
INTERACTIVE ART AND ARCHITECTURE AS RESOURCES OF CHRISTIAN TOURISM

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Abstract: In India, the tourism scenario presents itself in a wide range of tourism typologies like cultural tourism, religious tourism, eco-tourism, mass tourism, adventure tourism etc. India's rich national and regional history, cultural - geographical diversity, many religions with large number of believers presents unique cultural feasts to the tourists. Majority of India's domestic tourism market falls under the category of religious tourism [1]. As culture and religion are intertwined in India, most of the products of cultural tourism are religious in nature. Indian culture as a composite culture includes a complex whole of knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs and other capabilities of human beings. As India is a religio-cultural destination from a touristic perspective, Christian tourism and its resources acquire special significance. In this context, this paper articulates Indian Christian art and architecture which are interactive in content serves as Christian tourism resources from tourism perspective.

Keywords: Indian Christianity, art and architecture, Christian Tourism

Introduction:

Christian Tourism in India: Culture is an expression of religious, intellectual and ethical aspects of human beings or in other words, it is an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behavior that includes languages, ideas, customs, institutions, works of arts, rituals and ceremonies and other related components. Culture has both internal as well as external aspect. The internal aspect of the culture comprises of what human beings think, while the external aspects consist of what they do and what they produce. Tourism as an industry is concerned about all these. What people think becomes philosophy, and tourists would like to study it. What people do becomes the way of life which tourist like to observe and even take part in it. What people produce in terms of art, architecture, handicrafts, literature becomes an interesting attraction for tourists as they enjoy them. Preservation of these products becomes imperative in this context as these are priceless wealth of communities and the nation as a whole. Tourism helps in preserving and maintaining these priceless treasures. In India, Christian tourism can be a catalyst for preserving, maintaining and developing Christian tourism resources which in turn can be a great vehicle for creating awareness and admiration to Indian Christianity.

Tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the economy in India. Christian tourism is yet to make its presence felt in the country. Christian tourism in India is limited to the certain pilgrim centres and churches. In recent years, Christian religious attraction like shrines, churches began to appear in travel itineraries of many tour operators in India. Though Christian tourism is a new entrant into tourism industry of India, Christian tourism resources abounds in the country. The list of

resources include pilgrim centres like churches, shrines, Christian ashrams, museums, exhibitions, retreat centres, religious conventions, Indian Christian art and architecture etc. From the view point of religio- cultural tourism resources, we need to preserve these rare arte-facts.

Indian Christian Interactive Art and architecture:

In India, art has been described as yoga, a path of spiritual integration. In art, we find a movement from egocentric towards spiritual self-hood. What begins as an erotic play (*kama*), and desire for personal fame and Kudos (*artha*) becomes gradually a means to serving society (*dharma*) and finally liberation through a transforming spiritual joy (*moksha*). Thus art is not merely an aesthetic field concerned with beauty, but rather a process through which truth and goodness are manifested in terms of a whole system of values in society. In this context, Indian Christian art is another unique path of spiritual integration, where Christian truth is emphasized in Indian way. Indian Christian art and architecture help to proclaim the good news by depicting biblical narratives, and themes. The images depicted in these arts and architecture supplement the inspired word of God. They try to express the great insights and symbols of the religious traditions to which the artist and architect belong to.

Recent times, several Christian artists and architects have come forward to express their Christian faith through the medium / form of Indian art and architecture which is a great development from within Indian Christianity. Their contributions are not welcomed by the church and Christian community at the beginning, but later received with appreciation, as it revealed Indianness in Christian faith expression through art and architecture. Among the various eminent Indian Christian artists, the arts and paintings of Angelo De Fonseca and Jyoti

Sahi are unique[2].

Arts of Angelo De Fonseca: Among those artists, a pioneer was Angelo de Fonseca, a catholic of Goan origin who grew up in Pune and studied under



He was very much loyal to his catholic faith, at the same time, had a broad ecumenical outlook, and open to non-Christians radically. As a pioneer, he had to meet more objections. In all his paintings, Christ is the central theme. Among all available pictures of him, forty two are about Christ's birth, and nineteen are about his passion and death, which are central to the creed affirmation of Christianity. Other paintings concentrate on Eucharistic representations. Another painting that of sacred heart and of the Good shepherd, show that devotion (*bhakti*), was the substratum of his inspiration and that fostered by the breeze that descent from the lofty Himalayas. Thus his whole life was an effort to create his picture of Christ, a new type and style, both Indian and deeply Christian. Fonseca uses a simple gown or *kurta* for Jesus. From an elitist, upper caste, missionary oriented depiction of the church; he brought in the subaltern perspective, by focusing on the common village folk. His Mary is often garbed in the traditional sari worn by ordinary Maharashtra or Bengali women.

