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### A Comparative Study of the Symbolic Visual Representations in the Art of Indian and French in Pondicherry

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**Abstract:**

*Indian art lays emphasis not only on the outer form but also on the inner meaning. From the earliest times, Indian art evolved from the basic concept that it is of an auspicious character and thus the symbols and icons which were developed in Indian art were essentially philosophical-religious idea dictum. These auspicious symbols were the growth of the religious thought of ancient Indians.*

*Like Indian Art the Western art also lays emphasis on the inner meaning. In Puducherry there are ample of symbolic art forms seen in the Western French Art and Architectural structures. This paper aims to highlight the common symbolic art forms of the Indian and French which express their philosophical- religious ideas in their art in Pondicherry.*

**Keywords:** Visual, Symbol, icon, motif

#### 1. Introduction

In the Indian Art perspective "without meaning, Art is jejune."<sup>1</sup> It is not an art for art's sake; but an art for life's sublime ideas.<sup>2</sup> The mission and the purpose of Indian art is to convey these ideas through the language of symbols which while representing a meaning in an outer form were used for ornamentation by followers of all religions in all ages.

The word "Symbolism" refers to the practice of representing things by symbols or of investing things with a symbolic meaning or character. In Indian Art, an image is intended primarily to express certain ideas, rather than to portray the likeness of any early thing. Art Historian Ananda Coomarasamy says "It is a Visual Symbolism, ideal in the mathematical sense."<sup>3</sup> According to Margaret Stutley "Most of the Indian Art was initially intended to remind the illiterate laity of religious truths and sacred stories, as were the painted frescoes in Christian churches in the Middle Ages."<sup>4</sup>

The Indian figures, consist the parts all have certain significant symbolic philosophy. The body posture, limbs, hand gesture, the garments, attributes, emblems, weapons and also the accompanying minor divinities, animals, birds, fish, trees, plants and flowers all tells some symbolic ideas to the world. Like Indian religious figures the Western religious figures also lays emphasis on the inner meaning. There are a number of Christian symbolic images which bear the imprint of common symbolic ideas of both the Indian and Western in Pondicherry Churches built by the French. The symbolical motifs of French in the religious and the secular structures not only made for ornamentation they also express their philosophical- religious ideas in their art. Most of the symbolic representations of French decorative art in Puducherry speak a universal language of human emotions and reflect the universal spirit of man. Some of these symbolic images convey a similar meaning to the religious ideas of Indian art.

In the case of decorative motif there are a number of Indian traditional motifs has the same symbolic meaning related to the Western traditional motif; the Greco-Roman style and Christian theologies. Some of the common symbols are as follows:

- i. Object symbols – Flower pot (puranakumbha), sea shell (sankha) etc.
- ii. Vegetation symbols – Lotus (padma), lily, palm (tala), honeysuckle (mucakunda) etc.
- iii. Animal symbols- Fish (matsya), deer (mrga), horse (asva), elephant (hastin) etc.
- iv. Bird symbols – Eagle (garuda), Peacock, cock etc.

Analyzing each of the above symbolic motifs of both the Indian art and Western French art in the same art formula was used symbolically or merely with ornamental objective. Some of the common symbols seen in the French decorative art motifs in Pondicherry are as follows.

<sup>1</sup> V.S. Agarwal, Indian Art (Varanasi, 1965) p.55. "Indian aesthetic canon seeks beauty both in form and meaning". Cf. V.S. Agarwal, Chakradhvaja (Varanasi, 1964) p.7. As a matter of fact purely ornamental motifs did not find favour at the hands of the Indian artists who laid more emphasis on 'artha' (meaning) than on 'rupa' (form).

<sup>2</sup> A.K. Coomaraswamy, (1923) Introduction to Indian Art, Madras, p.41.

<sup>3</sup> A.K. Coomaraswamy, The Transference of Nature, p.28.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Stutley, (1985) The Illustrated Dictionary of Hindu Iconography, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, p.viii.