

GOD IN VISUAL AESTHETIC EXPRESSION: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY IN TRANSCENDENCE SYMBOLIZATION

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I. INTRODUCTION

Humans, regardless of race, geographic and climatic environment or source of economic wealth, have been fascinated by the questions dealing with their existence and its purpose in the on-going stream of life in the universe. Every people, in striving to understand the human situation and how it arose, have sought an explanation for human life and striving. They have attempted to determine an overall structure and direction for life's processes and an understanding of its determining Force or forces. They have asked such questions as: Is there an Ultimate Reality Which created man and nature? If so, what is the nature of that Ultimate Reality or God? What is the divine plan or will for creation?

"The structure of the human being is such that man cannot live his life or understand himself without some ultimate concern that he takes as the that-beyond-which-there-is-nothing of this world. This is indeed his god and the articulation of his life in terms of it is his religion."¹

There are many ways in which a culture may set down or transmit its religious message. It may do so conceptually through its religious and philosophical treatises, and even through its oral or written literature--its myths, drama, poetry and prose. It may also transmit its religious message cultically, i.e., through its religious rites and practices. The transmission may also be societal, i.e., through the creation of customs and institutions governing the political, social and economic lives of the people. A fourth way of translating a culture's god-view is through an aesthetic dimension, i.e., by the art works its people produce. It is to that aesthetic translation of the message that we direct ourselves in this paper.

Every culture's description of the Transcendent or God is special and unique, and it is matched to the space and time environment in which it grew. Ideas regarding the world and mankind, which derive as spin-offs from the central notion of Ultimate Reality, present additional facets of a particular and detailed notion of the culture's conception of reality. It is because of the uniqueness of the complex of these basic premises that all aspects of a civilization take on a special hue which is not identical with that of any other culture or people. Its religion, its philosophy; its political, social and economic institutions; its arts, and even its natural sciences and mathematical contributions are determined by that religious and ideational complex.²

For the artistic presentation of the god-view, the content is expressed through sensory means rather than through conceptual, cultic or social data. This artistic reinforcement of the message has come to be known as "symbolic expression," since it is a sensory representation of something not evidenced to the senses. But this is not the only meaning of symbolism. The term is also used in a much more limited and specific way, for the utilization of a sensory image or figure to arouse in the mind of the spectator a remembrance or an intuition of another object, living creature or idea which is conventionally associated in a particular culture with the sensory image. Symbolism is, under this definition, a substitution of an abbreviated statement or "clue" for a much wider and deeper intellectual idea. Thus the term carries both a wide meaning which seems to include all art as in some way expressing that which it is not, and a narrower meaning which designates it as only one aspect of the iconography of art.

This double meaning of the term "symbolism" has caused a good deal of confusion and requires clarification. For this purpose, we will attempt to describe three levels of message carrying or content which pertain to the arts as it serves to express God or Ultimate Reality. In some cultures and in some media, or in particular

works, all three types of content are utilized. In other cases, only one or two apply, depending on the nature of the message conveyed or the art work created.

One of these levels of symbolic expression is that which is found in the subject matter or "surface content" of the work, for example, the particular person or object or scene it portrays which has significance in the traditions of culture in question, e.g., the Nativity or Crucifixion scene in Christianity, the Enlightenment of the Buddha in Buddhist culture, a statue of Shiva in Hinduism. This we shall call the EXPLICIT CONTENT of a work of art.

Secondly, we would posit another content level, one which is synonymous with symbolism in its narrower sense. Here we mean to include all those symbols or signs used in the art works of various culture which are loaded with meanings for the initiated view--e.g., the stupa, the mandala, the cross, the menorah. This we shall call SYMBOLIC CONTENT since it fulfills the more conventional meaning of symbolism. Thirdly, there is another level of expression which lies behind the subject matter or EXPLICIT CONTENT and behind the obvious symbolism or SYMBOLIC CONTENT. We will label this third level of expression IMPLICIT CONTENT. This level of content includes all those aesthetically significant means for combining the materials of the first and second levels. It involves features of both structure and style which help reveal in much more subtle ways, the deep premises and the god-view of the culture.

Our next task is to try to discover how these three levels or kinds of symbolic statement (here the term is used in its wider sense) apply in the arts by investigating how artists of certain specific belief systems have translated the complex of beliefs which we call their god-views into aesthetic products. Since our presentation cannot be all-inclusive here, we have limited ourselves to a consideration of evidence in the visual arts of only two traditions--Hinduism and Islam.

II. TRANSCENDENCE SYMBOLIZATION IN HINDU ART

A. THE GOD-VIEW

Probably the leading motif of religious thought in Hindu culture is its idea that Ultimate Reality partakes of an inseparable unity with all existence. The Brahman Atman, as the Hindus refer to the Absolute, is the unknowable, indescribable, unlimited divine Power which pervades and is cause of all creation and action, whether divine, demonic or human. This Absolute is above all gods, as well as above animate and inanimate creation; yet everything from top to bottom of the hierarchy of existence partakes of and is related integrally to this Brahman Atman or World Soul. Therefore every aspect of nature, beautiful or ugly, is a manifestation of the Absolute.

God, for the Hindu then, encompasses all. He is considered to have both abstract and incarnate forms. In consequence, since life in this world is but an extension of the Absolute, existence also evidences a plethora of dual tensions and forces: Male and female, night and day, pleasure and pain, birth and death, active and passive, subject and object, body and soul, transient created world of māyā and eternal spiritual world of the Brahman Atman.

There is also an individual soul or atman which longs for union with the World Soul, from which it was created and will eventually return. It is only with this merger that release from the otherwise endless human miseries, deaths and rebirths can take place. Only in this way can the individual soul overcome the Karma ("action") or earned destiny from previous lives which holds it captive.

The escape from the power of karma and the endless rebirths through which the human soul, as well as all creation suffers, is known as moksha (lit., "set free"). According to the Hindus, it can be achieved through ritual observance, good works, right thinking and contemplation. Members of the faith have regarded art as an important and legitimate aid for the right thinking and contemplation that lead to moksha. For the Hindu, art is not mere entertainment, but a way of helping him

understand the nature of reality and of his true relationship to that reality.