To sum up, Angelo da Fonseca is one of India's most creative and innovative Christian painters, who painted Christian themes in Indian forms. He through his bold and path breaking paintings contributed to the process of inculturation, a revolutionalized Indian Christian art. His arts are influential both in early Christian arts and post colonial Indian Christian art.

Arts of Jyoti Sahi: Jyoti Sahi is one of the most productive Christian artists well known in India and abroad. He was born in Pune in 1944. His mother was a British Unitarian and his father was a Hindu from Punjab. He was baptized into the Church of Scotland. His talent for art became visible in his early childhood and so his parents sent him to study arts

Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose. His two main motivating factors were:

- i) to represent the catholicity of the church by clothing its teaching in Indian forms
- ii) to offer his work in a gesture of *bhakti*



and crafts in England. In 1963, he happened to meet Bede Griffiths in England, who was a Benedictine monk, started a Christian ashram in Kerala called Kurisumala. After returning from England, Jyoti Sahi took a pilgrimage tour visiting various ashrams. In 1970 he married Jane in Shantivanam Ashram, a Christian ashram founded by swami Abhishitananda. Later he himself started an art ashram in the Christian village Silvepura, near Bangalore. This ashram was founded for village children and people to train Indian Christian art. Some of his well known disciples are Arun Pardhe, the Jesuit; Wendell D'cruz, a well known warli artist and Lucy D' souza-krone. The first phase of the artist Jyoti Sahi from the year 1964 to 1982, reflects his dedication in inculturation in the sanskritization and making use of many Indic (hindu) symbols. His second phase from 1982 becomes more that of little traditions of tribals and dalits.

He is having a wide cultural background incorporated Indian traditional forms and symbols in his Indian Christian arts. According to him, the understanding of symbols and traditional Indian forms are ongoing process. As they have been reinterpreted from time to time, also a Christian can give his or her new interpretation. He combines art with theological reflection. For him, the symbols of Hindu traditions are to be creatively interpreted. All through his arts, he searches for the unknown Christ in Hinduism.

He published a beautiful calendar with mandalas (symbols helpful for meditation) in 1975, in which one of the mandalas, shows 152 fish in the form of a triangle (siva), in a basket depicted by the shape of the moon (sakthi). The picture shows visually how the number 153 connotes fullness, representing a complete triangle, revealing in its number symbolism a Pythagorean influence. He developed a new form of

art expressed through paintings. Some of the celebrated paintings of Jyoti Sahi are: Jesus as Chandra, the dancer on the cross, Yogi Christ, Nataraj-Christ, Trimurthi Christ.

Jesus as Chandra is a painting of the moon rising over the snowy peaks of Himalayas as seen as Landaur in which that large part of the full moon which is over the mountains is His Skull with His face painted below. His body seems surrealistic and looks temple-like. His right hand seems to gesture *abhayamudra* and holds something with a star on it, as Hindu gods hold symbolic things in their hands; while his left hand seems to gesture *Varada mudra*, and hold something with an eye on it.

Another painting *Christ the dancer on the cross* is a crucifixion within a typical Nataraj flame-halo-circle and with arm and leg gestures; there is a multicoloured background with a tree. This is a mandala – an object of meditation. He has represented Jesus as Nataraja or the Lord of the dance. The great Indian icon of the Nataraja or the Lord of the dance represents Siva dancing at the centre of a flaming circle. This dance is dance both of death and life.



This shows that Jyoti Sahi is basically a seeker. Seeking the divine and human in his art through which he expresses himself. Through his art of painting, carving



Saccidananda Ashram: The first major catholic ashram called Saccidananda ashram founded on

and architecture he has opened a new vista in Indian aesthetics and his contribution has enriched the art arena not only of Christianity in India but also in the world at large. His contemporary arts reveal the fact of his preferential option for the marginalized, as he express their voice through paintings.

