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## DEPICTION OF CHRISTIAN THEMES IN INDIAN ART

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**Abstract:** The depiction of Christian Art in India begins with coming of Christianity in India. The earliest examples of the Christian art in India are the surviving churches of 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Later on in Goa, examples in which we can see the important Indo-European art are on the altar of the church of Se Cathedral, and also in the basement of the nunnery of St. Monica are some of the finest mural paintings of old Goa. After that Mughal paintings also depicts Christian subject matter in the patronage of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Artists like Baswan, Miskin, Manohar and Keshav das did copy biblical themes of European painters. Mughal art was diminished by Aurangzeb and artists then adopted the European style of painting with the coming of East India company which is considered as “Bazaar art”. In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian artists started incorporating certain European techniques and themes and hence “Company School” of art evolved. In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> c. with awakening among the Indian intelligentsia, nationalist movements and members of modern renaissance movement showed great interest in Christ as they sought to reject the obscurantist beliefs and replace them with certain clearly definable features. During nationalist movement the figure of Christ comes out importantly with the message of sufferings of poor, his passion, and his love for humanity. Non-Christian artists like Abanindranath Tagore followed by Nandlal Bose, A. R. Chughati and Christian artists like Angelo da fonseca, Vinayak Masoji, A.D, Thomas, both painted Christ and Christian themes in Indian style and manner. Other modern Indian artists also depicted christ in their art works. By mid of 20<sup>th</sup> century, we see most of the artists like D.P. Roy Choudhury, K.C.S Paniker, Laxman Pai, S.L. Prashar, Sobha Singh, G. Sanyal, Janangir Sabavala, Shakti Burman, Nikhil Biswas, Satish Gujral, Akbar Padamasee, F.N. Souza, S.H. Raza, M.F.Hussian, Krishna Khanna, A. Ramachandran, Anjolie ela Menon, Badri Narayan, Sunil Das, Arup Das, P.V. Jankiram, Jyoti Sahi, Sudhir Khastgir and also a number of ordained priests and nuns like Sister Genevieve, Sister Claire also inevitably painted Christian themes. The present paper has a historic and descriptive concern about the depiction of Christian themes in Indian art. This paper also gives information of about how with the changing political, social and economical environment themes are being treated and how the choice of subject matter changes over a period of time by Indian artists.

**Keywords:** Art, Artists, Christianity, Christ, India

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**Introduction:** Christianity was introduced to India by Thomas the Apostle, who visited Muziris in Kerala in c. 52 A. D. to spread the gospel amongst Kerala's Jewish settlements. The earlier examples of the Christian art in India are the surviving churches from the time before the arrival of the Portuguese is in Kallopara/ Kerela, and shows beyond doubt between 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century A.D. a close link existed between the Hindu and Christian architecture. These earlier churches resembles with the Hindu temples and having local features in their architecture because they were made by local artisans and craftsman. The style and manner of depicting narratives from the Gospels in church were also local.

In the western India, Goa conquered by Portuguese in 1510 A.D. Efforts of missionaries and the right of padroado we see the development and influence of Christian culture and Christian art in and around Goa. The examples where we can see the important Indo-European art are on the altar of the church of Se Cathedral, and also in the basement of the nunnery of St. Monica are some of the finest mural paintings of old Goa. We see a unique blend of both the cultures and their artistic styles prominently in Goa which we

called the Braque Indo-Portuguese style. We see paintings in old Goa reflections of earlier mannerist styles and Braque of European paintings. We see expressions of suffering and passion of Christ and apostles.

Mughal paintings belongs to the period of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan which reveals its proximity and contrariety with the Indian, Persian and European art. The Mughal artist's primary source of art was their interaction with European pictures, engravings, specimens of decorative art, textiles and the like. Artists like Baswan, Miskin, Manohar and Keshav das did exact copying of the print, coping of certain elements of the print, which are considerable to be important for the themes of the painting and transforming these elements in to and Indian Context, which are characterized by dress, ornaments architecture and household items, subtle adaptation of position of figures, dress, and symbols of Christian prints with a careful incorporation to typical Indian scenes, creation of own compositions by adaptation of Christian subjects. We see several paintings of Hamzanama, Tutinama, and Anwar-i-Suhaili having impact of European art on Mughal Artist's works.

