs celebrating the

formless Absolute) of saints like Kabīr or other wisdom-centric sādhakas are sung, they serve as powerful vehicles for the transmission of philosophical knowledge and profound spiritual truths. These songs distill complex metaphysical concepts into accessible poetic and melodic forms, allowing the listener to absorb and contemplate ultimate reality through sound, thus aligning with the path of knowledge. The fervent devotion of the Bāuls, the spiritually charged pilgrimages associated with the Tēvāram hymns, and the profound depth of Sattriyā music (from Assam's satras) are all prime examples where bhakti yoga flourishes through musical expression. Here, music is the direct outpouring of love, surrender, and yearning for the Divine, serving as the primary mode of emotional and spiritual connection. The very act of singing is an act of love. The meditative stillness described by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, where music transcends noise and leads to profound inner silence, represents rāja yoga in musical form. Through structured sounds and harmonious vibrations, the mind is quieted, focused, and elevated, facilitating deeper meditative states and access to higher consciousness. Similarly, the precise melodic and rhythmic structures within classical Indian music and chanting traditions (e.g., in Sikhism or Buddhist monasteries) provide frameworks for mental concentration and inner discipline, essential to rāja yoga.

Thus, music functions as the *sāra* (essence) of all these yogas. It is the consummate bridge between the human and the Divine, not merely connecting the two but ultimately facilitating their merger into a state of oneness. As consistently illustrated in the narratives from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, or the poignant, ecstatic devotional cries of Mīrābāī or Sant Tukārām, the sheer, compelling force of the Divine Name (*nāma*) and the power of song are so potent that they are depicted as compelling the Divine itself to manifest, to reveal its presence, and to respond to the devotee's call. In essence, the fervent spiritual call (*pukār*), the resonance of the divine name (*nāma*), and the structured beauty of music itself are not merely components of devotion but constitute the very means of achieving profound spiritual union in a single, transformative moment. Music, therefore, stands as a testament to humanity's innate capacity for transcendence and its timeless quest for the Divine

Every artist almost (there are rare exceptions) has got something of the "public" man in him, in his vital physical parts, the need of the stimulus of an audience, social applause, satisfied vanity or fame. That must go absolutely if he wants to be a Yogi and his art a service not of man or of his own ego but of the Divine.

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 29: 290)

The Enduring Nexus of Art and Divinity in Indian Consciousness

Indira Malapaka

Abstract

This research investigates the profound connection between tangible art and spiritual concepts in Indian civilization, asserting that art serves as a dynamic bridge between the human and the divine. The study traces this relationship from the Indus Valley Civilization to the present, moving beyond a purely aesthetic analysis to interpret art as an instrument for spiritual transformation. The paper examines archaeological evidence, such as the Pashupati seal, and the cosmic symbolism of temple architecture to reveal how these forms embody and transmit deep philosophical principles. It explores how art appreciation is a multifaceted, personal journey that facilitates spiritual realization, drawing on concepts like the Upaniṣadic idea of *pūrṇatva* and the teachings of figures such as Sri Aurobindo. By analyzing specific sculptures as visual guides to ethical living (*dharma*) and the four aims of human life (*puruṣārthas*), this research posits that Indian art is a living legacy. It is a tool for personal and collective spiritual evolution, demanding a deeper engagement with its philosophical foundations. The study concludes by advocating for the preservation of this heritage not merely as a historical record, but as a timeless source of wisdom.

Keywords: Indian Art, Spirituality, Temple Architecture, Indus Valley Civilization, Sri Aurobindo, Philosophy, *Pūrṇatva*, Dharma, *Puruṣārthas*, Iconography, Aesthetics, Spiritual Realization.

Introduction

The study of Indian art is a profound inquiry into the intricate relationship between tangible artistic expression and intangible spiritual and philosophical concepts. From the ancient Indus Valley Civilization to modern times, India's artistic heritage has served as a continuous dialogue between the human and the divine. In this context, art is not merely an aesthetic pursuit but a deeply rooted quest for meaning and a means of connecting with something greater than the self. This enduring human aspiration is a central theme woven throughout India's art, literature, and culture. India's artistic legacy is a multifaceted conversation between the visible and the unseen, where architecture, sculpture, and painting embody spiritual and philosophical realms. This interconnectedness of art, culture, philosophy, and spirituality is a fundamental element of the Indian artistic tradition. Before art can be appreciated as a bridge to the divine, its very definition must be explored. The perception of art varies widely, offering unique insights from personal, regional, and national perspectives. As a field encompassing archaeology,

iconography, and epigraphy, Indian art, particularly in temple architecture, serves to guide humanity toward the divine.

