

SPIRITUALITY AND FINE ARTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ways in which artistic creation and spiritual search interrelate in the life and work of an artist. Based on an analysis of different narrative and art works produced by the artists during their spiritual and artistic exploration, this article relates to the artists' understanding and practice of spirituality in their forms of expression. It also investigates the connections between their artistic and spiritual practices, emphasizing their understanding of art as a vehicle for accessing and communicating spiritual insights. This paper will track the interconnection between artistic creation and spiritual search in the life and work of the artists. To do this, the paper will focus on the two sides of the research question presented above: What configurations of spirituality have emerged from the spiritual searches of the artists? And how do these configurations relate to their understanding and practice of art? The power of artistic creation to discover and give meaning to life, we will see, is one of the main features that connects it to spiritual search and practice. The information is based on the author's self-experience of life and creation. Study of art criticism articles, biographies of artists, exhibition catalogues, museum publications, scholarly books on art history, journal articles analysing artwork, art reviews etc.

Key Words: Spirituality, Fine Arts, Spiritual Insights, Artistic Creation, Interconnection

Introduction

From the beginnings of civilization, humans have revered and celebrated nature as the source of supreme spiritual power and creator and destroyer of all things. Every culture has a creation myth featuring some element of the natural world. Even today, most societies can point to a tradition derived from the natural phenomena, rooted in the material world. Therefore, we must acknowledge that nature plays an important role in the understanding of spirituality. If asked about the aim of art, one word is sometimes sufficient, 'Expression'

The word eco-spirituality is a combination of naturalism and spiritualism: while many natural events have a concrete explanation rooted in science, there are some things about our world that we can never understand or explain. No matter our religion, we can draw upon nature as a grounding spiritual force which can sometimes help us understand our limitations and struggle to understand the highest spiritual phenomena. This was the reason the prehistoric man decided to pay homage to all natural phenomena. So much so for him the action was performed inside the cave while performing a spiritual religious act rather than an actual physical performance. 'It is possible to go further than this and to find examples of societies where the activity of art is totally subsumed with religion or magic, and where social background and artistic function are completely inseparable.'¹

When we understand our place in the universe, we begin to experience the benefits of a strong connection between spirituality and Art. This connection can result in:

- a A greater appreciation for things as they are
- b A better understanding of time, its rhythms, and limitations.
- f Increased gratitude for simple gifts.

All these things help us to find our connection to the Natural World for finding spirituality and our connection to Art can make us appreciative of both by Seeing and appreciating beauty in imperfection. Observing and learning about the ways in which spirituality and Art have the common steps of creation. In realizing a spiritual role, art employs beauty, whose purpose both in the world of creation and in the realm of human creativity is to attract the soul toward its Creator and to draw it into a spiral or spiritual

growth. For example, during renaissance period all art works were created keeping in mind the creation of Adam by the supreme God. Similarly, in India the art depicted the reverence of the god by the artist in his own way, like the Buddhist believers created the art depicting his teachings and form in a way a disciple pays homage to his guru and thus finds the enlightenment. In contemporary art the artist depicts his version of bliss through his ways of art, it might be abstract, figurative, conceptual or in any other way. Art also employs emotion, which can reinforce the various facets of the art renders. There is an emotional release, a rush of pleasure and feelings of overwhelming joy that are rarely found in any other experience. Many times, artists also make a deeper spiritual connection with God. On the one hand, artistic creativity is a central feature of significant forms of spirituality. Mystics do not remain silent after having dwelled in the divine reality which cannot be expressed in words or captured in concepts. Rather, they face the hassle of communicating what they have experienced, and thus share the task of the artist: giving word, form, colour, or sound, to that which cannot be fully grasped in any language.

