

What caused the creation of art?

A round table at the 25th Valcamonica Symposium

EDITED BY
Emmanuel Anati



ATELIER
colloqui III

Dr. B. L. Malla

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi

The Origin of Art?

Most of the world's religions have found expression in some way or the other in visual imagery, and view the universe as God's artefact. God is the supreme artist for them. God's work is the natural world, visible to the human eye. The Upanisadic sages described it as the cosmic tree. On the symbolic level, 'This tree is the great world mother, the Godde

ss of Nature who nourishes all life with the milk of her breast.' The metaphor of the cosmic tree shows that the sacred is the proper context of both art and nature. Indian philosophy, irrespective of ethnic considerations, views man and nature in a holistic perspective. The reverence of nature was not confined to Eastern thought only; the ancient Greeks too deified the forces of nature.

Indian aesthetics has three main streams: first, literature and poetics; second, drama and dramaturgy; and third, fine arts and sculpture. But its scope circumscribes almost all the branches and sub-branches of Indian aesthetics, arts, crafts, sciences, literature, etc, which entertain our sense organs, satisfy our minds and gives contentment to our souls. This includes all sorts of literature – prose, poetry, criticism, drama, dramaturgy – dance, music, both vocal and instrumental, painting and also the allied faculties of arts, which also convey joy to an aesthete. It can also be anything which is sweet, bright, beautiful and true in the phenomenal world, even in dream and imagination, because in the ecstasy of paramount of good and absolute happiness the supreme reigns.

Indian logic postulates the perception of the mundane (*laukika*), or what is perceptible by sense organs, and the super-sensuous (*yaugika*), or what is realizable introspectively. It assures super-sensuous taste in relishing aesthetic beauty and bliss. It is not only concerned with the problem of beauty but also with the question of art and the enjoyment

of art. The classification of arts in Indian tradition is based on different aesthetic senses. Among the senses that lead to aesthetic experience are vision (*drshya*) and hearing (*shravya*). Architecture, sculpture and painting originate from vision, and music and poetry originate from hearing, and theatre from the two together. Hence, Indian aesthetics is a well conceived psychoanalytical process of judgement. It is understood today as the science and theory of beauty and fine arts.

Indian art is imbued with an extraordinary feat of traditional thought, currents which are both simple and complex. At one level, simple words are used so that everybody can understand the nature of art and the art of nature. But at higher level it becomes cosmology instead of simple explanation. The true aim of the artist is not to extract beauty from nature, but to reveal life within life, the noumenon within phenomenon, the reality within unreality and the soul within matter. When that is revealed, beauty reveals itself. So all nature is beautiful for us if only we can realize the divine ideas within it. To express the truth is the virtue of the artist. In it he is not bound either by subjective inclinations or by objects or facts in themselves; he is free, what is true is beautiful. What is beautiful is delighting. The freedom of man lies in thus delight. To live this life of truth is, as Tagore said, the way of man's being. Works of art enable a man to move from quantity to quality, from fact to truth and from utility to beauty.

Dr B. L. Malla is presently Project Director with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. Dr Malla, an art historian with specialisation in Indian art and cultural studies is currently engaged in study of Indian Rock Art and Himalyan Studies. He has been associated with the IGNCA-UNESCO-UNDP project on Village India. Numerous well received books including *The Sculptures of Kashmir*, *Vaisnava Art and Iconography of Kashmir*, *Trees in Indian Art, Mythology and Folklore*, *Conservation of Rock Art* (ed.), *Global Rock Art* (ed.), *The World of Rock Art: An Overview of five continents* (ed.) *Cosmology and Cosmic Manifestations: A Study in Shiava Art and Thought of Kashmir* (in press) along with many research articles are to his credit. He is a member of editorial boards of some prestigious publications. He is also editor of the forthcoming *Proceedings of International Conference on Rock Art 2012* (two volumes).