Art as a Multifaceted Dialogue

The artistic legacy of India constitutes a profound and multifaceted dialogue between the tangible and the intangible. Visible forms, such as architecture, sculpture, and painting, are not merely aesthetic objects; they serve as vessels that embody and transmit invisible spiritual and philosophical realms. This fundamental interconnectedness of art, culture, philosophy, and spirituality is the defining characteristic of the Indian artistic tradition. To fully appreciate art as a bridge between the human and the divine, a nuanced understanding of its very definition is essential, as its perception varies widely across different domains of inquiry.

The appreciation of Indian art is not a monolithic experience, as it is shaped by diverse perspectives, from the personal to the regional and national. It is a field of study that encompasses a broad spectrum of disciplines, including archaeology, iconography, epigraphy, and museology. Each of these fields provides a unique lens through which to interpret and contextualize artistic expressions. For instance, archaeological analysis uncovers the material history and evolution of a site, while iconography deciphers the symbolic language of deities and narratives. Epigraphy, through the study of inscriptions, reveals historical patronage, social structures, and the intellectual milieu in which the art was created. Consequently, every artistic form, particularly within the context of temple architecture, is not a static artifact but a dynamic guide intended to facilitate humanity's journey toward the divine. The temple, in this sense, functions as a consecrated space where the material structure and its artistic embellishments work in concert to awaken the inner consciousness of the devotee and lead them toward a state of spiritual realization.

The Personal Journey of Art Appreciation

Art appreciation is a deeply personal and evolving process, reflecting the varied perspectives of those who engage with it. The profound dedication and emotion invested by ancient artisans in creating temples, sculptures, and paintings require a reciprocal effort of understanding from the observer. This act of appreciation is crucial for acknowledging the labor of love embedded in these creations, yet it is by no means a one-size-fits-all experience.

The way an individual appreciates art is shaped by their unique background and interests. For a child, a visit to a temple may evoke a spontaneous sense of joy or *ananda rasa*, a feeling of divine experience that precedes formal art analysis. An engineer, in contrast, might appreciate the same temple for its structural and architectural brilliance, marveling at the technical skill and ingenuity of its builders. A historian's appreciation would be rooted in historical context, meticulously examining inscriptions, patronage, and cultural significance. An archaeologist or geologist might focus on the materials and construction methods, while a

philosopher or performing artist might engage with the art on a spiritual or emotional level, seeing reflections of dance, music, and philosophical ideals within the sculpted forms.

For the devout, the appreciation of a temple is primarily an act of religious devotion, centered on the residing deity and the sacred narratives, or *sthalapurāṇa*, associated with the site. The temple is not merely a monument to them but an integral part of their daily life and spiritual practice. This perspective, though distinct from formal art critique, is a profound expression of a living philosophical tradition. The contrast between local and international perspectives on heritage monuments is stark: what a global scholar sees as a protected site, the local community views as their daily reality and shared cultural space. This communal relationship with heritage highlights that while preservation is a universal need, the lived experience of these sites is deeply personal and often transcends purely aesthetic or historical considerations.

The Ancient Roots of Indian Spirituality and Art

The genesis of Indian spirituality and art can be traced to the Indus Valley Civilization, offering a foundational glimpse into the nation's artistic and philosophical heritage. Although the script of this ancient culture remains undeciphered, a wealth of archaeological evidence from sites such as Mohenjo-daro and Harappa provides compelling insight into a rich spiritual and artistic life. Artifacts like terracotta seals, steatite figurines, and the architectural marvel of the Great Bath suggest a complex belief system. The presence of fire altars and intricate carvings of deities and sacred animals points to a spirituality deeply rooted in nature worship.

Furthermore, the famous Pashupati seal and the so-called "priest-king" statue—with its serene, meditative expression—provide compelling evidence of a sophisticated philosophical awareness. These artifacts suggest that the seeds of spiritual and philosophical thought were already present in this ancient period, manifesting in communal rituals and a consciousness of the divine. This early foundation then transitioned into the Vedic period, which saw the formal emergence of spirituality through codified hymns and rituals. These practices, in turn, laid the groundwork for the rich philosophical and artistic traditions that would define Indian civilization for millennia to come.

Indus Valley Civilization: An Artistic and Spiritual Legacy

The Indus Valley Civilization, one of the world's most ancient urban cultures, offers a compelling glimpse into the dawn of spiritual and philosophical life. While the undeciphered nature of its script prevents a definitive understanding of its religious practices, the archaeological record is rich with clues, suggesting a society where art and daily life were deeply intertwined with a profound spiritual consciousness.