Christian Ashrams and Indian Christian Architecture: Indian Christian architecture is developed as a mark of indianization process after the independence of India. The peculiarity of Christian ashrams[3] is that they are Christian in religious affiliation while incorporating the main elements of Indian culture and monastic traditions. These ashrams are unique tourism resources in a country where Christianity is largely conceived to be of foreign origin. It would be a novelty to tourists who look for religious experience in India and can offer genuine spiritual nourishment. These ashrams are unique contribution to Indian culture as it promotes and enhances Indian culture in an outstandingly Christian way. Some of the important Christian ashrams that are constructed with Indian Christian architecture are Kristukula Ashram, Tirupattur; Saccidananda Ashram (Santhivanam), Trichy; Anjali Ashram, Mysore.

Kristukula Ashram: This ashram is dominated architecturally by its house of prayer (*Jebalayam*). It has one entrance gate with a tower (*gopuram*) that leads to the courtyard. The *gopuram* has pyramidal tower with *Kutas* and *Salas* around. Each story has no other iconic representations. Above the main sanctuary is a tower (*vimanam*) with detailed ornamental work as that of hindu temple, but with different motifs like trees and birds seated on them along with architectural elements of *pada*. The summit of the *vimanam* has a cross instead of the original *stupa* of south Indian temples, instead the smaller *stupis* are on either side of the cross.



March 21, 1950 in Thanneerpalli of Trichy near the banks of the river Cauvery, by Swami

Abishiktananda (Henri Le Saux), a Catholic French Benedictine monk. Popularly, this ashram is called *Shantivanam* individuals and communities spend time in meditation for a holistic integration of life.



These monks identify themselves with that of Hindu Sanskrit tradition, hence they functioned as rishis living on the banks of the river in a forested area. Concerning the style and architecture, the ashram is built in the simple style with a temple constructed with South Indian style. The very colours and architecture of the temple is very much the resemblance of South Indian temple architecture. The entrance of the temple is decorated with an image of Holy Trinity in the form of "Trimurti".

The distance between the main entrance and the *mandabam* or the outer space of the temple is very short and in the middle, there is a cross enclosed in a circle representing the cosmic mystery – the wheel of law of Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Cross is placed on the ground to emphasise the humanity of Jesus. At the centre of the cross is the word **OM** of the Hindu Tradition – a symbol of the word of God. The *mandabam* or the outer court of the temple is open where Indian way of sitting on the floor for *dharsan* is adapted. There is also a cross where congregation gathers together for prayer. It bears the inscription in Sanskrit as "Saccidananda namah", denoting "Praise to Saccidananda". Saccidananda is a Hindu Vedantic name for Brahman (supreme deity) equated here with the Triune God of Christianity.

The *vimana* above the sanctuary indicates the mystery of death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and it is the symbol of new life ascending to heavenly realm. The art depicted in this *vimana* takes its inspiration from the temple architecture in placement of sculptures and other elements with aesthetic sense. Instead of the figures of saints and sages of Hindu traditions, the figures depicted in this *vimana* are biblical figures. The figures of Apocalypse, lion, ox, man and eagle represent that the whole creation is redeemed by Jesus Christ. Above their figures, there are four figures of saints of Christianity, who represent the redeemed humanity. Above them, there are four figures of Christ in different postures seated on the royal throne (*simhasana*) surrounded

After the death of Swami Abishiktananda, the ashram was taken control by his successors Bede Griffiths, an English Benedictine monk.

by angels. Above this, there is an architecture of the throne of God depicted by the dome covered with peacock feathers, over which there is lotus, and Kalsa. The architectural development adapted in Saccidananda ashram is typical South Indian Shaivite style.

Anjali Ashram: Anjali Ashram is founded by D.S. Amalorpavadass at the foot of Chammundi Hills on 15th August 1979. This ashram consists of three main buildings: Visva Gopuram (cosmic cupola), Satsang Mantap (community hall) and Central Ashram. The central ashram is flanked by a series of ten cottages in a crescent, five on either side. The temple of Saccidananda is in the style of an Indian temple.



Visva Gopuram is an octagonal pavilion standing on eight pillars on a circular space capped with a Kalasa denoting the finishing point or the perfect completion of house or edifice. It serves as symbols of the rhythm in nature and of our communion with the universe: cosmic harmony. Eight pillars signify eight directions of the universe. There are arches, on all sides with foliated curves or scallops, represent Islamic architecture. The structure is surrounded by water and has four steps which lead to the platform.