B. THE ARTISTIC EXPRESSION OF THE GOD-VIEW

1. Explicit Content

Since the Hindus believe that Ultimate Reality imparts its essence into every, even the lowest, strata and manifestations of existence, all earthly creatures and objects have been considered proper motifs or subject matter for the art of Hindu culture. Vegetation, animals, humans, demons, gods and goddesses have all been represented in the various arts. However, in the depiction of the Hindu message, three categories of subject matter are outstanding in their frequency and importance. The first category includes all supernatural beings which have been the representatives or incarnations (avatars) of the Deity of Hinduism. These include the three aspects of the Brahman Atman--that is, Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma, as well as a host of deities of popular Hinduism--e.g., Ganesha (the elephant god and son of Shiva), Kali (goddess of destruction and consort of Shiva) and Krishna (the 10th avatar of Vishnu), to name but a few. The supreme God of the Hindus, the Brahman Atman, is strictly speaking abstract and neuter; but it is believed that He can be conceived of in such form only by the spiritually gifted of those particularly suited to abstract thought. The masses, it has been felt, need more personal, recognizable deities with known forms and sentiments.³ Practically every important aspect of the Supreme Being therefore has been personified and given forms from nature which the Hindu associates with it. And practically every phenomenon in nature has in a sense been apotheosized. There are three river goddesses for the major waterways of the Indian subcontinent. There are yakshas, genii representing the forces of the soil as well as jewels and precious metals. There are nagas, serpent kings and queens associated with the lakes, ponds, rivers and oceans. Even musical scales and melodic modes carry associations with particular human activities, times of day and year, emotions and specific deities. Generally the Hindu gods, goddesses and nature spirits are represented as anthropomorphic figures, but animal or fantastic combination figures are also common. For example, there is the four headed Brahma, gods with multiple arms, a god who is half elephant and half child (Ganesha), and a god who is half male and half female (Shiva). As we shall see below (under SYMBOLIC CONTENT), many objects from nature serve to represent the gods and goddesses.

The second category of EXPLICIT CONTENT in Hindu art comprises all those personages and events of the stories contained in the epics--particularly the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, which were written and re-written an unknown number of times between 500 B.C. and 200 A.C. These epics have been influential on religion and art since that time. The myths depicting the deeds of man and gods which are embodied in them are frequently drawn upon for artistic subject matter.

A third type of EXPLICIT CONTENT is the mithuna or erotic art which is so prevalent in Hindu aesthetic production. This includes all those figures, usually as couples in human form, which represent the longing of the human soul for reunion with the World Soul. Sexual union between human or divine couples became the subject matter of a vast number of statues and reliefs in Hindu art.⁴ The Hindus regard the act of love as representing the combination of opposites in existence and of the union of the individual and world souls. It implies, essentially, a symbolic and a mystical union with divinity. It is therefore regarded by the Hindu as a legitimate subject matter for religious art.

2. Symbolic Content

Used in its limited sense, symbolism is a particularly rich content level in Hindu culture. Any figure, color, shape or scene can be recognized by the informed member of the society as a visual representation, or a symbol of some more abstract idea rooted deeply in the culture and the religious tradition.

a. Gods

The earthly beings and objects used by the Hindu artists as aesthetic subjects are not merely representations of those creatures, creations and actions. They are at the same time symbols of other entities farther up on the hierarchical scale of existence, or even of abstract powers, emotions and ideas related to the underlying belief system. Each god or goddess has a particular, recognizable anthropomorphic or animal form as well as attributes, clothing, weapons, vehicles, etc. that were associated with him/her. Vishnu, for example, has been represented anthropomorphically with four arms bearing the conch shell (which ties him ideologically with the primeval aqueous situation and the act of creation), a sun disk (Vishnu being originally a sun god), the lotus (the floral symbol of creation and rejuvenation), and a mace (for power). He has also been commonly represented by his avatar Krishna, the blue-skinned, playful god of popular Hinduism. Shiva is also represented in many ways--for example, as the Destroyer, as God of Dread and Terror (in his Bhairava aspect), as the Lord of Music, as Lord of the Dance. In each of these or still other manifestations he is associated with a particular set of attributes and objects which identify his different roles. In statues of him as Lord of the Dance, his movements are regarded as symbolic of all movement within the universe, of both creation and destruction. Shiva is represented in these works in human form. He possesses four arms, however, to show his diverse capabilities and powers. An arch of fire symbolizing the whole of creation circles the figure of the god in these Lord of the Dance statues. His upper right hand beats a drum, symbolizing the rhythm of time, or the first beat of creation. A flame in his upper left hand represents the holy sacrificial fire or sometimes the fire of destruction. The lower right hand presents the abhaya mudra or gesture promising protection, while the lower left hand points downward to draw attention to the god's uplifted foot. Lifted in a circular movement around the body, the position of this foot is itself, in its uplifting buoyancy, a symbolization of the soul's longing for moksha. Under the other foot, the demon of darkness and ignorance is crushed.

Devi, who is called by many other names as well, is the mother goddess who presides over power, prosperity, knowledge, beauty, and benevolence. Ganesha, with his elephant head, is a symbol of wisdom. Kali, another consort of Shiva, symbolizes destructive power. A black anthropomorphic figure of terrifying aspect, she bears weapons in her four arms. A garland of skulls hangs around her neck.

b. Animals

Snakes are probably the most frequently used symbolic animal in the arts of the Hindus. This is not to be explained simply by their physical prevalence in the Indian subcontinent, but rather by the regeneration and re-creation ideas which the cyclical sloughing of their skin symbolizes. They present in Indian art and mythology a representation of endless time as well as of continual rebirth. As mentioned earlier, divine creatures are associated with particular animals which may serve as symbolic stand-in for the gods or goddesses (e.g., the nandin or bull of Shiva, the wild goose for Brahma, the boar for Vishnu, the alligator for Parvati, and the peacock for Kumara).

c. Objects

Phallic Symbol.--The erect phallus or linga ("sign") has been a prominent symbol in Hinduism, and has been associated particularly with Shiva worship. It not only symbolizes the god himself, but provides visual representation of the ever re-creating world process which is a premise of Hindu religion, as well as representation of that core or axis, the Brahman Atman, around which everything else in existence gravitates.

Lotus.--This flower, which has been part of the religious symbolic vocabulary of many cultures (e.g., Ancient Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, Buddhism), is particularly prominent in Hindu SYMBOLIC CONTENT. It has been considered to be a particularly fitting symbol because, like human existence as described by the Hindus, the lotus has the capacity for beauty, despite its growth in an environment of mud and dirty water.

Shells.--The shell symbolizes for the Hindu the watery state out of which all creation was born. The conch shell, with its characteristic sound, is thought to represent the primeval sound of that act of creation, and therefore is generally associated with Vishnu, the god of creation.

Kalasha.--This object which so often tops the pinnacle of a Hindu temple, is really a waterpot, symbolic of the never ending outpouring of the World Soul or Brahman Atman in the creative act.