Terracotta Seals and Figurines

The terracotta seals and steatite figurines from sites like Mohenjo-daro and Harappa are among the most significant finds. These small, intricately carved artifacts are not just artistic objects but also key to understanding the civilization's belief systems. They depict a pantheon of figures, including a seated deity surrounded by animals, famously known as the Pashupati seal, which many scholars consider a prototype of the Hindu god Shiva. The figure's meditative posture and half-closed eyes, or *Ardha-nimīlita nētra*, suggest a deep understanding of yogic and ascetic practices. The presence of female figurines, often interpreted as the Mother Goddess, points to the worship of a creative, nurturing feminine divine and an emphasis on fertility and nature worship.

The Great Bath

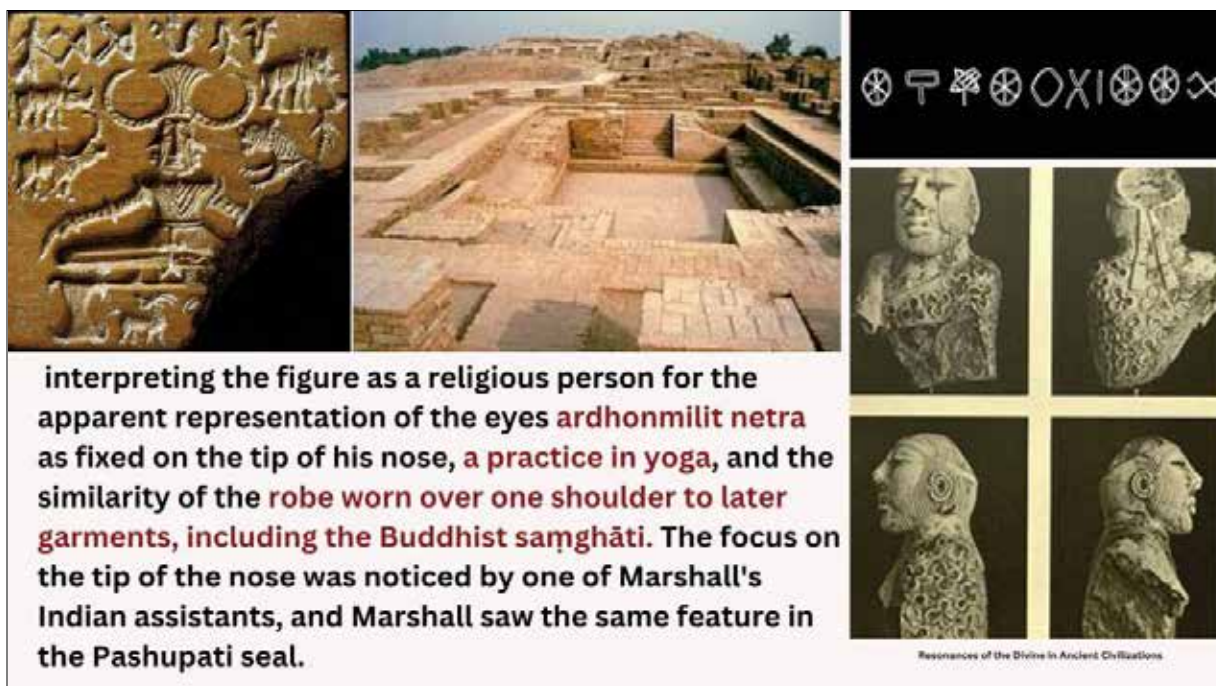
The Great Bath of Mohenjo-daro is a remarkable example of monumental architecture with a clear spiritual purpose. While the Indus people had private wells in their homes, this large, public structure, with its sophisticated water management system, likely served a ceremonial or ritualistic function. It may have been used for ritual cleansing or communal ceremonies, symbolizing spiritual purification and communal gatherings. This structure, combined with other findings, strongly implies a society with an organized religious life that went beyond individual worship.

Ritualistic Practices and Symbols

Evidence of a philosophical and spiritual life is further supported by the presence of fire altars at sites like Kalibangan and Lothal. These altars, distinct from industrial furnaces, indicate the existence of ritualistic fire ceremonies, similar to those found in later Vedic traditions. The reverence for nature is also a recurring theme. Carvings depict sacred trees like the peepal and banyan, suggesting they were revered as symbols of the divine or life itself. The intricate depictions of animals and mythical creatures also point to a belief system centered on the divine essence present in all of nature.

Philosophical and Artistic Expression

The priest-king statue is another masterpiece that speaks volumes about the spiritual awareness of the Indus people. His serene facial expression, calm demeanor, and draped robe suggest a person of religious or philosophical authority. The tranquility (*karuṇā rasa*) and meditative posture embodied in this sculpture, and others like the Pashupati seal, reveal a culture that valued inner peace and spiritual contemplation. While we cannot definitively say when spirituality originated, these artifacts provide strong evidence that the Indus Valley Civilization was not just a society of advanced urban planners but also one deeply engaged in a spiritual and philosophical quest for meaning. The art of this era was a direct reflection of this quest, serving as a powerful medium for expressing abstract spiritual concepts in tangible form.