Satsangh mandap's main function is to come together for worship. This *mandabam* has a gopuram on the eastern side having seven layers, representing the cosmic mountain, the axis of the world and the symbol of union between God and humankind. On the top of gopuram, dharma chakras are placed on all four sides that symbolize the flow of righteousness in society. All architecture, sculpture, grills, painting, dance, music and drama in this ashram are understood philosophically to emphasize Indian spirituality.

Beside these, there are ten cottages around the central ashram, five on each side. Ten cottages represent ten avatars of Hindu Vaishnavite traditions. These cottages are pyramid shape, with bricks without being cemented giving an earthy feeling. The temple or church is octagonal in shape

and rise in three different tiers of elevation. These three tier rise symbolises the three regions earth, mid-region and heavens (bhu-bhuvah-svah). Over the third rise or the svah is purnakumbaha that signifies "fullness", where the entire reality is redeemed by Christ. The shape of the cross is very much oriental. Thus Indian Christian ashrams not only through its indigenous way of worship and meditation played vital role, but also through its indigenous architecture. Having highlighted Indian Christian art and architecture in Christian tourism, now I would like to present Hindu-Christian architecture prevalent in the district of Kanyakumari which is known for Hindu-Christian Communalism. In the context of Hindu-Christian communalism, these interactive architectures found in the district of Kanyakumari reveal the cultural continuity of the native and create a space for Hindu - Christian interaction, paving way for harmonious relationship.

Hindu-Christian Architecture: Some of the Catholic churches in the district of Kanyakumari are constructed with Hindu-Christian architecture. The data on these churches of Hindu Christian architecture are collected by the author through

ethnographic research in the district of Kanyakumari.[4] It reveals the fact of the cultural continuity. The people, who were once Hindus, when they accepted Christian faith, keep their Indic cultural traditions and follow Christ in their faith. This is reflected even in their church buildings. A sample of those Hindu-Christian or interactive architectures are: Church at Nallayanpuram; Church at Parakundru; Church at Melpalai; Church at Edaikodu; are constructed in Indian style incorporating Hindu architectures.

Among these churches, the catholic churches located at parakundru, Nallayan puram, and Melpalai are said to have been constructed by a Belgian Roman catholic priest Fr. James Tombeur, who has a vision to build a series of indigenized parish churches during 1960s and 1970s. He belonged to the Society of Auxiliaries of Missions.

The church at Nallayan puram, constructed in 1965 is built in a style inspired by the Tamil style of temple building, with a tall gopuram at the entrance, which is said to mirror the style of the Meenakshee Temple in Madurai.



Another at Melpalai is built in Kerala Style, with typical pitched tiled roofs.



Another church at Parakundru is built as a temple hall, complete with outdoor drama stage and water tank. Here however the temple hall is enclosed.

Another church at Edaikodu is built in the style of a village ashram at Edaikodu.



These indigenous architectures express Indianness in

a variety of styles, and combined the traditional with

modern techniques and designs as well, thus creating a new style of Indian architecture. It is interesting that the sanctuary space in each building is also different, though in most, the idea of the womb house is explored and re-worked to provide a place for the sacrament house. The pillars in this church are constructed with typical Hindu architecture. The Hindu order consists of four principal parts: The upapitah or pedestal; the athisthana or base' the sthamba or pillar and the prastara or entablature.

Conclusion: Indian culture is a composite culture where many cultures find a place in its bosom. The underlying principle of Indian culture is 'unity in diversity' which is expressed in its unique way of life rooted in tolerance, mutual respect and coexistence of divergent societies. All religions in India helped

and are helping to mould the cultural life of India. All religions in their own respect had contributed through their arts, architectural styles, literature, philosophy, preservation of culture and linguistic traditions. Christianity with its ancient roots in India has contributed to the cultural fabric of nation through its services in education, social transformation, architectural innovation and etc. The presence of Christian religio-cultural resources in India is a boon to tourism as an industry. Thus Christian tourism acquires great significance. Indian Christian art and architecture in particular offer unique tourism resources. Today these Indian Christian tourism resources can be packaged for domestic and international tourists.

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