Amalaka.--A round stone disk or ribbed cushion which tops the pinnacle of many a Hindu temple, the amalaka ("stainless") is placed horizontally to emphasize the distinction between the spiritual world and that of material existence. Here, in this abstract form, the spiritual world hovers over the various states of life represented in the decoration of the temple below. It is pierced by the central shaft or core of the temple, another reference to the monist God-view.

d. Ideas

World Mountain.--The Hindu temple is itself another symbolic representation of the basic premises of Hindu belief. Not only is the structure decorated with numerous statues and reliefs which portray its gods and goddesses, and contain symbolic references to religious beliefs; in addition, the building represents the idea of the world mountain which is found in the Hindu religious tradition. Like the mountain, it has no front or back and little sense of specific orientation. All four sides usually have either real or imitation entrances which give the whole a sense of outpouring from the central core, just as the God, the Source of all creation, pours out in an unceasing creative flow. It is thus not only a center for the religion of the Hindu devotee in a physical and cultic sense, but that centrality is also emphasized in an aesthetic and symbolic way.

Duality.--The dual forces which exist in Nature are also attributed to the Brahman Atman, who comprises and exhausts both good and evil, both male and female, both material and spiritual qualities, both creation and destruction, both birth and death, both the abstract and the physical, both the spiritual power of the World Soul and the transient, created world of man which is known as māyā. As a result, the iconography of the Hindu arts reveals constant use of symbols for this tension and interplay of dual forces. The statue of a god or goddess seeks to portray the deity as representing not only one aspect of existence, but instead portrays him/her as holding the power or instruments of both creation and destruction. As we have mentioned, a god such as Shiva may be represented as possessing both male and female characteristics. The statue appears divided, from top to bottom, into two equal halves, the one completely male in physical features and dress, the other unmistakably female. The multiple headed representations of gods is another way of symbolizing the dual aspects encompassed by the deity. And the many-armed figures of the gods and goddesses are evidence of the multiple powers and functions which the Hindus believed them to have.

3. Implicit Content

Three characteristics of the art works of the Hindus will be isolated here for consideration as examples of IMPLICIT CONTENT. All of them have been found to be relative to a wide range of art products in that culture.⁵

a. Unity or Centrality

Given the importance of the idea of the unity of all existence and of the Brahman Atman as source of creation in all its ugly as well as beautiful manifestations, we should expect that the Hindus would have expressed this idea in many ways. Of course, it is explicitly referred to in the subject matter of much Hindu art. In addition, we have cited examples of its symbolical expression: e.g., in the phallic symbol, in the kalasha waterpot, and in the world mountain. These are specific visual items which have been culturally designated as representative of the idea of Brahman Atman as core of all existence. Now let us consider more subtle ways in which the Indus have sought to give an aesthetic representation of this religious idea. These give evidence of the level of IMPLICIT CONTENT.

In Architecture.--The temple is itself a subtle portrayal of this Hindu belief about the nature of divinity. Both in structure and program for decoration, both aesthetically and functionally, it is stabilized by a central core. At the top of the temple, a protruding finial often gives visual reminder of the core passing through the body of the building, just as the prevailing essence of Brahman Atman permeates all existence. At the center of the main temple building there is a chamber known as the womb chamber or garbha griha, where the statue or symbol of the main deity of the temple resides. From this central holy of holies, the spiritual power of the deity radiates in all directions just as the Brahman Atman spreads out to all existence. Floor plans as well as decoration of the temples convey a sense of outward spread. Reliefs closest to the garbha griha are those of the higher ranking deities, while those near the outside are the more earthly figures. The pilgrim makes physical progress on the road to reunion with his god, and relief from the cycle of transmigrations, as he moves toward the central image where he experiences the supreme religious experience in viewing and paying homage to his god.

In Sculpture.--Whether created as free standing or relief work, much of the sculpture of Hindu culture is as implicitly expressive of Hindu religious ideas as it is explicitly and symbolically expressive of them. In fact, sculpture has been regarded as the "supreme" medium for recording transcendent values (Mukerjee 1965:3). The image or relief is an instrument or tool to remind the devotee of the god, to help him reach an intuition of Ultimate Reality, and to further his efforts to reach moksha by uniting his individual soul with the World Soul. Much of Hindu sculpture reveals a circular movement of the body which seems to predicate a central or point (bindu) within. This spiral or rotary movement is found in the embracing bodies of mithuna human or divine couples, in male or female figures entwined with vegetal (notably tree and vine) or animal (especially snake) figures. It is even seen in the single human figure of free standing or relief carving which seems to twist itself around an inner vertical axis. This implicit expression of unity is a combination of centrifugal (as outpouring creation from the One) and centripetal (as longing for or reunion with the World Soul) forces. We have mentioned earlier that the statues of Shiva as Lord of the Dance are perhaps the quintessence of the visual arts of the Hindus. Their conformance to this impression of spiral movement helps make them meaningful vehicles of Hindu IMPLICIT CONTENT.

In many pieces of sculpture, figures seem to emerge from the stone of the background as though they were issuing forth from their Source as in a cornucopia. Using another analogy, they appear as bubbles rising to the surface of the water. They give to the viewer an impression that they are temporary ephemeral transformations of an abiding matter to which they will return again--just as the temporary, ephemeral aspects of this world and life (māyā) will fade with achievement of that liberation which results from pursuit of the values designated by the religion.⁶ Figures

often look as though they were being drawn or pulled out from the stone, just as māyā existence was drawn out in the creation process from the World Soul.

b. Māyā, the Manifold Existence

This life or existence, with all its lower and higher strata, is thought by the Hindu to be the unreal, illusionary realm of māyā ("illusion"). It is unimportant and ephemeral in comparison to the reality of the Brahman Atman. It is only when man realizes the true nature of māyā and its opposite, the World Soul, that he can be released from his instinctive appetites and desires. It is only then that he can escape the false gods of worldly cares. It is only then that he achieves perfect peace and fulfillment in moksha.

This idea is reinforced in the IMPLICIT CONTENT of Hindu art by at least four aesthetic characteristics: 1) seething movement and life; 2) stylization; 3) stratification; and 4) buoyancy or flight.

Seething Movement and Life.--The exterior of a Hindu temple reveals a maze of sculpture and decorative items which rise, tier over tier toward the crown of the structure. Figures of plants, animals, humans and supernatural beings cover the sides of these structures, giving implicit expression to the idea of a seething manifoldness of earthly existence. The temple facades, in fact, seem to throb with life and activity. This māyā quality is most apparent on the exterior of the building, as contrasted with the shrine and "home" of the god at the core of the building. With each movement inward toward the central or core chamber in which the image of the god resides, the program of decoration recedes from its earthly iconography to a progressively more spiritual one, leaving behind illusory and ever-changing life in order to concentrate instead on that unifying principle behind all existence.