The Sacred Art of India: A Philosophy of Wholeness

The artistic heritage of India, deeply intertwined with its philosophical and spiritual tenets, has profoundly shaped the course of its expressive traditions. Concepts such as *ṛta*, the cosmic order, and the interconnectedness of all beings have been woven into the very fabric of Indian art, transcending the boundaries of literature and finding expression in sculpture, painting, and architecture. This journey of ideas, from abstract thought to tangible form, can be traced back to the Vedic period, a time when music, poetry, and oral traditions were the primary vehicles for profound spiritual concepts. These ancient elements gradually laid the groundwork for the visual arts, which would later serve as a powerful medium for transmitting these same philosophical truths.

One of the most foundational ideas is expressed in a single verse from the *Īśāvāsyā Upaniṣad*:

pūrṇam adaḥ pūrṇam idaṃ, pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate |
pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya, pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate ||

This phrase, signifying that what is whole and complete comes from what is whole and complete, and remains whole even after being taken from the whole, encapsulates a core principle of Indian thought. This concept of *pūrṇatva* or completeness, suggests that any subject of study in India, whether philosophical or artistic, is a self-contained and complete system. It is a philosophy of abundance, beautifully illustrated by the metaphor of a single lit lamp used to light countless others, yet losing none of its own brightness. This is a powerful allegory for India's contribution to the world, offering teachings and practices such as yoga, Ayurveda, and the doctrines of Buddhism and Jainism, while simultaneously shining more brightly in this shared radiance.

India's ancient wisdom, encompassing its literature, philosophical systems, and cultural practices, has long transcended geographical boundaries. Rather than a future aspiration, this global influence is a historical and ongoing reality. Concepts from Buddhism, Yoga, and *Āyurveda* are now integral to global discourse, and each time they are referenced, India's intellectual legacy is affirmed. This diffusion of knowledge, sustained over centuries, positions India as a *Viśvaguru*—a global teacher—not in aspiration, but in fact. While a comprehensive exploration of these teachings is vast, certain foundational phrases offer profound guidance. The Sanskrit phrase "*Sarveṣāṃ śāntir bhavatu*" (Let there be peace for all) is a cornerstone of this philosophy. Its daily practice fosters a path toward inner divinity and spiritual connection. Similarly, "*Lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhino bhavantu*" (May all beings be happy) is a universal ethical directive. It underscores the principle of non-harm and compassion toward all life, making it a foundational teaching for individuals of any age.

Another key teaching is found in the *Īśa Upaniṣad*: "*tena tyaktena bhuñjithā mā grdhaḥ kasyasvid dhanam*" (Enjoy through renunciation; do not covet the wealth of another). This verse serves as a powerful reminder against avarice, advocating for contentment and gratitude. While often interpreted in a material context, it can be extended to the realm of ideas, cautioning against intellectual greed and plagiarism. Our ancient texts, therefore, offer not only spiritual guidance but also a framework for intellectual honesty, a concept that predates modern ethical codes.

The Vision of *Ārya Bhūmi*

The prophetic vision of India's future as a global spiritual center is exemplified in the writings of Sri Aurobindo. In his Sanskrit poem *Bhavānī Bhārati* (1904-1908), composed during the early years of the freedom movement, he articulated a powerful nationalist and spiritual vision. Verse 97 reads:

शिवस्य काश्यां निवसन्ति ये के स्पर्शेन ते तस्य भवन्ति मुक्ताः।
देव्यास्तु पुण्येन पदार्पणेन सर्वार्यभूमिर्जगतोऽपि काशी॥

Meaning

ये के - ye ke - those who; शिवस्य - śivasya - Shiva's; काश्यां - kāśyāṃ - in Kashi; निवसन्ति - nivasanti - dwell; तस्य - tasya - his; स्पर्शेन - sparśena - by the touch; मुक्ताः भवन्ति - muktāḥ bhavanti - are liberated; देव्याः - devyāḥ - of the goddess; पुण्येन पदार्पणेन - puṇyena padārpaṇena - by the purifying feet; सर्व - sarvā - this entire; आर्यभूमिः - āryabhūmiḥ - Aryan country; जगतः - jagataḥ - of the world; अपि - api - too; काशी - kāśī - Kaashi;

English Interpretation

As those who dwell in Shiva's sacred city of Kashi are liberated by the auspicious touch of the Lord, so all this Aryan country where the Goddess has set her purifying feet shall be the Kashi of the world.