The fact is that people are now turning to artists for spiritual guidance. Their works and lives offer public testimonies of the search for the divine in fresh and original manners, as well as of the struggle to integrate different sources and trends of spiritual experience and insight into an organic whole in a fragmented world. As E.B.Havell says in his book titled, 'The Ideals of Indian Art', 'Indian art was conceived when that wonderful intuition flashed upon Indian mind that the soul of man is eternal, and one with the Supreme Soul, the Lord and Cause of all things.² Authenticity, experimentation, and integration have become key elements of both contemporary art and contemporary spirituality, as can be seen in the art works presented in the medium of weaving at India Art Fair-2025, where weaving medium represent an additional form of integration. Here diverse elements coming from religious and spiritual traditions are understood as 'resources' and 'approaches' that can be used to address existential problems and to enrich one's search for meaning and the divine. They are all forms and the artist tie the threads of descriptions. The logic of a design that needs to respond to specific needs and aims and be adequate for a particular audience constitutes the principle of integration. Both the artists and the spirituality seekers consciously use their senses to experience all facets of the material world — sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Also understanding that humankind is not separate from nature, rather an intrinsic part of it helps to form an authentic connection with nature which can often inspire questions we never thought to ask before — about our purpose, our earthly responsibilities, and even our very existence. In other words, aesthetic experience is a kind of spiritual experience. Probably the most significant spiritual property of artistic creation for the artists is that at its highest moments, it constitutes a form of spiritual experience for them and then the same feeling is sometimes felt by the observer which also imparts a feeling of wonder at that moment in the same way a devotee experiences at the time of meditating.

In other words, the arts offer a form of knowledge as far as they allow one to see beyond ordinary existence entering states of grace and then bring back to everyday life those spiritual understandings that reach beyond one's own humanity, so that they may materialize and touch the life and reality of other people

This resonates with recent studies that have explored forms of spiritual awakening occurring in non-religious contexts. Sardar Sobha Singh describes in the following terms what occurs when he is improvising: 'Then I can empty myself, silence my thoughts, and enter the flow ... Sometimes I feel it is not me entirely who creates these paintings in those moments. Indeed, I feel that the I dissolves and some Great Being is holding my hand.

Further in the words of poet Ted Hughes who tries to explain his perception through his own experience, 'in a way, I suppose, I think of poems as a sort of animal. They have their own life, like animals, by

which I mean that they seem quite separate from any person, even from their author, and nothing can be added to them or taken away without maiming or perhaps even killing them. And they have a certain wisdom. They know something special.... Something that we are perhaps curious to learn. Maybe my concern has been to capture not animals particularly and not poems, but simply things which have a vivid life of their own, outside mine.’³

This emphasis on the uniqueness of each spiritual path which cannot be regulated by any external authority but must respond to the particularities and complexities of individual needs and sensitivities reinforces the sense that personal experience of the divine is the best source of knowledge and the privileged form of authority over spiritual matters. Direct experience of the divine is not only one of the main aims of spiritual search but also the main criterion of discernment among alternative doctrines and practices like the book titled, ‘Art and Mankind’ by Rene Huyghe, shares the feelings experienced by the renowned painter artist Delacroix where he shared that it was becoming much more important for the artist to get close to the ideal that he carried inside himself⁴

Meditation-like states were recurrently described by most artists, as well as the sensation of being a vehicle for the expression of something beyond themselves. Connection with everything, full attention, a sharp focus, a feeling of joy and plenitude, an expansion of loving awareness, and participation in the unfolding of the creative rhythms of life itself constitute some of the descriptions of the spiritual experience of creation. Here we find clear similarities with the reports of mystical experiences

The following passage from the photographer not only integrates the common traits between aesthetic and mystical experience but also shows how they become a central drive for artistic work:

How could I describe this experience of “vanishing when I observe”? When I am totally perceiving the phenomena of the world I feel the autonomy, infinitude, harmony, perfection, and independence of the world ... I stop existing. It is as if I discovered certain perfection of the world without me, a break from the need for my presence. This is something so subtle that these words cannot express it. The feeling is of peace and joy as if that sort of perception of the mechanism of the world moving on its own gave me tranquillity ... The certainty that everything, absolutely everything is fine. It would be wonderful to be able to take pictures of that!! But how? Can that be in an image? The answer is no. But I think it is fun trying to do it and spending life attempting that impossible. Aesthetic experience is a kind of spiritual experience.

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Conclusion

Artistic creation, we have seen, is both a place for encountering the divine and a vehicle to elaborate and express insights gained in spiritual experience. It also provides models for the ways in which people can integrate different sources of spiritual orientation and reconfigure their spiritual practices and identities in a pluralistic world. Artistically infused spirituality may be considered a central ability for meaning-

making and a key element in the processes of religious reconfiguration in contemporary societies, which deserves more investigation. All this shows how deeply, and intimately connected art and spirituality are. The divine is not only the source of artistic creativity but given that its/Her/His very nature is creative, doing art is participating in the divine life, collaborating with the divine endeavours. Accordingly, spiritual-oriented art represents a kind of religious experience and practice that opens a whole new realm for the expression and development of contemporary spiritualities.

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