Relief sculpture and individual statues are no less indicative of this IMPLICIT CONTENT of the notion of māyā, or manifold existence. Individual figures give the impression that all life, and all creation, are in a constant flow of relentless evolution and involution. They convey a feeling of bodily action, of mobility, of "throbbing" and even violent motion. Zimmer speaks of a "growing or expanding form" in the arts of the Hindus (Zimmer 1963:130). Nothing is static, nothing abiding. Only the relentless flow of the process of birth, growth, decay and death remains. This is true for the individual as well as for the universe (Zimmer 19 : 131). Reliefs therefore often depict events in process of happening (e.g., the colossal Shiva from Parel, near Bombay, in which many figures grow out of the central lowest one).

Stylization.--The visual arts of Hindu culture have also sought to implicitly express the idea of māyā through stylization. Since this life has only a pseudo-reality, naturalism is of little importance in Hindu art. For the Hindu, reality resides not in the earthly shape or form of the object or creature itself, but in its relation to some aspect of the Transcendent. Sheer imitation of nature, therefore, has held little attraction for the Hindu artist or the Hindu viewer. Stylization of the characters, objects and events of this illusory and ever-changing life de-emphasizes their importance in order that the viewer may concentrate instead on that unifying principle behind all existence. Natural objects are bent and molded and even distorted in order to present this religio-cultural message. The figures are important for their symbolic message rather than in themselves. One might say that the Hindu views events and creatures of this world as mere puppetry which he looks down upon from all angles as a giant surveying a Lilliputian world. As artist, he sees through it, recognizes its transient quality and its pretence of actuality. Multiple perspective and a lack of concern for naturalistic depth are

therefore apt ways which Hindu artists have used to impart the IMPLICIT CONTENT of basic religious beliefs.

Composition or arrangement of sculptured figures has also carried this demand for focus on the spiritual rather than the material, for stylization rather than naturalism. Sometimes with color, sometimes with vegetation, sometimes with architectural compartments, the artist encloses his figures in receptacles which set them apart from the ordinary world. The iconographic message rather than naturalistic representation is the goal of the sculptor or painter. Human bodies are disjunctly conceived, each part seeming to perform its symbolic function, rather than contributing to a naturalistic portrayal.

Since humans are part of this māyā pseudo-reality, since each person is but one instance of the myriad manifestations of the Absolute in this illusory existence, individuality is of little import. Each player in the scenes of Hindu art therefore plays his role behind a mask and relies upon the viewers to understand the deeper truths conveyed in the art work.

Stratification.--Life presents to the Hindu a series of strata. Each soul starts its round of existence in a given station. The inexorable law of karma dictates that each man's thoughts, words and deeds--his "actions"--will determine his future in this life. It also determines his fate in future lives as he seeks to come closer to his goal of reunion of his individual soul with the World Soul. The caste system is therefore believed by the Hindu to be a social institution in which rewards and punishments are meted out to each individual according to his/her accomplishments in a former life. It should not be resisted therefore, since it is administering the just reward of their actions to all creatures, be they humans of the four castes; those included in the lower, classless untouchables group; or those still lower on the hierarchy of life--the animals, insects, plants, etc. The Hindu devotee is constantly striving to move upward through this hierarchy, to become perfected in his perception of Ultimate Reality.

This stratified progress toward moksha is implicitly expressed in a number of ways in Hindu art. It is hinted of in the tier upon tier of decorative sculpture and porticos as the eyes are drawn toward the crown of a temple structure. Inside the building there is a similar aesthetic portrayal of movement toward a goal. We have already mentioned the progressive stages of the floor plan and iconography leading from the "mayan exterior" to the central image chamber. Even a single sculptured relief will often be composed of a number of horizontal bands, stratifying the figures within the scenes as all creatures are stratified within the world of māyā. Some of the creatures in the lower strata seem almost crushed beneath the burdens depicted above them.

Buoyancy of Flight.--There is a lightness or buoyancy depicted in many of the figures of Hindu art which is too common to be accidental or meaningless. Perhaps it too should be interpreted as an example of IMPLICIT CONTENT in the arts, in this case expressing that basic religio-cultural belief of the leap to moksha. Figures seem to float or fly. Gods and goddesses are generally less weighty in appearance than earthly creatures, but even the latter often convey this feeling. Dance-like images soar, as though caught by the artist in flight. Their feet fail to touch ground. Even seated figures seem suspended in air rather than resting solidly on their mounts or chairs.

III. TRANSCENDENCE SYMBOLIZATION IN ISLAMIC ART

A. THE GOD-VIEW

Now let us turn to another of the world's religions and see how it has expressed its basic ideas about God through aesthetic means. The religious theme that has

dominated Islamic being and thinking is that God is One and that He is an utterly transcendent Being, a Deity Who is completely other-than anything in the world of nature. God or Allah is the Creator of all that lives or exists in the universe, yet He is never to be equated with anything in His creation, lest His transcendence and oneness be mitigated. He is thus a Being Who is all powerful, omniscient and utterly transcendent. He neither submits to incarnation nor immanence. On the contrary, He remains forever the abstract, the unknowable, the all encompassing Power, dispensing His benevolence and justice in this life and the next to all peoples, in all places. His communication with man has taken the form of revelations sent to His prophets (e.g., Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad). In fact, God says in the Qur'ān that He has sent messengers to all peoples of the world.⁷ But the uniform message of monotheism revealed to all the prophets was altered and distorted over the centuries. Subsequent purifying revelations were therefore necessary. The last of these, the revelation to the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century of the Christian era, came in the form of a "book" to be recorded verbatim. This precise revelation in the very words of the Almighty--the Qur'ān--obviated the need for future revelations of the monotheistic doctrine.

The monotheistic doctrine revealed by Allah to the Prophet Muhammad is known as tawhīd (i.e., "the act or action of making one"). It is this religious theme which is the core of the religion of Islam and the cornerstone of Islamic culture. This notion of the utter transcendence of the one and only God has permeated and determined every aspect of Islamic life. It has certainly been a powerful factor in determining the nature of the Islamic arts.