Sri Aurobindo, *Bhavani Bharati*, v. 97

In this verse, Sri Aurobindo draws a parallel between the sacred city of *Kāśī* (Varanasi), a place of spiritual liberation, and the entirety of India. He envisioned a free India, transformed by the "purified touch" of *Bhāratamātā* (Mother India), becoming an *Ārya Bhūmi*—a noble land—that would serve as a global spiritual hub, a "*Kāśī* for the world." This vision, articulated decades before India's independence, is increasingly evident today as people from around the globe are drawn to its spiritual traditions.

Merging into the Ocean of Consciousness

The profound, transformative nature of Indian spirituality is often described through an elegant metaphor: a salt doll setting out to measure the depth of the sea. Upon entering the water, the doll dissolves and becomes one with the ocean. Similarly, those who come to study and engage with Indian philosophy and spirituality often find themselves not merely observing from a distance, but being absorbed into its vast, all-encompassing consciousness. This immersive experience highlights the unique and profound difference of India's philosophical and spiritual traditions—they are not doctrines to be studied, but realities to be lived and merged with.

Cosmic Vision in Art and Architecture

The concept of a cosmic vision, where the universe and the human being are profoundly interconnected, is a recurring theme across numerous Indian disciplines, including philosophy, spirituality, Ayurveda, and *Vāstusāstra*. The framework of the *Pañcatattvas*—the five elements of *prthvī* (earth), *jalam* (water), *agniḥ* (fire), *vāyuḥ* (air), and *ākāśaḥ* (space)—is not an abstract idea but a comprehensive model for understanding both the macrocosm and the microcosm. In ancient educational systems, this holistic understanding was paramount, transcending geographical and regional boundaries. This same vision was applied to the human body, with each element corresponding to a specific sense organ: fire to the eyes, air to the skin, space to the ears, earth to the nose, and water to the tongue. This elemental theme is further manifested in the design principles of *Vāstu*, where each element aligns with a specific cardinal direction, ensuring that architectural spaces resonate with cosmic energies.

This deep-rooted spiritual and philosophical foundation finds its most powerful expression in Indian art and architecture, which function as a tangible path to the divine. This is particularly evident in the construction of temples, which are not merely buildings but sacred spaces. As articulated by Sri Aurobindo, an Indian temple is "an altar raised to the Divine Self—a house of the cosmic spirit." These structures were meticulously designed and embellished with sculptures, inscriptions, and carvings, not for mere aesthetic appeal but to create an environment that would awaken the inner consciousness of the devotee. Kings and patrons commissioned these magnificent temples not out of vanity, but

from a profound reverence for the Divine, for whom the structure served as a home. The symbolic elements, such as the *garbhagr̥ha* (sanctum sanctorum) and the *śikhara* (spire), are steeped in cosmological symbolism, reflecting the cosmos itself in their design. The subsequent addition of features like *gopuras* (towered gateways) and *maṇḍapas* (halls) by later rulers further attests to a shared cultural ethos of perpetual homage and renewal.

Art as a Path to Spiritual Realisation

Indian art, in its various forms, is fundamentally an intentional guide for the individual toward spiritual realization. This is achieved through the aesthetic and emotional experience of *rasa*, a core concept in Hindu art that seeks to evoke profound spiritual and emotional responses in the viewer. The journey to the divine, whether in Buddhism or Jainism, is presented not as an overnight occurrence, but as a path of conscious effort and gradual transformation. The story of the Buddha's enlightenment, for example, attained through years of trials and austerities, serves as a powerful reminder that spiritual insight and liberation require continuous practice and unwavering dedication.

A particularly compelling example of this is the Jain concept of *śleṣa-paddhati*, or the "coloring of the soul," which is beautifully illustrated through art. A painting depicting this idea might show individuals performing actions with varying degrees of ethical weight. Each action corresponds to a different color of the soul, ranging from black for the most harmful deeds to a light, bright color for the most compassionate. This visual metaphor makes the core of Jain philosophy accessible and immediate, demonstrating how art can effectively communicate abstract ethical principles and inspire a path toward spiritual purity.



Ultimately, the purpose of Indian art, as envisioned by thinkers like Sri Aurobindo, is to serve as a vehicle for spiritual evolution. His writings consistently underscore that art is not an end in itself but a means to awaken consciousness and connect with the divine. By exploring the profound spiritual and philosophical underpinnings of Indian art and heritage, one can begin to understand its true purpose: to guide the individual soul toward a state of greater awareness and connection with the cosmos. It is a legacy that continues to echo the ancient call to “Arise and awake,” urging each new generation to rediscover and embody the profound wisdom embedded in its artistic and literary traditions.