Jahangir too, showed considerable interest in Christian paintings and tried to acquire them. He was not only an enthusiastic collector, but also a very competent judge. Shah Jahan was also interested in European pictures. Surviving pictures of his atelier clearly evidence the continuing adaptation and incorporation of European art. Also Mughal artists like Keshu Das, best known for his copies of European work. Further, Aurangzeb forbade art at the court, and showed no interest in paintings, Indian or European. After the death of Aurangzeb, Mughal paintings go to decadence as there was no central autonomy till 1858, then with the advent of 17<sup>th</sup> c A.D when British East India Company got success in establishing both trade as well as their political sway in India the traders and British army, with a number of painters came to India along with their new techniques and styles of paintings and caught the attention of the provincial rulers especially in their treatment of portrait paintings thereby making the position of Indian painters more pathetic and they gradually lost their secured patronage and by 18<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. they gradually adopted the European style and manner of painting and virtually transformed to "Bazaar painters" as they were then in search of some commissions or assignments from the Britishers. During this period Christian themes were made only on commission or the personal demand of those provincial rulers. This was then in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Indian artists started incorporating certain European techniques in their works in order to gain confidence among their possible buyers. Thus, the "Company School" of art evolved where we see the European influence occurred in the style and techniques of the Indian artist and its art. Moreover, during late 19<sup>th</sup> century, art schools were opened to impart European art techniques to the Indian artisans and students. Also western education helped people to understand the western standards of life and art and aware them about their social backwardness. By this time the art produced in India was of two types one is influential and other is traditional folk. No matter the themes in both the types of arts was Christian or Indian. We see biblical and Christian symbols and biblical depiction in folk art also and Indian themes in influential European art of which Raja Ravi Verma's works are the best examples.

Later on, in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> c. with awakening among the Indian intelligentsia, especially in Bengal, there was a new awakening and transformation in ideas about art and aesthetics and literature also. Members of modern renaissance movement showed great interest in Christ as they sought to reject the obscurantist beliefs and replace them with certain clearly definable features. Tagore family was the initiator, influenced by Brahmo Samaj movement.

And during nationalist movement the figure of Christ comes out importantly with the message of sufferings of poor, his passion, and his love for humanity. Non-Christian artists like Abanindranath Tagore followed by Nandlal Bose, A. R. Chughati and Christian artists like Angelo da Fonseca, Vinayak Masoji, A.D, Thomas, both painted Christ and Christian themes in Indian style and manner because their main concern was reliving Indian tradition in philosophy, ethics and arts. Frank Wesley, Jamini Roy, Angela Trinitade painted Christ with Indian feeling. But some of them in Bengal also visualized a new Indian art of the future. The controversy began while posing the question whether it can be done by an insulator outlook or by being open-minded and responsive to the newly emerging European revolutionary movements. For a time the Indianness went in to the background and there was a whole-hearted welcome and adaptation of every new manifestation that the Indians heard from Europe, mostly by artists from the north as well as those based in Bombay during the forties and fifties. This generation of artists styled themselves as 'Progressives believing in internationalism'. They saw to it that the concept of Indianness was downgraded as retrogressive and reactionary and made synonymous with narrow-mindedness. This extreme stand has softened to give rise to the view that although Indianness is really not essential yet if it is desired then it will come automatically, when the artist happens to be sincere and opens up himself to his environment. By mid of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the assimilation of the American painters, impressionism and other schools of European modern art resulted in development of abstract expressionism, emphasizing spiritualization of experience and vision. We see most of the artists like D.P. Roy Choudhury, K.C.S Paniker, Laxman Pai, S.L. Prashar, Sobha Singh, G. Sanyal, Janangir Sabavala, Shakti Burman, Nikhil Biswas, Satish Gujral, Akbar Padamasee, F.N. Souza, S.H. Raza, M.F.Hussian, Krishna Khanna, A. Ramachandran, Anjolie Ela Menon, Badri Narayan, Sunil Das, Arup Das, P.V. Jankiram, Jyoti Sahi, Sudhir Khastgir and also a number of ordained priests and nuns like Sister Genevieve, Sister Claire also inevitably painted Christian themes. The depiction of the biblical or Christian themes from ancient to Modern art of India continued with the changing political, social and economical environment and also with the individual and original approach of artist expressed in his art. From the above mentioned we find two types of paintings in which Christian themes or Gospels were depicted one by the Christian painters and others, the non-Christians. This corresponds to two efforts at understanding Christ in relation to the Indian traditions. Non-Christian painters expressed their

search and insights in relation to the person of Christ, means of Indian traditions.  
 Christian painters interpreted Christ through the

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