B. THE ARTISTIC EXPRESSION OF THE GOD-VIEW

I. Explicit Content

a. An Abstract Art

Since God for the Muslim is an utterly and unfailingly transcendent and abstract deity, no being or object in nature is proper representative or descriptive symbol for Him.⁸ In consequence, Muslim art has never depicted Allah in anthropomorphic or zoomorphic form, and in fact, fosters a distaste for the association of the Divine with any figure from nature. All forms of religious image are emphatically rejected. The closest thing to a visual representation of God in Islamic art is His name, "Allah," rendered in beautiful calligraphy, or His words, i.e., lines from the Qur'ān, carefully executed.

The Islamic doctrine of tawhīd did not only deny the figural representation of God. It also affected the subject matter, i.e., the EXPLICIT CONTENT, of the Islamic arts in much more pervasive ways. When the artist sought to create a work of beauty, he rejected figural representation. This tended to draw the attention of the viewer away from this world in order to contemplate and derive an intuition of the completely-other-than-this-world Ultimate Reality. This negative reaction to figural representation had a positive corollary. It caused Muslim artists to explore the possibilities for other subject materials which would be suitable in abstract art. In this pursuit they developed a rich calligraphic art, (probably the most important art form in Islamic culture), and a vast vocabulary of motifs. This motif vocabulary includes both abstract figures (calligraphy, as well as geometric and non-geometric shapes), as well as shapes from nature. The latter comprise denaturalized vegetal motifs (leaves, vines, flowers, fruits), lifeless objects from nature (cloud bands, water and waves, vases and pitchers, shields and emblems), and architectural components (arches, niches, pillars, etc.).⁹ The representation of living creatures (human or animal) plays a minor role in the motif vocabulary of Islamic art.¹⁰ Figural representation of living creatures is never used in religiously

significant objects or structures. Instead, it is found primarily in privately used works which were never accorded the popular support and esteem that a communal aesthetic conscience accords to that art which is unreservedly accepted.¹¹

The neglect of figural representation cannot be explained as the result of a lack of artistic ability or inferior training, as some art historians have supposed. Nor is it a sign of primitiveness. Neither is it simply the result of prohibitions in the Qur'ān, the hadīth or the sharī'ah (Islamic law). In fact, there are no Qur'ānic prohibitions against figural art. Those in the hadīth and sharī'ah are themselves the result of a deeper religio-cultural aesthetic goal, rather than the cause of such a predilection in the arts. Much more determining of all these facts was the view of Ultimate Reality which the Muslims held. Abstraction in the arts of the Islamic World is an indication through EXPLICIT CONTENT of the message of the peoples who produced that art. Instead of an accentuation of those characteristics of a God-immanent nature by which the Hindu sought to express Ultimate Reality, the Muslim chose his motifs and de-naturalized his subject matter to fit with the core message of his faith--that God is One, that He is beyond description, and that, as Creator God, He is completely other than His creation.

2. Symbolic Content

While the practice of investing visual symbols with specific meanings or associations is one of the most important features of Hindu art, it plays almost no role in Islamic artistic expression. Some scholars have suggested that this rejection of the use of the abbreviated, culturally significant conventions known as symbols is due to an abhorrence of idolatry which was inherited by the early Muslims from their Semitic forerunners. Since this argument is only applicable to the art used to produce a religiously significant item, while the truth is that the lack of symbolic expression extends to all aspects of art production in Islamic culture, we would suppose that an additional explanation is necessary. This explanation is derivable from the Islamic doctrine of tawhīd.

Since God is transcendent and not in any sense immanent in nature, no natural object can be "stand in" for him. No shape or body from nature can represent any aspect or characteristic nor any value of the Divine. In consequence, no symbol is suitable for representing a value or an important idea. Even the crescent, which is sometimes associated with Islam, plays no significant role as a symbol in Islamic art. It may be used as a shape for design purposes, but it carries no symbolic meaning for the Muslim viewer.

3. Implicit Content

IMPLICIT CONTENT is the level of aesthetic translation of ideas which has been most affected by the religious idea of tawhīd. Here we find the most significant and determinative characteristics of Islamic art. It is true that subject matter or what we have called "EXPLICIT CONTENT" has been crucially determined by the Islamic view of Ultimate Reality. But even there, the possibility is open for the use of motifs and subject matter of various kinds, so long as they are given an Islamically congruous treatment.

It is therefore not so much the subject matter or the motifs used which make a work of art Islamic rather than non-Islamic--determined by tawhīd rather than merely the creation of a artist who happens to be a Muslim. An understanding of this deeper level of aesthetic symbolization is thus actually synonymous with an understanding of the structural and stylistic principles which govern not just the two-dimensional surface patterns on a building, fabric or plate. They are equally important in the three-dimensional, architectural, musical,¹² and even dance¹³ creations of the Muslim peoples. An understanding of the "Islamic" in art is not merely one of solving the question of what iconography, what motifs (i.e., what

EXPLICIT and SYMBOLIC CONTENT) can be used, or which are favored. In addition-- and even more important--is the need to discover in what ways the abstract and denaturalized motifs favored by the Muslims have been used, in what ways the EXPLICIT CONTENT materials are put together. It is the characteristics determined by these more subtle aspects of symbolic expression which in particular distinguish Islamic art from the art of any other tradition.

a. The Infinite Pattern

Islamic art is one which involves the creation of "infinite patterns." Whether done in metal, in wood, in textiles, in bricks, in words, in sounds, in movements, or in three dimensional architectural monuments, these works exhibit organizations which have no beginning nor end. Just as the world of Islam created name after name to describe the one and only God (Qur'ān 59:22-24), so the artist painted, carved, wrote or sang one pattern, then another, and still another. Even the boundaries imposed on him by the edge of the design seem to be arbitrary interruptions of the pattern and never imply a finality of the succession of design elements. The very inconclusiveness of the design emphasizes the implicit aesthetic expression of the nature of Ultimate Reality which the Islamic art work carries.

This should not lead us to imagine that the individual pattern itself or the complex of patterns to which it belongs, is a symbol, in the literal sense, of Divinity, or of any aspect of Divinity. It is instead an aesthetic means to help the viewer intuit infinity, and thus draw out a deeper and awe-inspiring notion of the meaning of the transcendence of God. For this reason, the pattern is never given the status of holiness; it never becomes an idol or object of worship. Nothing in nature, not even the infinite pattern, can be equated with Transcendence by the person possessed by the doctrine of *tawhīd*. Islamic art thus allows the Muslim to remain true to the belief that God is the completely abstract, transcendent and infinite Being.

Divisions Rather than Overall Unity.--The infinite patterns of the Muslims have further characteristics which reveal the relationship which they hold to the God-view of Islam and the IMPLICIT CONTENT in their art. In order to achieve the impression of infinity, Islamic designs are structured to comprise a series of separable components. Each of these units or "modules," as I have called them elsewhere (al Faruqi 1978:19), is independent and satisfying in itself, yet loosely combined with other units in some form of larger organization. The eye or ear can experience one, then another, and another pattern in a series which has no more confining limits than the available time of the performer and listener, the ingenuity of the artist, or the boundaries of the design space.