Art as an Instrument of Transformation

The creation of monumental works of art and architecture in ancient India, particularly temples, transcended mere physical construction. These endeavors were acts of profound spiritual offering, intended to elevate the collective consciousness. The motivations behind such projects were not rooted in regional pride or temporal contentment alone; they were the products of visionary leadership, a hallmark of the kings who patronized them. While historical accounts acknowledge instances where some rulers also engaged in the destruction of temples built by others, such actions were often followed by a process of philosophical rectification. This capacity for self-correction is a fundamental tenet of Indian philosophy, which does not demand immediate perfection but rather encourages learning and evolution from one’s mistakes. This is exemplified in the transformation of Emperor *Aśoka*, who, after the devastating Kalinga war, publicly acknowledged his grave error and devoted his life to *dharma*. This willingness to admit and atone for mistakes stands in stark contrast to the modern era, where such courage is a rarity. This principle of self-reflection and transformation—not the pursuit of flawlessness—is a core tenet of Indian spirituality, as espoused by philosophical luminaries. The journey toward divinity is understood as a slow and steady process of daily practice and personal transformation, in which mistakes are an integral part.

This transformative ethos is profoundly embedded in the architecture and art of Indian temples. The sculptures and ornamentation are not arbitrary decorations but are thematically aligned with the temple’s purpose, acting as a bridge between the human and the divine. The concept of *sampūrṇa* (complete, holistic) education, central to the Indian tradition, is mirrored in these sacred spaces. A prime example is the *pañca-bhūta-sthalams*, five temples aligned with the five great elements (*pañca-tattvas*): Earth (*Bhoomi Liṅgam*), Water (*Varuṇa Liṅgam*), Fire (*Agni Liṅgam*), Air (*Vāyu Liṅgam*), and Ether (*Ākāśa Liṅgam*). These were not simply symbolic sites but were active centers where *sādhakas* (spiritual practitioners) engaged in disciplines to achieve *bhūta-siddhi*, or mastery over the elemental forces. While the world

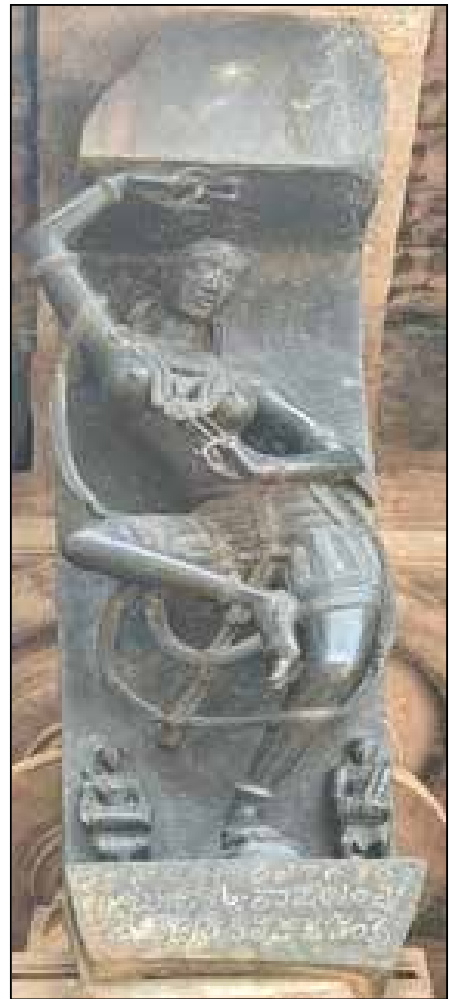
is now embracing concepts of heritage tourism and spiritual travel, these practices have been integral to Indian civilization for millennia, embedded in daily life and philosophy. The tradition of *tīrtha-yātrā* (pilgrimage) was a widespread practice across all social classes, undertaken to experience divine art, foster spiritual growth, and honor ancestors. Historical records, such as the Gaya inscription of *Śrī Kṛṣṇadeva Rāya*, provide evidence of extensive travel for spiritual purposes, demonstrating a deeply integrated sense of a single, unified country bound by spiritual journeys. The modern *Mahākumbha Melās* are not a new trend but a continuation of this ancient tradition, an enduring testament to the continuous flow of Indian civilization.

To truly understand the message conveyed by ancient Indian sculptures, one must look beyond their aesthetic beauty and recognize their deeper philosophical significance. A compelling example is the sculpture from the Ramappa Temple, which depicts a dancer whose necklace breaks mid-performance. Her unwavering grace and determination to continue the sacred act, without pause, illustrate the principle of unwavering commitment to one's dharma (duty). This is not merely a depiction of a dance but an embodiment of profound divine qualities. Unlike modern performances that allow for corrections, this live and sacred act demanded flawless adaptation. The sculpture teaches that one's commitment to duty must be absolute, regardless of external circumstances.