The constituent parts of an Islamic work of art are not evolved, one after the other, in a seemingly inexorable chain simulating a growth-like, organic development. There is no single focal point to which all minor elements of the design draw attention and subordinate themselves. Instead of a single climax and decisive conclusion, an Islamic work of art utilizes divisions, symmetry and repetition to produce a series of aesthetic units. An Islamic work of art therefore might be described as one revealing a succession of mini-climaxes of comparable emphasis and importance rather than one which evidences one major climax. Even the Islamic miniature painting has no central figure around which other elements of the picture are grouped. The architectural floor plan of an Islamic palace such as Alhambra in Spain or the Fatihpur Sikri in India reveals no single unity for attention or aesthetic focus. The viewer or participant therefore can begin to experience a work of Islamic art at any point in a two dimensional design, at any verse of poetry or song, at any point within a building or architectural complex.

In its endeavor to express this open-ended structure, the Islamic work of art carries the participant viewer beyond the limits of the art work, as the pattern is interrupted, before its completion, at the outer limits of the picture, carpet or wall. Not only is the imagination called upon to complete the shape of the medallion, of which only a quarter is shown in the corner of a rug, but the crenellations at the top of a facade of a building and the outward projections on the page of an illuminated Qur'ānic manuscript demand that the imagination of the viewer continue beyond the physical limits of the work of art. Even rigid borders of a picture cannot always contain the limb of a tree, the tail of a horse, a protruding dome or minaret. These elements of the picture break through its borders in their effort to provide another hint of the IMPLICIT CONTENT of Islamic art. The art work thereby imparts to the viewer an intuition, though not a representation, of that which is beyond sense, beyond knowledge--in other words, God.

Successive Combination.--The infinite patterns of Islamic art are not only implicitly expressive of the linear infinity which has been described above. They also evidence a kind of geometric infinity in the successive combinations of their many parts. The Islamic design is created, first of all, from a combination of abstract or stylized motifs, involving symmetry and repetitions, in order to form design modules or units. Any one of these modules evidences an autonomy for aesthetic satisfaction which allows the viewer to contemplate it as a separate and satisfying unit. If we analyze a work of Islamic art, we find that the module, as an entity, is also subjected to symmetrical and repetitive combination with other modules in order to create a still larger organization or "modular complex." Even this modular complex can be seen as basic unit for further successive combinations with other like or different units. These result in larger, more elaborate multi-unit structures which continue until the edge of the plate, the frame of a picture, the sky above the facade or the outside extremities of a building physically arrest the pattern's successive combinations. Any "view" or portion taken from an imaginative Islamic design will be just one of the possible successive combinations of constituent elements which make up its pattern. Even that overall design itself gives the impression of being a "cut out" from a larger master design.

Intricate Movement.--The designs of Islamic art move the eye, the ear, the mind with a proliferation of minute details. The tiny flowers traced with his single or double-haired brush by the miniaturist, the intricate geometric designs of an inlaid table, the complicated floral patterns of a carved stucco facade, the melodic intricacies of a taqāsīm musical performance--all achieve their aesthetic results with small and intricate movements. These miniscule patterns catch the trained viewer or listener at any one of their many centers or points of aesthetic departure and draw him persistently to new areas. Up or down, in or out, to right or to left, or perhaps in several directions at once, the eye, the ear, or mind is caught up in the aesthetic movement of the infinite patterns.

Dafqah.--As each infinite pattern is completed or understood, the spectator feels a launch of his spirit with this success, and he moves to the next segment of the design. This launch, or dafqah ("outpouring") as it is called in poetic terminology, produces an aesthetic release in the spectator, and he moves to a new division or successive combination of the pattern. The term dafqah has never to my knowledge been associated with the non-literary arts, but its fittingness warrants its being adopted to designate the mini-climaxes which punctuate any Islamic aesthetic organization or pattern.

Movement seems to increase as the spectator is caught up in the aesthetic activity and he encounters the many elements, units and combinations which make up the design. This increased momentum is produced in part through technical means. For example, the artist can increase the proximity, the complexity, the interrelation, as well as the actual number of his pattern components. Equally, the movement may be increased within the spectator himself. He grasps, with eye or mind, the first module or unit of the design and experiences its dafqah release. Then he moves to another similar unit, or to a larger, more inclusive complex of modules and motifs. With each step in this process of moving from division to division, from combination to combination, the spectator becomes more proficient at design unit discovery in that work of art, thus enabling his rate of discovery and comprehension to increase in tempo. Even when the artist and viewer reach the extremity of the work of art, the imagination takes over to continue the creation of infinite patterns beyond its borders. The Muslim artist, of course, stops the execution of his pattern where the physical limits demand; but he always constructs that design and ends it in a way to hint of a continuation beyond.

No pattern is complete, no dafqah release overwhelming of all others. Thus the pattern, without being considered a symbol of the one God, or Allah, presents an IMPLICIT CONTENT which is unmistakably linked to the Islamic view of Ultimate Reality. It never represents God, for God is unrepresentable. Instead, it arouses an aesthetic activity within the spectator or listener which moves him through a series of beautiful visual or aural patterns until his imagination breaks down in the attempt to continue the design beyond its physical limits. In this incapacitation, an intuition of the infinity of the Absolute, of the indescribable non-nature-ness of God is grasped; and the infinite pattern of Islamic art has fulfilled its goal.

b. Denaturalization

Stylization, or the disguise of naturalism, is another aspect of the IMPLICIT CONTENT carried by the Islamic Arts in their aesthetic expression of the notion of tawhīd. This de-emphasis of naturalism is of three types: 1) the stylization of figures; 2) the transubstantiation of materials; and 3) the dematerialization of structures.

Stylization of Figures.--Even when figures from nature were conscripted from the representational subject matter to serve as motifs for the abstract art of the Muslims, they were fitted into an aesthetic scheme consistent with the Muslim's religious convictions regarding transcendence. Whether dealing with human figures or those from the plant and animal world, artists felt no scruples about disturbing the naturalistic identity of a creature or object. Since the conscious or unconscious goal was to help members of the community achieve an intuition of the utterly non-nature, transcendent God, there was no need to be scientifically accurate in depicting a plant or to render a leaf or flower in a way which reminds of its actual appearance in nature. An animal need not be portrayed as a living creature; instead, the body might be stylized, even distorted, or used in a composite of several animals, to produce the required infinite pattern.