Similarly, a sculpture from a Hoysala temple, depicting a huntress, is a

visual treatise on the four *puruṣārthas* (aims of human life): *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa*. The huntress's profession is her dharma, her daily duty to sustain her household. The deeper purpose (*artha*) is her contribution to a larger social and spiritual structure. Her desire (*kāma*) is not for worldly recognition but for spiritual accountability and acknowledgment by a higher power. Finally, through a life of discipline and



dedication, she achieves *mokṣa* (liberation), which is not a sudden event but the natural culmination of living a life in harmony with all four *puruṣārthas*. This sculpture serves as a timeless lesson, urging us to find purpose and meaning in our daily lives and responsibilities, recognizing that perseverance on this path leads to liberation.

Conclusion: A Legacy of Transmission and Realisation

The enduring greatness of Indian art lies in its ability to transmit spirit and deeper values across millennia. Every artist, architect, and scholar contributed to this timeless spiritual tradition not as an isolated individual but as part of a collective cultural consciousness. Indian art is not simply a representation of form but a bridge between the human and the divine. To cross this bridge, one must perceive not only the visible form but also the invisible purpose behind it. The conservation and preservation of this heritage are a profound responsibility, demanding a deep understanding of the philosophical, architectural, iconographical, and epigraphical dimensions. Simply posting images online is insufficient; a deeper engagement with the tradition is required. While modern media efforts are laudable for raising awareness, it is essential to move beyond a superficial or “mysterious” framing of ancient sites. The true appreciation of art must be a deeply personal and felt experience, allowing each individual to connect with the divine essence of these creations through their own unique perspective, be it through aesthetics, philosophy, or history. It is through this personal connection that the eternal glory of Indian art can be fully recognized, conserved, and passed on to future generations.

Bibliography

General Works on Indian Art, Philosophy, and Culture

- Basham, A. L. *The Wonder That Was India: A Survey of the History and Culture of the Indian Sub-Continent Before the Coming of the Muslims*. Grove Press, 1954.

All work done for the Divine, from poetry and art and music to carpentry or baking or sweeping a room, should be made perfect even in its smallest external detail, as well as in the spirit in which it is done; for only then is it an altogether fit offering.

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 27: 291)

- Zimmer, Heinrich. *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*. Princeton University Press, 1946.
- Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. *The Dance of Shiva: Fourteen Indian Essays*. Noonday Press, 1957.
- Mittal, Jagdish. *Indian Art and Culture*. D.K. Printworld, 2011.
- Indus Valley Civilization
- Possehl, Gregory L. *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective*. AltaMira Press, 2002.
- Kenoyer, Jonathan Mark. *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Parpola, Asko. *Deciphering the Indus Script: Methods and a Tentative Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Hindu Temple Architecture and Philosophy

- Stella, Kramrisch. *The Hindu Temple*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1946.
- Michell, George. *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to Its Meaning and Forms*. University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Dehejia, Vidya. *Indian Art*. Phaidon Press, 1997.

Literary and Philosophical Sources

- Sri Aurobindo. *The Renaissance in India*. In *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA), Vol. 20. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2002.
- Śrī Aurobindo. *Bhavānī Bhārati*. In *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA), Vol. 2. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2002.
- Olivelle, Patrick. *The Early Upanishads: Annotated Text and Translation*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Kale, M.R. *The Īśa Upaniṣad: With the Commentary of Shankara*. Motilal Banarsidass, 1904.

Jainism and Buddhism in Art

- Dundas, Paul. *The Jains*. Routledge, 2002.
- Huntington, Susan L. and John C. Huntington. *The Art of Ancient India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain*. Weatherhill, 1985.

To be a literary man is not a spiritual aim; but to use literature as a means of spiritual expression is another matter. Even to make expression a vehicle of a superior power helps to open the consciousness. The harmonising rests on that principle.

(Sri Aurobindo, CWSA 29: 291)

Our Contributors

Dr. Bharat Gupt

Dr. Bharat Gupt is an eminent Indian classicist, theatre theorist, sitar and surbahar player, musicologist, cultural analyst, and newspaper columnist. He retired as Associate Professor of English from Delhi University's College of Vocational Studies, where he taught from the early 1970s until 2011. He currently serves as a Trustee and Executive Committee member of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi. Prof. Gupt earned master's degrees from St Stephen's College (University of Delhi) and the University of Toronto, and received advanced training in traditional Indian music. He was also awarded the Onassis Senior Research Fellowship in Greece. His notable works include *Dramatic Concepts: Greek and Indian* (1994), among others.

Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi

Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi, the Member Secretary of IGNCA, which is India's premier institution in the field of arts and culture under Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India, since 2016. Dr. Joshi is a renowned writer, theatre artist and academician, who served as Vice-Chancellor of Kushabhau Thakre Journalism University, Raipur, for 10 years. Earlier, he served as Registrar and Dean of Makhn Lal Chaturvedi Rashtriya Patrakarita Vishwavidyalay, Bhopal – a university for the discipline of journalism and mass communication. He has authored many books in variety of disciplines such as short stories, poetry, satire and memories and published several articles in reputed journals and books. He has edited several prestigious publications including "Connecting Through Culture", selected words of Mahatma on Culture and Civilization", and "The Eternal Truth – Life & Teachings of Guru Nanak Dev Ji." He has been conferred with several prestigious awards at the national level for his contribution in the field of Culture and Literature. He is a life member of INTACH, and also on several prestigious committees including NMML, UGC, etc.

Dr. Sumit Dey

Dr. Sumit Dey currently serves as the Regional Director of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Regional Centre, Puducherry. With an academic foundation in social sciences and cultural studies, he has been serving as an Assistant Professor at IGNCA since 2019, contributing to various key domains such as Cultural Informatics, Cultural Archives, Kalanidhi, Sutra Dhara, and the National Mission on Cultural Mapping. His professional journey also includes tenures at distinguished institutions like All India Radio, the Press Information Bureau, and INTACH. He has played a pivotal role in the Ministry of Culture's National Cultural Audio-Visual Archives Project. As co-editor of the IGNCA publication *Tribal and Indigenous Languages of India*, he has made a significant contribution to the preservation of India's cultural heritage.

Commander Neeraj Vashisth

Commander Neeraj Vashisth is a specialist in Underwater sciences. He has keen interest in history and field of human rights. He is author of the book 'Ayodhya to Ayutthaya a relationship transcending faith and time'. He has served as former Aide de Camp to the President of India. His second book Kim and Krishna was out in July 2025. He has been an invitee at many literary fests and colleges of repute. He has written for Indo Thai news.

Dr. Indira Malapaka

Dr. Indira Malapaka is a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Central University of Puducherry and has published articles in both national and international journals in the fields of Epigraphy, Museology, Iconography and Manuscriptology, in addition to authoring academic books. Furthermore, she serves as the Subeditor of *Culture Collecti*, a monthly e-journal that celebrates the richness of Indian culture in various formats. She is working as the Programme Director at SACAR now.

Our Recent Publications



Explanations of *Essays on the Gita* (Volume Four)

Author: Dr. V. Ananda Reddy

ISBN: 978-93-85391-50-7

Price: ₹375/-

The Future Poetry and The Evolution of Consciousness

Author: Madhumita Dutta

ISBN: 978-93-85391-53-8

Price: ₹525/-



Savitri: Its Profound and Magnificent Significance

Book III: The Book of the Divine Mother

Cantos: I to IV

Author: Dr. V. Ananda Reddy

ISBN: 978-93-85391-56-9

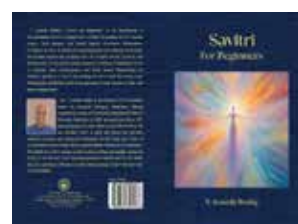
Price: ₹675/-

Savitri For Beginners

Author: Dr. Ananda Reddy

ISBN: 978-93-85391-57-6

Price: ₹90/-



Published by: SACAR Trust, Puducherry
These books are available at SACAR trust and SABDA, Puducherry.

A “literary man” is one who loves literature and literary activity for their own separate sake. A Yogi who writes is not a literary man for he writes only what the inner Will and Word wants him to express. He is a channel and an instrument of something greater than his own literary personality.

Of course the literary man and the intellectual love reading — books are their mind’s food. But writing is another matter. There are plenty of people who never write a word in the literary way, but are enormous readers. One reads for ideas, for knowledge, for the stimulation of the mind by all that the world has thought or is thinking. Poetry, even perhaps all perfect expression of whatever kind, comes by inspiration; reading helps only to acquire for the outer instrument the full possession of a language or to get the technique of literary expression. Afterwards one develops one’s own use of the language, one’s own style, one’s own technique. Reading and painstaking labour are very good for the literary man, but even for him they are not the cause of his good writing, only an aid to it. The cause is within himself.

If one lives in the inner consciousness, if the inner mind or higher mind become dynamic, all the ideas in the world and all sorts of knowledge come crowding in from within or from above; there is little or no need of outside food any longer. At most reading can be then an utility for keeping oneself informed of what is happening in the world — but not as food or one’s own seeing of the world and Truth and things. One becomes an independent Mind in communion with the cosmic Thinker.

(Sri Aurobindo CWSA 29: 291)