Likewise, human figures, whether done in wood, ceramics, paint or metal, give little impression of representing real persons. Garments revealing a wealth of decorative patterning, hide all evidence of the bodies underneath. There is a lack of articulation of body parts, and the gestures are for the most part stiff and unlife-like. These stylized figures seem to display an immobility even though their garments may be covered with the eye-catching movement of infinite patterns. Emotion in the faces of the human figures is rarely evident.¹⁴ Human attributes and emotions are not what the artist seeks to disclose, even when dealing with this most atypical of Islamic subject matter. Instead, the viewer is asked to turn his attention away from the mundane to contemplate a higher reality suggested by the tawhīd-

determined infinite patterns. Depth and perspective further de-emphasize naturalism in the subject matter or EXPLICIT CONTENT of the Islamic arts. Figures may be placed higher on the page to show their greater distance from the viewer, but they rarely elicit an impression of naturalistic depth. Some elements in an illustration may be seen from one viewing point, others from another. A pool, with its swimming fishes, for example, may appear as seen from directly overhead, while the figures near it are drawn from the side. Such devices of denaturalization of depth and perspective in Islamic art are similar to those utilized by Hindu artists. The means are not dissimilar since both traditions have the desire to convey a stylized representation. But they stem from quite different religious commitments. In Islamic art they represent an attempt to aesthetically represent the idea of transcendence, the non-nature of Allah. In the Hindu tradition, they point to the illusionary quality of māyā, into which Brahman Atman pours his Being through Creation, but which is only a vale of tears to be overcome by the release of moksha and reunion with the Brahman Atman.

The "stylization" or "disguise of nature" suited to the Islamic arts goes beyond the denaturalization of figures from the human, animal and plant worlds. It also affects the aesthetic values of materials as part of its IMPLICIT CONTENT determined by the God-view of the Muslims.

Transubstantiation of Materials.--In Islamic art there is no concern for creating an aesthetic impact by emphasizing the natural materials out of which the art object is made. For example, no attempt is made to impress the viewer of an architectural site with the innate qualities of the raw building materials. We are never aesthetically confronted in Islamic architecture with "stoniness," "brickness," "wood-ness," or the properties of raw concrete. The preoccupation of the viewer is drawn to the intricacy of patterns to which the materials have been subjected rather than to the substances themselves. Materials are treated in ways that denaturalize or disguise their inherent, natural qualities. Marble panels, rather than emphasizing the innate characteristics of that hard stone, are so pierced in the execution of a pattern that they present a screen-like or lacey impression. The hardness of the marble is thus visually dissipated in an elaborate openwork design. Bricks are cut in such intricate shapes and sizes in order to create decorative veneers that they look more like mesh or weaving than bricks.

Decorative overlays of wood, ceramic, brick, carved stone and stucco have been widely used to transfigure the base construction material of buildings as well as that of many smaller pieces of Islamic art. This camouflaging ornamentation aesthetically negates the significance of the basic materials and thus assists in revealing the IMPLICIT CONTENT of Islamic art. Instead of impressing the viewer with nature, the infinite patterns created by the artist lead the viewer to an intuition of non-nature Transcendence.

As a corollary to this regard for pattern rather than material which is a hallmark of the Islamic arts, we find much less interest in the use of precious materials for artistic creation than in other traditions. Some of the most successful of Islamic art works have been created from quite humble materials. The base materials used in a building or in a small object is often of little value; yet it is treated to decorations of such intricacy and interest that the humble base is transfigured and transubstantiated. For the Muslim, the lowly cooking pot is just as suitable a medium for carrying an Islamic pattern as a golden urn. Every article in his possession, every act of his daily life, should remind him of divine infinity and of his duties as the vicegerent of God.

"Camouflage of Forms".--Structural facts are also de-emphasized in an Islamic work of art as a result of the Muslim's rejection of nature as vehicle for the expression of tawhīd. This Islamic form of denaturalization has been noted by numerous art historians, but it is not generally related to the implicit representation of transcendence, as we wish to claim here. Whether in the creation of architectural monuments or of small religious and secular objects of beauty and utility, the Muslim has not been concerned with evidencing the structure of the art object. Instead, an overlay of decorative patterns disguises the mechanics of construction. This subordination of structural facts is another way of aesthetically negating the dominance of nature and instead giving expression to a preoccupation with a transcendent realm which is utterly non-nature.

This denaturalization device expressing IMPLICIT CONTENT is especially noticeable in architectural works, where the basics of structure are so crucial to the creation of the art work. Mass, gravity, apprehension of space or enclosure, awareness of overall structure--these are all aspects of architectural aesthetics which are down-played or negated by the Muslim builder. Of course the architect of a building or complex understands the forces of mass and gravity and erects his mausoleum, mosque or palace in conformance with sound engineering principles and precise size restrictions. But the aesthetic effect is one of denaturalization as the attention of the viewer is drawn to the abstract God rather than to an over-awe or over-concern with His creation.

The cut-out filigree of stone and plaster dematerialize the mass of a dome or vault and give it the appearance of being suspended, weightless on its supports. There are walls whose mass has been so dissipated with intricate designs that they seem to rest effortlessly on slender pillars, denying any impression of their weight or the forces of gravity inherent in them. Stress points of architectural elements are never emphasized in the Islamic building. Neither are structural members given a feeling of aesthetic isolation. Decorative openings and veneers camouflage those construction facts and focus the attention of the viewer on the intricacy of the infinite patterns rather than on the nature-based art of the engineer. Honeycomb-like decorations, rounded corners and crenellated roof lines are other devices utilized or devised by the Muslim builders to soften and disguise the junctures of a building.

In furtherance of this IMPLICIT CONTENT which is evidenced in the de-emphasis of structures, or "camouflage of forms" as it has been called (Ettinghausen 1963:260), architectural space in an Islamic building never emphasizes a sharply defined enclosure. Of course, the Muslim architect is limited by his grounds and the functional needs of the building constructed; but within these limitations he seeks to create an aesthetic impression that space, like the Islamic two-dimensional design, is limitless. In an aisled hall, a plan used so consistently in mosque architecture from the time of the Prophet Muhammad until today, the countless arches, pillars and aisles give the person standing in their midst a feeling of continuity in all directions--a continuity which seems to have no bounds of enclosure, no limits to its three-dimensional aesthetic pattern. In the domed structure, another plan used frequently by Muslim builders, the central dome, the semi-domes, bubbling smaller exedrae and the proliferation of windows combine to aesthetically negate the physical limits of the enclosure. Courtyards, arcades and porticos ease the transitions between the enclosed rooms and the outside living spaces in what amounts to a virtual interpenetration of inner and outer space in Islamic buildings.

This camouflage of forms which acts as an instance of Islamic IMPLICIT CONTENT, is evidenced also in those Islamic buildings with facades of such tremendous heights that they hide any notion of the volume or outline of the buildings behind. Even when inside a room of an Islamic building, there is little aesthetic awareness of the structure as a whole. Instead, one room is the object of perception, to be

followed by that of another and another, as the visitor moves from chamber to chamber, or from complex to complex within the structure. Only after experiencing each portion is there an after-the-fact, recollected awareness of the entirety of the architectural design. The aesthetic effect of experiencing a building is thus similar to that achieved in experiencing a two-dimensional pattern of abstract or stylized motifs arranged in design modules.

The external limits of the structure are likewise de-emphasized in an Islamic building as another means for dematerializing structures. Rather than being set off on a mountain or in a vast open space, Islamic buildings are so enmeshed with the surrounding structures that it is sometimes difficult to know where one building leaves off and another begins. This interpenetration results from an aesthetic demand in Islamic culture dictated by the doctrine of tawhīd. It fulfills also the religiously determined goal of integration of the sacred and the secular in Islamic social life. No effort is made to set the mosque apart, for example, from the shops around it. Instead of an isolating separation, the goal of the town planners of Muslim cities has been integration and interpenetration of the various facets of community life. (one of

IV. CONCLUSION

The insights gained from a study of art works as revelatory of the religious beliefs of a culture are manifold. First of all, it is obvious that such a study provides a much deeper understanding of the art products than a mere description of the archaeological and historical data which can be learned about them, or the superficial detailing of their visual or sound characteristics.

Second, such a study provides a key to understanding the people and the culture which produced that art. Countless histories have been written about peoples of the past or of our own century. Each of these historical records carries not only information about the designated people, but also much that can be read between-the-lines--and even in-the-lines--about the interpreting author. The historian often distorts the picture he "paints" for us, but the art work of any people can never lie. The artistic "translation" is a more difficult message to penetrate, but it is a considerably more reliable document for those who can "read" its message.

The third benefit of the interdisciplinary study of religions and the arts is probably the most important one. It is the contribution it makes to our understanding of ourselves. Having penetrated, on a foreign and neutral ground, the relationship between an art tradition and the beliefs that determine it, students of such studies are able to look at the art of their own traditions with "new eyes." They would have conditioned themselves to understanding it, not as an entertaining though expendable aspect of culture, but as an important message carrier and reinforcer of the dominant ideas of their own society. An aesthetic awareness would be created which would obviate such statements as--"I don't know why I like (or dislike) this art." "I don't know what I like in art." "Art appreciation is all a matter of individual taste." A realization would result of the important changes in ideology that have spawned innovations in artistic style and content in the past, and that are just as surely occurring in our contemporary world. It is only with such awareness that an aesthetically conscious audience can evolve. Only then can our societies, our religious communities, our nations, our fellow humans effect a beneficial influence on the future direction of the arts. Given the educative and value-imparting functions of art, this cannot fail to be an important mission for the religiously, the socially and the politically conscious citizen of any part of our globe--in our time, as well as in any future age.

NOTES

1. From W. Herberg, "God and the Theologians," Encounter, November, 1963, quoted in David W. Bolam and James L. Henderson, Art and Belief (New York: Schocken Books, 1969, first pub. 1967), p. 137. "There has never been a society without religion" (Pergson, in Wach 1961:38).

2 "For quite early, before he has begun to think abstractly, primitive man forms for himself a religious world-picture, and this is the object upon which the understanding begins to operate critically. Always science has grown up on a religion and under all the spiritual prepossessions of that religion . . ." (Spengler 1946:II, 13). See also Spengler, op. cit., II, 59, 383-384.

3 A Brahmanical text reads: "For the support of the devotee, Brahman is embodied in manifold murtis [images, icons]" (quoted in Mukerjee 1965:94).

4 The Hindu temple at Khajuraho is the one best known for its proliferation of mithuna art. See Kramrisch 1946:II, plates I-XXXV; Anand and Kramrisch 1960(?).

5 In Hindu art, it is difficult to separate the examples of IMPLICIT CONTENT (subject matter) from SYMBOLIC CONTENT (or literal symbolism) because the whole aesthetic vocabulary and message concerning the Hindu religious beliefs is so tightly bound to symbolism in its literal sense. It is therefore difficult to explain the following message-carrying aesthetic means without referring back to materials already covered, just as it was difficult to present the foregoing without allusion to the materials yet to be covered. The reader should take this as a further indication of the nature of things in Hindu culture, rather than as a hindrance to a clarification of the materials.

6 The four values to be pursued by Hindus are 1) dharma, or the ritual conduct and virtues which have been assigned for each of the four different stages in the life of the devotee and for each class within society; 2) artha, or the acquisition of wealth and possessions; 3) kama, which includes all the emotional gratifications; and 4) moksha (the highest value), which is the release from human cares and desires carrying spiritual and physical salvation from the birth/death cycle.

7 "To every people (was sent) an Apostle" (Qur'ān 10:47). "For We assuredly sent amongst every People an apostle" (Qur'ān 16:36).

8 "There is nothing whatever like unto Him" (Qur'ān 42:11). "No senses can perceive Him" (Qur'ān 6:103). "Praised be He, the Transcendent Who greatly transcends all claims and reports about him" (Qur'ān 17:43).

9 See "Arabesque Decoration: The Motif Vocabulary" in al Faruqi 1981:Chap. V.

10 The government of Gamal 'Abd al Nasr in Egypt is a case in point. Egyptian policy in the arts under the Revolutionary Government of the 1950's and 1960's became a variant of the 19th century European model. Maḥmūd Mukhtār's "Awakening of Egypt" is an earlier item of Westernized, nationalist Egyptianization of the arts which was encouraged in this century.

11 Examples of these are the figural representations in the desert palaces constructed in the very early period of Islam for the Umawī rulers. They were done at a time when borrowed aesthetic styles and workmen from Byzantium still played a role in Muslim architecture. Another type of figural art found in Islamic culture is miniature painting. These illustrations for secular books do not appear until six centuries after the birth of Islam. They have always been appreciated more by Westerners than by Muslims themselves.

12 See al Faruqi 1974, 1975, 1978b.

13 See al Faruqi 1976/77, 1978a.

14 See Arnold 1965:134, for that author's dismay over the lack of expression in the depiction of a bloody scene from a story.

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